

Transcript, June 9, 2022 Regular Meeting

[This is the transcript of the Virginia Tech Staff Senate meeting on Thursday, June 9, 2022. The Zoom video was recorded and a transcript created. While close to verbatim, it is not exact due to limitations of the software translating voice into text. In the interest of readability, some punctuation has been added and duplicate words have been removed.]

Speakers are Serena Young, president of the Staff Senate; President Tim Sands; Curtis Mabry, assistant vice president for consulting and strategic services in Human Resources; Tamarah Smith, past president of the Staff Senate; Bruce Harper, secretary of the Staff Senate; Sandee Cheynet, assistant vice president of talent for Human Resources; and Lisa Wilkes, vice president for strategic initiatives and special assistant to the president.]

Serena Young

So welcome, everyone. I'm glad you can join us today, we are fortunate enough to have President Sands come and speak with us today. I thought I could do some wild and crazy introduction, because I know that he is the man of the hour, the big cheese on campus, because he has been super super busy. And I know this for a fact for the last several days. So the fact that he is taking the time out of his schedule to come and talk to us today. We are super honored and privileged to have you here with us today. We didn't have a meeting in May so there are no minutes to approve. So with that being said, just a little bit of housekeeping. We're going to be doing some questions for q&a time through our chat. And then we were trying to set it up so that Bruce and I had the only capabilities of seeing but I don't know if we actually got that in place. But we will get those questions to President Sands. But first, before we do that, he is going to provide us with an overall update. So President Sands take the floor.

President Sands

Thank you, Serena, I'll keep the update brief so that we can have a conversation. I always look forward to getting together with the staff senate annually. I can't remember when how we did it last year if we did it, but normally, we would have at least one opportunity during the year. And I always learned a lot. So I'm hoping this will be the same.

Just to give a quick update on the university and where we are. I mean, you all are living it. So this is an update from my perspective. But I think we're in a very good spot, we've got some challenges. Most of the challenges are the same challenges that every organization around the country is dealing with. But relative to higher ed in general, and even higher ed in Virginia, we're in a very strong position. It's been a very busy year transitioning back to in-person engagement at all of our locations. And I think that's been a challenge, but also a welcome one in a lot of ways. We're finding a new equilibrium. I know you have, will have a lot of questions about the Governor's executive order. And we'll get to that.

But I am pleased with the experiments that we've been running in the future of work, and how we might take advantage of some of the things we learned during the pandemic about how to engage in different ways, in more productive ways for some and, and how to be flexible. So that's really I think the big opportunity that's grown out of the pandemic, that has now become really an imperative for all organizations to get that right. And to keep working on it.

It's also been a lot of fun, just a little highlight. From my perspective, I live on campus. And so normally right after commencement, I try to get away and then we get back in quickly for the board meeting. And then the summer is a little quieter. This last month has been very busy with softball and baseball. So if you're any softball and baseball fans here, I think you probably have noticed that the campus is really quite different this past month. And fortunately, we've got a couple more days at least and that's exciting. So a different feel this year.

To say a little bit about the budget in Virginia in Richmond. I think, again, I think most of you are probably pretty well informed. I know Serena has heard hours of discussion on this issue. But we're in the final stage -- it might be, you might call it the extra innings. So nothing has actually been fully finalized yet. The conference budget, which is a really important one, was issued some days ago. We did very well in it. I'll mention a couple of things, a couple of highlights. But that still has to be approved by the governor. The governor, if he gets in and does make some changes, will, I think, create another potential little cycle where the General Assembly will have to negotiate. But the General Assembly we expect to come back and vote on the 17th. And that's the point, if everything goes well, that's the point where the budget will be finalized. This is a lot later than we would have liked and this created a lot of extra work, I think, for probably many of you and certainly a lot of folks in administration, but we're heading to a pretty good place. I'm quite pleased.

We are the state's most comprehensive university and we have the largest full-time equivalent enrollment and student credit hours. And we have a huge role in economic development and the state has recognized that. They've offered, the General Assembly has offered, 15 point 3 million dollars in addition to our appropriation, for access, affordability and quality enhancement for each of the two years of the biennium. That sounds like a lot and normal year 15 point 3 million would be a huge windfall for us, would give us a lot of flexibility. But in an era of eight to 9%, inflation, it's actually not enough, but it's highly welcome.

We are, interestingly, if you look at the history of state support, if we look at state support per resident Virginia student, going back to the beginning of this century, we've seen a 46% decrease in inflation-adjusted dollars from the state. But the good news here is that that's been improving since fiscal year 21. And that's a good thing. We were dropping pretty steadily through a couple of recessions in this century, and not recovering fully and continuing to drift down until just a few years ago, when the state, I think, recognized that they had gone far enough with budget cutting, and that they were going to let us stabilize and even grow a little in areas that are of high priority to the state.

