

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENT'S CABINET

Minutes

Meeting date: January 31, 2022

Members in attendance: President William LaForge, Dr. Vicki Bingham, Mr. Mike Kinnison, Dr. Eddie Lovin, Mr. Rick Munroe, Dr. Andy Novobilski, Dr. Michelle Roberts, Mr. Jamie Rutledge, Ms. Nakikke Wallace, Dr. Andrew Wegmann, and Mr. William Young (recorder – Ms. Claire Cole)

Members not in attendance: None

Call to Order: A regular meeting of the President's Cabinet was held in the President's Conference Room on January 31, 2022. The meeting convened at 1:30 p.m. with President LaForge presiding.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On motion by Dr. Novobilski and seconded by Mr. Rutledge, all Cabinet Members present and participating voted unanimously to approve the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on January 10, 2022.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

- On behalf of Cabinet members, President LaForge wished Ms. Wallace and Mr. Kinnison a happy belated birthday.
- President LaForge gave an overview of the activities and events from the last few weeks. The GSC Board of Directors met for their quarterly meeting. President LaForge and Dr. Lovin met with representatives from Prosper & Partner as part of their review of the Student Affairs unit. President LaForge visited with the baseball and softball teams and with the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences, Dr. Leslie Griffin, as part of his campus outreach initiative. President LaForge and Dr. Novobilski met with Dr. Beverly Moon to discuss the SACSCOC reaffirmation process and site visit. The Department of Music held their annual Honor Band weekend event. Mr. Kinnison and Ms. Dana George represented Delta State at the 2022 NCAA Convention, and President LaForge participated virtually. The IHL Board of Trustees had their monthly meeting. President LaForge, Dr. Lovin, and Dr. Roberts met with Ms. Julie Jackson to discuss restructuring the Delta State ODK Circle. The BPAC began their spring season with Summer: The Donna Summer Musical. President LaForge attended the Employee of the Month Luncheon, which was nice celebration of the staff award winners from 2021. President LaForge thanked Dr. Novobilski and his staff for hosting the Memorial Service for Dr. Gray Kane. The event was well-attended and included comments from several of Dr. Kane's colleagues and friends.
- Mr. Rutledge gave an update on Facilities Management projects. The campus-wide roofing project is on schedule, and it should be completed by the end of March. The campus-wide elevator project is almost complete, and it will be complete once Facilities Management replaces the flooring in the elevators. The university was approved for an additional grant from MDOT to finish the sidewalks on campus. The university continues to use its Repair and Renovation funds for projects around campus;

however, it has been difficult to procure and receive materials in a timely manner. The Delta Music Institute needs a new roof, and the university is going to use insurance funds to replace it. The project will commence as soon as possible. Mr. Rutledge has requested an extension for using all funds. Mr. Rutledge should know by the end of the week the amount of funds the university will be allocated from the American Recovery Act. Mr. Rutledge will participate in a conference call tomorrow to discuss CARES funds.

- Mr. Kinnison gave an update on Athletics. The swimming and diving teams hosted and defeated Rhodes College. They will host the New South Intercollegiate Swim Conference in two weeks. The men’s basketball team hosts Lee University tonight, and the women’s basketball team hosts Mississippi College on Thursday. Both teams will travel to Clinton on Saturday to compete against Mississippi College. The baseball and softball teams open their seasons this weekend. The baseball team travels to Hot Springs and Arkadelphia, AR to compete against Harding University, Rogers State University, and Henderson State University. The softball team travels to Gulf Shores, AL to compete against Drury University, Union University, University of North Georgia, and Saint Leo University. The men’s tennis team opens this weekend in Arkadelphia, AR to Ouachita Baptist University, Southern Arkansas University, and Southwest Baptist University.
- President LaForge shared with Cabinet members some of the meetings and events planned for this week. President LaForge will participate in the weekly teleconference on Tuesday with Commissioner Rankins and the IEOs to discuss COVID-19 related issues. The Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors will meet on Tuesday. President LaForge will visit with the men’s and women’s tennis teams on Wednesday. Dr. Lucy Harris-Stewart’s funeral service will be held on campus in Walter Sillers Coliseum on Saturday at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday. President LaForge will travel to Indianapolis on Sunday for the NCAA DII Implementation Committee meeting.

CABINET TOPIC

None

BUSINESS

Action

None

Discussion

Budget Plans for FY23 – update Mr. Rutledge

Mr. Rutledge shared with Cabinet members an update on the budget planning process for FY23. Phase I and Phase II budget requests were sent to the vice presidents and to Mr. Kinnison for distribution to their respective areas. Requests for both phases are due to Mr. Rutledge on February 11. Mr. Rutledge shared insight into the budget planning process. Dependent upon the amounts Delta State receives from State appropriations and tuition revenue, the university may need to decrease contractual services, utilities, salaries, supplies, travel, etc. for FY23. The Executive Committee has discussed reinstating the 5% fee for all 108 funds; transferring monies from auxiliary funds to E&G funds for FY23; and, a possible tuition increase. All items are just possibilities at this point and will be discussed with Cabinet members throughout the remaining budget planning process this Spring.

