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UA3/10/2 State Budget Proposal Calls for More Reductions

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Fellow Faculty and Staff:

Last week, our campus resembled a winter wonderland, and while beautiful, it did come with challenges for the grounds crew and facilities staff. My compliments and gratitude to those who worked through the extreme cold, ice and snow to clear sidewalks, parking lots and building entrances. I also appreciate the efforts of those making decisions and communicating about campus closures. The safety of our students and employees remains of utmost importance in these situations. Thanks to all for your patience and cooperation.

This morning, I was pleased to see students, faculty and staff returning to the hill and campus crackling back to life as we begin the spring semester in earnest. Hundreds of Hilltoppers will be the first to take classes in Ogden College Hall, our fantastic new science building. This building replaces the former North Wing of the Thompson Complex and provides state-of-the-art laboratories and classrooms for our students studying the sciences. On February 19, we will dedicate the building officially, and I hope you will join us for that celebration.

We have a busy and challenging few months ahead. Through these occasional Monday messages, I will update and engage you in the work that will consume much of our time and energy throughout the spring semester. Today, I will focus on the legislative session of the Kentucky General Assembly.

Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin presented his State of the Commonwealth and Budget Address to the legislature last Tuesday, during which he outlined his two-year budget proposal for the state. For months leading up to the budget presentation, the Governor previewed that substantial budget cuts to state agencies and universities should be expected as his administration seeks to address the state’s underfunded pension systems.

The proposed budget includes across-the-board reductions of 6.25% to all state agencies, including higher education, along with the elimination or reduction of 70 state-funded programs. While smaller than anticipated, the implications for WKU include a $4.6 million reduction and elimination of $750,000 in funding to support the Kentucky Mesonet, the statewide weather monitoring network that we operate. The proposal does not include any relief for our growing pension obligation, which for WKU is projected to increase by some $9 million beginning in July.

These potential cuts and payment increases are on top of the $15 million in reductions caused by enrollment shifts and declines in the previous four years we also must address this year. I don’t have to do the math for you to see that our fiscal challenges are substantial.
As we work through the details of the various measures affecting higher education, it’s important to remember that this is the beginning of a long process. We will maintain a constant presence in Frankfort throughout the legislative session, and we will work diligently to improve the outcome for higher education as a whole and WKU specifically.

I will continue to update you on our work in Frankfort as the session unfolds. Pertinent information from our Government Relations staff and regular updates on House and Senate bills of interest to higher education can be found at [https://www.wku.edu/govrelations/legislativepriorities.php](https://www.wku.edu/govrelations/legislativepriorities.php).

While the decisions we will make in the coming months certainly will be difficult, they will allow us to project accurately the institutional revenues we have in future years. More importantly, they set the stage for a new budget model that will allow us to reward performance, incentivize growth and ensure our revenues match our expenses. Together, we will emerge from this process a stronger and leaner institution, poised to execute our new strategic plan and move WKU forward.

Best,

Timothy C. Caboni