One area was the tech talent investment program. And those funds are flowing into the university, but they're for a specific project, but they do have it aligned with our strategic plan in a way that helps us and helps us with the overall funding rate from the state, reversing the downward trend and starting to stabilize and even moving up.

One thing we follow is the funds split in the university division. That's really the instructional budget, if you will, and are two big components to the state appropriation and tuition and fee revenue. There are a couple of smaller ones. But historically, looking back to say 2000, about 50% of the budget of the University Division budget came from the state, and the other 50% was tuition and fees. And that started to shift around 2000 and we got down to below 25% from the state. The good news is that fund split is restored a bit, it's been increasing in the last four fiscal years. And now we're at 25% from the state and 75% from tuition and fees and other revenues. So although it's still not where it needs to be, we're still, I think, asking the Virginia families and taxpayers -- our families, I would say -- to kick in too much. It's still better than it was a few years ago. So just to give you a general sense of where, what the drift is, and it's in a good direction.

But the budget also includes the replacement of Randolph Hall with Mitchell Hall, which will be 70% larger and square footage is desperately needed by our growing College of Engineering. There are investments in financial aid, especially in the second year. They've made a few investments in research and commercialization and are really important to Virginia Tech, and to our communities. And there's a 5% salary plan in each year of the biennium, which is, again, very welcome. Not enough to keep up with inflation, but a big bump from where we were before. We saw continued growth in support for Cooperative Extension and for the Corps of Cadets and many other programs. So overall, fantastic outcome, given the situation.

And we're anxiously awaiting the final budget approval and also our approval of the budget by the Board of Visitors, which has not occurred yet. They have not approved a tuition and fee plan or the budget. They heard a lot about it in this last meeting, but the executive committee is going to make the final decision on the 14th of this month, a couple of days.

Top priority for us is childcare and we've been working hard on that over the last several years. We just hosted a childcare summit with New River Valley employers and government leaders. I think that was really a great moment to set out or come up with a sort of an understanding, a shared understanding, of what situation is and where the challenges are. For those of you who are not involved in that directly or maybe don't have children in childcare, the real problem right now is not access to physical space. It's access to talent and to the workforce, given the low rates of income, or of salary, for childcare workers and also the other options that they have. It's just really become an incredible challenge. And we're all working together to solve those problems, but they're gonna take some work. But we need a regional solution, not an individual organizational solution. So we're actively involved in that, we have to figure out what is probably one of the top issues that we've got in terms of retaining and attracting talent. The same thing is happening across the country. So it's not just Blacksburg, but we're seeing it, I think, in a more severe way, because we had a problem before the pandemic. And now it's exacerbated. So I just want to let you know that that's top of the agenda, a lot of good work going on among people on the Zoom. And I'd like to thank Lisa Wilkes for her work in this over the last several years, but many of you are engaged in it. Not done. But I think we have a shared knowledge of where our challenges are.

We're continuing to explore the possibility of increasing our minimum wage, we've done it in a few units. And we're now looking at, we have been looking for the last couple of years, at moving that along so that it's uniform across the institution. That's another topic of great discussion this year, as we planned for the budget.

And, you know, I just want to thank you for everything that you do to keep Virginia Tech running smoothly. Our students really appreciate all the work that you do, as do I, and our faculty, that have the support that you provide. I know you all have different kinds of experiences and so that's why I'm looking forward to the conversation, the q&a. And looking forward to your feedback and any concerns you have. This is an opportunity to raise my awareness. I think I know, and Serena does a good job of sharing what those challenges are. But I also would like to hear from you and see what I can do to help. And also just hear, I'd love to hear too, what's working well, what changes that have been made over the last couple of years here, you're finding are working for you. But I'm sure you've got a list of things, some of which I may have already touched on, that you'd like to discuss. So let me use the rest of the time for that conversation. Thanks.

Serena Young

Thank you President Sands. Okay, so if you guys have any questions, please put those in the chat. And then Bruce or myself will get those to President Sands. Not just questions. So if you want to

make a comment as well on things that are going well, please do share those as well. Because we don't want to be all doom and gloom. We want to be sprinkles and rainbows too.

President Sands

Well, I can share a little bit just because I know it is in the back of people's minds, if not the forefront. We are, you know, we have a bit of a challenging relationship with the administration at the moment. We also have a very open dialogue with the administration. So I feel good about that. But the recent decision that the Governor made about his executive order about requiring that universities, well, all agencies, submit their telework agreements and have them approved at various levels all the way up to the Chief of Staff for the governor approving telework agreements.