Legislative UpdateMr. Munroe

Mr. Munroe provided Cabinet members with an update on the Mississippi legislative session. Tuesday,

February 1st is the deadline for committees to report general bills and constitutional amendments that originated in their own chamber. Mr. Munroe highlighted a couple of the bills being tracked by IHL. House Bill 1313 will provide tuition assistance to foster children for attendance at approved postsecondary educational institutions. Senate Bill 2165 will prohibit state agencies from approving a request for state-funded or state-sponsored travel to any state, county, or municipality that has enacted a law, ordinance, or regulation prohibiting employee travel to the state of Mississippi. IHL Commissioner Al Rankins requested feedback from the Institutional Executive Officers on legislation that would prohibit the teaching of “Critical Race Theory” in public schools, the Institutions of Higher Learning, and public charter schools. On behalf of Delta State, President LaForge shared with Commissioner Rankins the university’s stance on not supporting “Critical Race Theory” legislation. Mr. Munroe shared that the IHL system is requesting \$75 million for Repair and Renovation funds, and Delta State’s portion would be \$6 million. Senator Sarita Simmons is working to develop a Senate proclamation for Dr. Lucy Harris.

Challenges and Goals..... President LaForge

President LaForge shared with Cabinet members the list of challenges and goals for the university over the next two years that he developed based on input from the Executive Committee. He compiled this information for his bi-annual performance evaluation with Commissioner Al Rankins. The challenges for the university are: enrollment decline; budgetary and financial sustainability; negative public perception; campus team effort/apathy; and, private fundraising. The goals for the next two years are: improve financial sustainability metric to 90 days of cash (five year goal or less); increase enrollment with smarter recruiting and program offerings, improved marketing, and realistic goals; realign core functions and structure with budget realities, and make budget adjustments; prepare for the SACSCOC reaffirmation in 2024; improve customer service culture to meet students’ needs; increase internal accountability and communication; improve university standing, reputation, and pride with marketing campaign; and, raise \$20 million for Centennial Capital Campaign.

Spring 2022 Colloquia Series President LaForge

President LaForge announced the Spring 2022 Colloquia Series is scheduled for March 8, and the speaker will be former Congressman David Bowen. Congressman Bowen’s lecture will focus on his observations of the state and climate of the U.S. government and national politics in light of the cultural and political divides that affect the country. During his time on campus, Congressman Bowen will visit with student leaders and speak to classes.

Conclusion of Hays Litigation President LaForge

President LaForge shared with Cabinet members the following report on the conclusion of the Hays litigation. “For your information and the minutes, I am pleased to report the conclusion of civil litigation filed against me as President by William Hays, a former Delta State faculty member. On January 11, 2022, the Mississippi Court of Appeals handed down a decision, in my favor, on a civil law suit filed against me by Hays in the fall of 2015. The Bolivar County Circuit Court originally granted summary judgment and dismissed the case in April 2020. The decision of the Court of Appeals affirms the lower court’s granting of summary judgment, and dismisses the case with prejudice. This is the second case filed by Hays against me as President. The first case, filed in 2014, alleging first amendment speech retaliation, was decided by a federal court in 2015, and also resulted in dismissal. Hays was chair of Delta State’s Division of Languages and Literature for several years. We removed him as chair in May 2014, subject to the terms of an at-will contract which he had signed. Subsequently, he and some supporters staged a misguided and orchestrated campaign protesting that decision, and caused significant disruption within the division and the academy. In a division meeting in August 2014, I instructed him and his supporters to stand down. The second law suit basically centered on Hays’s bogus defamation allegations based on my remarks in that meeting, and, as noted, the appellate court affirmed the lower court decision in my favor, and

dismissed the matter. In summary, both cases were baseless and a waste of time and money. They were essentially nuisance cases. Hays retired in December 2015. The outcome of both cases is essentially vindication of my actions as President, and validation of the university's personnel action regarding Hays. The recent appellate court decision marks the positive conclusion of a sad and unfortunate seven and a half year saga. As our lawyer pointed out to me, the lawsuits were vindictive and sophomoric in their personal attacks. But we won at every opportunity, and justice prevailed. While we put these distractions behind us long ago, and moved on, the courts' decisions and orders now put an end to the saga once and for all."

Big Green Event Mr. Young

Mr. Young informed Cabinet members about the Student Government Association (SGA) sponsored "Big Green Event" scheduled for April 23. During the Big Green Event, Delta State students will complete a campus and Cleveland community service day. SGA has a goal of having 200 students to contribute to the event.

Funeral Service for Dr. Lusia Harris-Stewart Mr. Kinnison

Mr. Kinnison shared with Cabinet members the logistics of the funeral for Dr. Lucy Harris-Stewart. The funeral service will be held on Saturday, February 5 at 11:00 a.m. in Walter Sillers Coliseum. Mrs. Nancy LaForge will read President LaForge's remarks at the service, since he will be unable to attend. The service will be livestreamed for those not able to attend in person.

Additional Information

- Mr. Young announced SGA officer campaigns begin on February 10. SGA Elections will begin the first week of March.
- Mr. Munroe provided a personnel update. Ms. Rhonda Williams is retiring from Mailing and Printing Services. Mr. Dean Arnold has been named the new Alumni Affairs Coordinator.
- Dr. Lovin announced he has established a temporary office in the Office of Academic Affairs on Mondays and Wednesdays to allow him to work more closely with his divisions located in Kent Wyatt Hall.

INFORMATIONAL/CALENDAR ITEMS:

- Lusia Harris-Stewart's funeral service, February 5, 11:00 a.m., Sillers Coliseum
- The British Invasion, February 15, 7:30 p.m., BPAC
- NSISC Swim and Dive Championships, February 16-19, Ronald G. Mayers Aquatics Center
- Mississippi Municipal League's annual Youth Summit, DSU campus, February 26
- Colloquia Lecture Series with The Honorable David Bowen, March 8, 6:00 p.m., Jobe Auditorium

NEXT MEETING:

- Next Cabinet Meeting – Wednesday, February 9, 2022 at 1:30 p.m.
- Next Cabinet Meeting Topic – None

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 2:39 p.m.