We worked hard to, all of our institutions worked hard to, explain to the secretary of education in the governor's office that because of the 2006 restructuring, we have flexibility in HR practices for our university employees. But recognizing that we don't have that flexibility, at least not all of it, for classified employees and staff. So we did get over that hump, I think we've successfully conveyed that. And they've understood that we have that flexibility, but there's still the issue of staff and telework agreements for the classified staff. And we don't like to be in a situation where the university staff and classified staff are treated differently. There have been many times in the past where they had been treated differently when we didn't have an option. This is one where, unfortunately, we're in a situation where there is a difference.

So we have not received, matter of fact, we're just submitting now our telework agreements. So thank you for those who have telework agreements for working with your supervisors and getting those into a form where we can share them with the state but we don't know the outcome of that. I suspect we'll start hearing things next week. But we haven't heard anything yet. And we'll deal with it on a case-by-case basis as the issues come up. I just want to share with you that that is still pending, and we haven't, since we haven't submitted, we haven't gotten any feedback. We were given a little bit of leeway and Bryan Garey, our VP for HR, made a very strong case with the secretary of education that we have very sophisticated telework policies, they have worked for us, they're getting better, they're probably better than anything that the state has in terms of the state of the art of policy and practice. And especially given the pandemic and the post-pandemic reality of flexibility, we feel pretty good about where we are. They were happy with that but they said, we still want you to submit them anyway. So that's kind of where we are.

Serena Young

President Sands, do you know if there are any other options being reviewed or looked into as far as for the classified staff should they not be approved? And if they don't want to take the option of converting to university staff? Are there any other options that may be available to help them continue in some sort of flexible option?

President Sands

Well, that's a great question. And I think we have Sandee and Curtis here on the Zoom call, so maybe I could turn it over to them if they would like to comment on that.

Curtis Mabry

So at this point, Serena, we've not heard if there's any type of program that the state's considering. I know they're hearing pushback from some agencies, too. And so we're not sure there. I think, locally, folks do have the option to consider converting to university staff, if they would like to do that. And we also, the state has given us a little bit of flexibility on the one day per week. So that goes up to the Dr. Sands level for review. You know, not that all of those could be approved. But there might be some flexibility there that, you know, we might have an option there if folks are seeking more than one day a

week. But we really, you know, I think the state had expected to have already completed this process for all the other agencies. And because of the number of requests that they've gotten they're a bit bogged down in that process right now. So I think as they continue to get through that, we'll get additional feedback from the state on some possible next steps.

Serena Young

Perfect. Thank you, Curtis. Tammy, you want to go ahead and take yourself off mute?

Tamarah Smith

Yeah, thank you, Dr. Sands for being here. We always appreciate this time, to be able to talk with you, find out things that are going on at the university, and to get some answers to some of the things that are on our minds. One thing I just wanted to say that was bothersome about the telework agreement from the state is that it wasn't inclusive, when it gave us no opportunity to put any reasoning for why we would like to be included or considered for teleworking. And I've heard that from a lot of people, it's like, wow, they're not being inclusive at all. And they, with no opportunity. It was discouraging. And I know that's not your fault. And I know that you guys are doing everything you can. But in a world where we're trying to be really inclusive, I just think that that's something the state needs to look at. So it's not that I need you to answer anything. It's just more of a comment.

President Sands

No, I agree with you. I don't know, as Curtis said, we're not the only ones expressing discontent. So we may not need to be out in front of it too much. But I do think this is going to be a challenge for the state as a whole. I was in a recent meeting with CEOs of tech companies in Northern Virginia, and they were all expressing confusion over the policy even though it didn't affect them, because they're all struggling to retain their workforce. And they're, you know, providing ultimate flexibility when they can just to keep the talent they've got, understanding that everybody's situations, you know, I just mentioned the childcare issue. That although that was very acute and challenging during the pandemic, it hasn't gone away. So there are a multitude of reasons that flexibility is going to be needed to retain the workforce and why the state would be different than every other organization and sector, I don't understand. But, you know, as Curtis alluded to, there, the governor's office will have to figure that out. And, you know, I think all we can hope for is that they're deliberative and when they realize what they've got that they do make some changes, but I can't guarantee that. I, you know, it's not under our control, of course, but I don't even think it's under our influence. So we'll see how it plays out. But we will continue to express our concerns to the governor about retaining workforce. And I think we're not going to be the only ones.

Tamara Smith

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much.

Bruce Harper

Okay, we've got multiple questions, and we'll try and get to all of them. But this one pertains to the current discussion. What is the attitude of people with President Sands level and just under, as well as the Board of Visitors, towards knowledge workers, and others who may do their work but not come into direct student contact, and remote work? Returning to in-person for folks that have more contact with students, especially those in instructional roles, we have a clear understanding of what the university would like to see. Some of our teams have lost office space, and would not be able to return on site should the university's attitude change.

President Sands

Well, I don't think our attitude is, I don't see that changing in the sense that we are looking at flexibility. We see the benefits of remote work for some types of positions. I think the big utilization is in IT. And that makes sense and we're comfortable with that. There are cases, as you mentioned Bruce, you're

conveying that someone else's question I presume, but that there are cases where we need people in person, or where we need to have some kind of a hybrid arrangement where they can be in person for a portion of the time. But there are certainly job positions, descriptions that are very easily accomplished, fully remote. And I think if anything, we're gonna see a growth of that.

One of the things that we look at is, you know, are there some positions where we have historically limited ourselves to recruiting people from the New River Valley, let's say, and we have challenges in terms of finding people, where we could recruit someone from another part of Virginia, who wouldn't have to be in residence in Blacksburg, but could effectively perform their work. We are looking for those opportunities to be flexible. That's why the governor's decision is particularly challenging, because it is, as you indicated, it's going in the opposite direction of where we were headed. We do, I would just want to emphasize, we have a big commitment on the instructional side, especially to in-person learning. Virginia Tech is not a, you know, it's not an effective, especially for undergraduates, online university. It's just, you know, our brand is about in-person engagement, it's about active learning, it's about projects, you know, it's not about online. Online has been helpful. You know, there are a lot of students that take online classes for flexibility, that's fine. It's not a dominant fraction, and we like the idea of students being able to choose but really our reputation is, comes from the in-person experience, not just in the classroom, but in a Student Affairs side of things with Housing and Residential Life and well-being initiatives that are really meant to be in person.

I think our donors -- well, let me before we get to the donors, the alumni attachment to the university and the donor attachment, for those that are alumni, really is based on shared experiences that they've had at Virginia Tech. It's not because their particular online degree was particularly valuable to them. I mean, we do a really good job in ROI, if you will, in basically the quality of our degree programs, but I think most alums who remain attached to the university would say, it was the shared experiences they had with lots of other Hokies that are the things that attach them to the university.

So yeah, you're, you know, the idea of clamping down on remote work just seems the opposite of where we need to go from a flexibility standpoint, with the caveat that the student experience is still largely online. All right, sorry, largely in person. You know, they kept, the exception of that is our graduate programs. There are some professional master's programs that can be delivered very effectively online, but they're really aimed at the incumbent workforce and upskilling, not so much at the first graduate degree. So, you know, we're, I will agree with the sentiments expressed by that question.

Bruce Harper

An old catchphrase "hands on, minds on." And kind of a follow up to that is, is the university looking at a way to allow all employees to have the ability to telework? Some supervisors are against telework and will have no discussion of it. Also, in addition to that, is what will an office do if they have classified staff as well as university staff, and the telework agreement is not approved by Richmond, is this going to set up situation where the classified employee will be expected to come into the office every work week, while University staff do not?

President Sands

Yeah, I mean, on that last one, that's the scenario and the one that we would like to avoid, but it's a very realistic scenario.

In terms of flexibility around telework, I think we're doing these future of work pilots, and they need to run their course. And we've got some preliminary ideas about what's working and what isn't, but, and there's always needs to be some discretion at the lower level of administration, the department head or the unit lead, or whatever it may be. But we're also looking at the job architecture opportunity here,

and trying to create some uniformity around certain kinds of job descriptions. And with that, we'll probably come some clarity around which ones can be performed effectively with a telework environment or with a hybrid environment. So I think we're still evolving in that, in that on that issue

Sandee Cheynet

To add to that, President Sands, just to piggyback on what President Sands is saying, you know, we do realize that some supervisors and managers may not have been adept at supervising a workforce that's remote. So our talent development team has put in a tremendous series of training for supervisors, so they can learn to lead remotely and handle it. And so we're hoping that as they become more comfortable with learning how to manage their remote teams, it's not so scary, and they become more understanding of that. In addition, we've also put together the work force, the work, remote work feasibility guidelines that are available online. And so we're using that to provide some uniformity across the campus so that supervisors really do have some standards that they can look at to see if a job, you know, does lend itself to be performed successfully in a remote place. And so they can always, in addition, reach out to human resources, employee relations, and we're happy to work through that. But we do realize that there have been varying degrees of receptiveness to the concept. And I think we've worked through those a lot since the pandemic and as President Sands alluded to, the pilots have been very successful. And we're continuing to learn as we go and to revamp policies and procedures, but I think we're pretty sophisticated, as he alluded to, compared to the other institutions and maybe the state because our telework agreements do have a place for you to indicate why it can be performed successfully on a remote basis. So unfortunately, Bryan's pitch to include that didn't go very far. But we did offer some.

Bruce Harper

Okay, this kind of tags on to Sandee's comment about training. What can be done to help staff that have not had a performance evaluation since their arrival? And folks that have to do their own evaluations and the supervisor just signs off on?

Sandee Cheynet

You want me to take that one?

President Sands

Yes, please.

Sandee Cheynet

I love this because this is exciting. So we are in the midst of implementing, we're right in the middle of a pilot, a brand new performance management system. And some of you -- is anybody on the call involved in the pilot, raise your hand. I know Sue is, Denise is -- we've had a lot of senior management areas volunteer to participate. The reason it's in a pilot is because we're working out some of the technical kinks before we roll it out university-wide. But this system is so much better than what we currently have. It actually encourages and reminds the supervisors that we have to have continual touch points during the year, that having a evaluation where you only talk about it at the end of the year is not really effective for anyone. So it really is more of a discussion and coaching throughout the year and setting your goals and then learning how we can course correct mid year, if a goal changes, we can set your development plan and determine what training you might need to get to those goals and link it to our performance development, talent development learning system. So it's very sophisticated in terms of what it can provide. But it's also very simple to use, and it's not overly complex. So our hope is to be able to roll it out that -- Sue, give me the timeline on what we're targeting here.

Sue Teel

We're hoping to go live with all staff in the fall. Yeah, on the same performance cycle that staff are currently on.

Sandee Cheynet

So I agree with you, I think we've heard the concerns that have probably been around for a long time. And this is a way that we'll be able to really address and work on training too with employee relations on teaching managers how to coach and teach managers how to give feedback, but also teach employees how to perceive that feedback, and how we can make it a really proactive and positive experience for employees. We want to retain our employees and we want to everybody feel like they have an opportunity to get development and train and learn new skills. So this is a really excited about it, you know, I'm using it. And I feel like it's in terms of places that I've worked before, it's really a good tool. And we're happy to come to any department and present on it. We're really excited. So you just have to let me know.

Bruce Harper

Okay, I've got two more questions. They're both kind of related. The first one: have baseline salary and merit increases been set yet? I know they need to be approved by the BOV, but there hasn't been a discussion in the daily e-mail that I've seen. And my question involves staff compensation issues and the freeze on in-band raises and/or bonuses, which have lasted two years now. Do you foresee a lift of the freezes so that staff are not dependent on the cost-of-living raise that may or may not come from the governor's office each year? This is causing some serious compression issues.

President Sands

Yeah, I can I can answer the big question around where we are with the process, but maybe Sandee or Curtis or someone else could highlight the inter-band issue. We're expecting, and it's in the conference budget and we haven't heard anything to suggest from the governor's office that they won't go along with this, that there will be 5% salary plan overall for each of the two years. And I think the classified staff have a slightly different arrangement that still adds up to 5%. And then there's a \$1,000 one-time payment in December for all employees, if I recall it correctly. And that but the big news would be if it holds up that we would have a 5% plan for the two years of the biennium, for each of the two years, in addition to the 5% that we did last year. So I think that puts us in a pretty good place, although you have to look at it with inflation. And if this 8 or 9% inflation lasts much longer, that's going to still set us back. So it's not that we're not out of the woods, but we're in a good spot. The final vote we expect will come from the General Assembly on the 17th. But we will have to make a commitment, the Board of Visitors will be making that decision on the 14th. Right now they're all aligned with it. There's nothing -- I don't expect any problems. But that's where we are. Maybe Sandee or Curtis, could you talk a little bit about the other, the salary compression issue?

Sandee Cheynet

Yeah. I can talk about that. Maybe Curtis, maybe we can tag team on this if you have anything to add. We are actually in the process of starting to plan for some in-band adjustments in the next few months. We're getting those spreadsheets ready. And obviously it's up to each unit to be able to fund those. We haven't done those across, consistently, as you said, over the past few years, but we do plan on looking at those and working with the senior management areas. In addition, I will say that the job architecture program, part of what it does is it allows us to look and provide salary and market ranges for positions so we know where positions fall in the market, which will be helpful as well as we move forward. Even know that that may not affect all the staff positions, which we do already have a structure for in a pay band system, but we can be at least consistent across the university.

Curtis, anything else you want to add on that?

Curtis Mabry

The only thing I would add is, and I think this was shared recently with the folks in CSPA, as they met with the comp team. But so the Comp Team has the salaried market data in, so that'll be shared as these in-band processes start up again with senior management. So they'll have a chance to kinda look at the market data and where folks are. But as Sandee mentioned, we have to be mindful that there's not money associated with that. It's set to department level and senior management level. So folks will try to target what they can and be the best they can, but it will be good to have that process in place again. And it was paused for a couple of years as we went through the pandemic and not really sure how that might affect this from a budget standpoint, but it'll be good to have that started again.

Serena Young

I had a question come in via email that came directly to me, so I figured I would ask that if that's okay. With the push for electric cars, what's Tech doing to prepare for more electric cars on campus?

President Sands

Of course there are charging stations. And let me, I don't know the details of where we are with that, but maybe Lisa, could you share anything in that regard? I don't want to put you on the spot, because I don't know exactly where we are on it.

Lisa Wilkes

No I'm out of the loop but I'm happy to circle back for me to get some information and send to you that you can share with the group if that would be helpful.

Serena Young

Sure that'd be great. I mean, I can even reach out to Jeri if that would be helpful to take, because I know you've got a lot on your plate, too. I'm happy to do that as well.

Lisa Wilkes

That's what I was -- she's the person that would be able to let. I know that we were doing the garages and planning. You know there were plans specifically to do that in some other areas of campus. I'm just removed from that, knowing those details right now

President Sands

I've heard a little bit about it, but I don't remember the details either, but with the large changes associated with the multi-modal transit facility, and with shifts in the dynamics of parking and everything, that this would be high on the list. But I don't know that we'll find out.

Serena Young

Okay, thank you. Go ahead, Bruce.

Bruce Harper

Okay, this kind of ties in -- there are two parts. First, the transportation survey closed on May fourth. When can we expect to see the results? And are there any anticipated improvements to parking and transportation we might see from feedback of the survey? and then related to that question is broader -- There may be some low-hanging fruit with respect to enhancing staff benefits and work experience, for example, since we are speaking of parking, it seems like reducing the cost of parking for staff to better align with overall differences in salary between faculty and staff would be one way to make staff positions at VT more attractive. Are benefits and improvements, parking or otherwise, that would accrue specifically to staff currently being considered?

President Sands

Lisa, would you like to comment on that? You may have some more information than I do?

Lisa Wilkes

So typically I don't have the details. But I do know that those items, Bruce, that you reference have been on radar, that we've looked at for 10 years around that and the balance of a tier parking system of what that would be. It will be interesting to see the results of the survey this year. When we did it 4 or 5 years ago, the last one, there wasn't an overwhelming response that we should move to a tiered parking system, which was surprising. So it'll be interesting to see if that's changed this year, but I'm sure they will have the data analyzed and ready to have conversations. They are starting in the fall. I think that was the timing of trying to get it finished, the academic year, so it could inform, and they could continue to make some progress.

The staff, on the other piece, and Sandee or Curtis may be able to speak to this, but one of the items that we did a few years ago, and it actually generated from the childcare, the benefit working group, that was part of the Staff Senate work. We had a team 3 or 4 years ago that looked at how we could make some progress if we couldn't manage or reduce parking and we couldn't assist with childcare, and we did the benefit and provided, I think it was \$500, and Curtis or Sandee can correct me. But to all employees who were making below 35 5 (\$35,500), I think was the number, and I know HR's been looking at that and looking to make some changes there if that's approved.

And so that's another opportunity at least while the university is still evaluating the childcare, parking, those benefit-related issues, that we're trying to help those employees in the lowest pay bands. So I don't know Curtis or Sandee, I know you all are looking at it. But is there any information about updating that salary, or the \$500 amount that you all can share?

Curtis Mabry

We have looked at some options there. One was, you know, is there a way that we can increase the \$500 stipend amount? The other thing was maybe looking at that 30 5 threshold and should that be raised, even if the amount were to stay at \$500? So, looking at kind of the cost tradeoffs and the benefits, that, you know, employees might get, how much more broadly could we increase that to folks on campus? But that was a way that we tried to address the parking concerns at that point in time, and you know for some folks they might use the money for childcare or other issues. But yes, that is still on the table, and being looked at. Maybe the survey will give us some insight into people's wants and needs there. So hopefully, there'll be some news on that, as we move forward into the new year.

Sandee Cheynet

Yeah, I think we did pay out the stipend, I think it was in April, if I'm not mistaken. I could have a little mixed up. But we certainly want to continue to refine that, as you said Lisa, to look at the data, and how many people would be impacted, and how many people we could, you know, help bridge that gap since we don't have the tiered parking structure. It can help with that or childcare. So we continue to look at it every year and make adjustments and proposals.

Serena Young

Thank you, thank you everyone. I just wanted to take a quick minute while we're waiting on a couple more questions to come through and thank you, President Sands, and your team, your whole team, for being here and answering our questions today.

What staff may or may not know is that President Sands has to go to the State every year and fight for the monies that we get, amongst other things. And he does a wonderful job at that and he truly

cares about Virginia Tech and the staff and faculty here. And I don't know that a lot of people know that or even knew that. So that being said, thank you for all the work that you do, President Sands, because you do a lot more than people even realize that you do and it's appreciated and we're grateful for that. Thank you for being a cheerleader for Virginia Tech because that's basically what you are, amongst many other hats that you wear. So thank you.

President Sands

Well, thanks Serena but you know it's an honor to be able to serve Virginia Tech. It's just a great organization with a fantastic mission and really wonderful employees. So it's not that hard, it's easy to be a cheerleader. So I appreciate your service on the board. Actually that's a really important thing that we've got at Virginia Tech with the 5 constituent reps, who then bring that knowledge back. So I think that's a really critical interface. So thank you, Serena, for your work with that.

Serena Young

Absolutely. I enjoy it. I would like to give a kudos as well to our talent development team because they have done an amazing, amazing job with all of the trainings that they have created for staff, for faculty, for supervisors. I think they need some sort of an award because it's amazing the creativity and work that they've done just over the last couple of years. And so I wanna shout out and give a kudos, and you know, staff, we tend to get, we kind of tend to focus on negativity I think sometimes. And you know, we have a lot of good going on at Tech as well. There's a lot of great things, there's a lot of great people here, and I think that we just need to kind of keep our focus on that and not get focused on the negative stuff.

But we also know that when we're dealing with higher education that things take time, that it's a process, everything takes a lot longer than in the regular world out there. And so I would just ask for people's patience when it comes to dealing with things like stipend, with the supervisor trainings, with all that, because there is work being done. And I guess probably the biggest thing that would be an issue in my eyes would be the communication piece, because I think that we just, we have communication breakdown. And so there's all these wonderful wonderful things being done and taking place. But we don't always know about them and so with that lack of knowledge people tend to create their own story. It's what I like to use when I work with folks in the office, too. And so sometimes those stories are not the actual reality. And so, President Sands, if you can think of any way that we could, I could work with you, with others, to communicate better to our staff. I mean, we try to do a good job. We try to get presentations in, but to have that communication piece in place. I would be happy to here any advice that you might want to give in that arena as well.

President Sands

I think you are absolutely right. Internal communications, especially, have been probably the biggest challenge we've had aside from the pandemic and some of the financial challenges that universities have. With that, even before the pandemic, and this is before you were on the board, Serena, but Tammy may recognize this. But there were a lot of really intense conversations about how do we better communicate with our students and our employees internally? We do a great job externally. Really, we win a lot of awards for external communications or social media. We're really good at that -- internally it's more challenging. I would suggest, well first of all, this venue is really important, and we try to meet. I know you invite other administrators and other people into these meetings to have this kind of conversation. This is probably the most effective way and a lot of senses because your leadership, you take it back down to your unit, you spread whatever you've heard, good or bad and it's probably gonna be more accurate than what people are hearing otherwise. So please do continue to share what you've learned in these gatherings, and propagated out there.

The other thing I would recommend, and maybe you've already done this, but engaging with Tracy Vosburg and her team around this challenge of internal communications. They're more than willing to get involved but they need to know that there's an issue. I think we do a very good job of communicating around HR issues and policy issues, and if you look at VT News you can find pretty much anything there. I mean, if you have a question it's probably been answered in VT News. But you do have to dig through it and I think the very specific question you're asking is, how do we get what the staff need to know as opposed to what the whole university needs to know, what it specifically pertains to staff? How do you filter for that? How do you get? And how do you convey that? And I would suggest a conversation with Tracy and her team. I'm sure she should have some ideas for improving the communication flow.

But it does go in both directions. It's one thing for the University Relations team to be pushing out information. But we also need to collect input from all of you and that's happening. But I think that you can never do too much of that. You can get well, you get to the point where people don't want to answer any more surveys. But if you look at all the venues we have for collecting information, getting feedback, that's so valuable we can't just think of it as a one way deal.

Serena Young

Thank you. Thank you. This may be a question for Curtis or Sandee. We have a staff member and they wanna know is it too late to fill out a telework agreement if they haven't already? There seems to have been a lot of confusion in their office surrounding this topic.

Sandee Cheynet

We've been confused too, so don't worry. It gets normal. We did, Curtis you correct me if I'm wrong, but we did have some people miss the deadline. We tried to contact everyone to make sure they proactively got those in. We will be contacting those folks that we do not have an agreement for and I think, Curtis, the plan is to look at a second wave of middles on a regular basis. We have things change all the time, per the policy of the State. So anything else?

Curtis Mabry

I think as we go through this and we kind of learn what the state's looking for, and what their turnaround time will be, we do anticipate that we'll have probably some type of monthly cycle, because you know somebody might not be teleworking now, but in November they may need to, or want to, and so we need that review process and we can't just do them one at a time and keep track of them that way, so we'll have some cycle in place. We just don't know what that'll look like yet. So, yes, there will be future opportunities for people to submit those or make changes in what they've already submitted.

Sandee Cheynet

And we anticipate, too, that the form may change. It would not surprise me if we had some different iterations going forward based on your previous comments that were very well founded.

President Sands

One thing I'd like to just share with you all and there'll be a news story on it. It kind of gets back to some of what Serena was saying about the, you know, trying to keep a balance, what we should celebrate what works, and of course keep trying to improve what isn't working. But we were just in the Forbes survey of best employers for new grads, so it's kind of a very narrow slice, but it's important slice. Virginia Tech made the top 30 of all sectors nationwide, and this is a survey of employees. And we ended up number 3 among higher ed institutions, so that we've never been -- I don't even know if we've ever been on that list even. But to be number 3 among the thousands of higher ed institutions

is a testament to all the effort that many of you are making, and HR has made, and the changes in policy and the gradual upgrading.

So, even though it's going, it's a slow process to your points Serena. It's, you know, we're a big organization so we make a change, it takes a while to propagate it. We have to run a pilot. We have to, you know, make sure we're doing it the right way. The accumulated efforts over the last several years are being recognized by our employees in these surveys, and there's more work to be done there. It's part of our strategic plan -- if you look at the dashboard you'll see employee satisfaction measures that are part of our top-level strategic planning. We monitor that, but we're never, you know, never rest. It's just a lot. There's always things that we can do better. But I do want to recognize everyone for that incredible work. It couldn't have come at a better time to be, you know, as state coming out of the pandemic and dealing with the great resignation and all that, to show up on a list like that. And if you look at the list, it's all the big employers you've heard of in all sectors. So it's no small achievement.

Serena Young

Thank you. I think Bruce has had 2 more questions come in and some of you may have questions that come up after this. But we're getting close to our time to end and just being respectful of everyone's time. We'll do these 2 last questions. If you have any other questions, feel free to email those to me or Bruce, and we will follow up on those and get back to you. So, Bruce, go ahead and take the floor, Buddy.

Bruce Harper

Okay, first one's kind of quick and easy and may have an answer. What if we don't hear back on our telework agreement before July 5? Does this mean we can continue to operate as we are until we hear back? And then sort of related. We have seen instances of employees taking advantage of the teleworking environment and causing strain on their department because they seem to be absent more than present, but it doesn't seem that we can force them to come to campus to perform their duties. While most are performing as they should, not everyone is. How are we to handle these situations with our hands tied?

President Sands

I don't, maybe Sandee or Curtis -- do you want to take those 2? And I could certainly provide an opinion but I don't wanna, you know, and the first one I think we're waiting, you know, we'll wait to hear. I don't know when that's gonna be. I can't imagine that we would have to take action until we hear back. But maybe you've heard a different thing Curtis or Sandee.

Curtis Mabry

No, we were expecting to hear for the results from most agencies this week. Although we've not heard that yet and with us submitting our request tomorrow, we should hear by the end of the month. So hopefully we won't have to address that situation. But we should have information prior to July fifth.

Sandee Cheynet

Yeah, as far as the second part of that question, I can take that. You know, I refer to the workplace feasibility guide for remote telework and that's what we should be utilizing. But the situation that you're describing sounds more like a performance issue. And so that's something that we would really highly encourage the supervisor, if they're struggling with performance with teleworking, and you know, it's impacting the employees and the morale in their department. It's certainly something that we could help in employee relations coach them through, and how to address that, you know. Sometimes it's just a matter of communications and expectations and letting people understand that

sometimes their decisions are impacting their teammates, and we're happy to work through that on an individual basis. So if you will email me separately or privately, I can set something up for you in that situation or if you want to refer anyone to me, I can get you with the ER team and plugged in. So happy to do that.

Serena Young

Thank you again. Sandee and Curtis and Bryan, I know he's not on here, but, Bryan, that whole team, you guys have done amazing, amazing work, and you really are fighting for the employees here. All employees. So thank you. Much appreciated.

Sandee Cheynet

I will pass on your kudos to the talent development team. I know they really appreciate it, and I will give you a preview. The article hasn't come out in the VT News yet, but Greg Beecher from Student Affairs has accepted the director of the Talent Development position, and he will be joining our team in July. So all that you've seen in the past year has been done by the staff with just me as an interim. So they've really had their work cut out for them but we really appreciate you recognizing their efforts. Thank you.

Serena Young

Absolutely and congrats to Greg. He'll do a great job with that. So, yes, thank you, President Sands and Lisa. Thank you both for taking your time today when you're busy, crazy crazy busy week. And being here with us, and we appreciate all that you do, both of you, because I don't think the university would run without you. So thank you. Thank you very much for everything that you do, and just know that you are appreciated, and you are recognized for doing a wonderful job.

President Sands

Well, thank you, Serena, and really appreciate the opportunity to get together with everyone. And, you know, it doesn't have to be -- maybe once a year, when we do this format, but don't hesitate to share insights, information, questions either through Serena or to my office, whatever works for you. But we're in this together, and I think we're in a strong position. But we have got to keep working. So thank you.

Serena Young

Thank you. Have a great rest of your week everyone. This meeting is adjourned.