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Forum Speaker: Senator Ron Farris appeared as the forum speaker. In brief opening remarks, Senator Farris made the following main points:

• He is committed to higher education, and supports the Faculty Senate’s recommendation for long-term planning aimed at stabilizing funding for the system and gaining for USM its fair share of funding.

• The legislature’s proposed budget, based on a 3.7% revenue growth projection, is realistic; even should revenues fall short of expectations, there is sufficient "cushion" built in to avoid the financial crisis predicted by Governor Musgrove.

• The Governor and the Legislature agree on the need for substantial "bridge funding" for higher education in order to ease the pain of budget reductions.

Senator Farris responded at length to comments and questions from senators. Highlights of the discussion follow:
D. Cabana commented on the relative ineffectiveness of the southern legislative delegation in comparison to their northern counterparts, and asked if Senator Farris would commit to proposing legislation to deal with the unfair and outdated makeup of IHL. Senator Farris responded that he would support such legislation, as he did in the current session. The prevailing power structure favors north Mississippi in general, and within the higher education system Ole Miss and Mississippi State specifically. The southern Mississippi delegation has not coalesced in part due to fear of running afoul of this structure. Fortunately, however, headway is being made, with greater organization of south Mississippi interests.

J. Rachal asked if the Legislature could compel IHL to distribute allocated funds more fairly, ideally according to credit hour production. Senator Farris indicated that the issue is being worked on from both legal and political angles, and expressed confidence that a positive change will come in time. A coalition of universities in favor of change is developing. Legislative efforts failed this year, but reformers will regroup and continue their efforts.

D. Duhon commented that there appears to be little reason for USM to be hopeful given obligations to K-12 teacher pay increases and to settling the Ayers case; these commitments will absorb any revenue increases. Senator Farris responded that these and other commitments will be manageable if the Legislature’s revenue projections hold. At this point optimism is still justified, especially in light of the universities’ position that they cannot take additional cuts. He noted other budget possibilities: He is open to cuts in corrections, as well as in mental health, though there is little support for the latter. He is in favor of diverting gambling money to education from roads and local projects; this approach enjoys a good deal of popular support but little in the Legislature. Tax increases are a theoretical possibility, but no one in the Legislature is talking about them at this point. It is much easier to redirect existing revenues than to increase taxes. D. Cabana noted that the problem with increased taxes is that under prevailing arrangements south Mississippi would be unlikely to get its fair share.

J. Smith asserted that Mississippi must invest in education or risk its economic development. The state’s percentage of college-educated citizens is far below the national average, and we have the lowest college completion rate in the country. Senator Farris replied that the most pressing issue in Mississippi is poverty. For this reason he has worked on education more than any other issue, and wants to see improvement at all levels. Unfortunately, Mississippi is unable to support excellence at 8.5 universities. He is, further, worried about the impact of Ayers on USM. Despite these concerns, however, the Senator does not support tax increases. Revenue is up, but spending is also up. The state needs to realign its spending priorities so that excellent education is available to all that want it.
without the schools and universities having to beg for money.

M. Dearmey suggested that Mississippi follow the example of New York, which appointed a blue ribbon panel to recommend binding changes to the state university system. At present Mississippi is funding too many schools and too many mediocre programs, but the Legislature is not in good position to make critical, intensely political, decisions for change. Senator Farris suggested that he would support a proposal for such a blue ribbon panel, and encouraged the Faculty Senate to speak out strongly on the issue.

K. Davis made three points. First, that she did not understand the political "fear" factor referred to earlier. Second, she recommended efficient consolidation of academic programs within the system where possible. Third, she questioned why gaming revenue is not devoted to education. Senator Farris clarified the "fear factor" in terms of the need for political support. A legislator cannot get anything accomplished without support from other legislators; the "fear" referred to earlier is really caution about alienating needed allies. As for the gaming revenues, Senator Farris pointed out that nothing in the legislation on gaming slated the revenue for education. In fact the gaming revenue goes completely to the general fund, of which about 2/3 currently goes to education.

E. Lundin asked if there would be continuing funding for the National Board Teacher Certification Program [the program grants teachers a $6000 raise each year for ten years if they successfully complete the certification process]. Senator Farris responded that the certification incentive program was fully funded for the coming year.

J. Olmi questioned how revenue projections had fallen so far off the mark, noting that the last 18 months of dealing with unanticipated budgetary contractions at USM has been very difficult. An exodus of faculty and staff from USM has already begun, and will worsen if next year’s projections fall short and further cuts are necessary. Senator Farris responded that until last year, the state had met or exceeded revenue expectations every year. He then proceeded to defend the Legislature’s current revenue projections in some detail, deriding the Governor’s projection as overly conservative in its exclusion of all "special" revenue, such as income taxes and new Nissan-related monies. Even in a worst-case scenario the 2% budget cushion [the Legislature budgets only 98% of expected revenue] and the Working Cash Stabilization Fund ["rainy-day fund"] should cover any shortfall.

B. Coates questioned whether the state risks its bond rating by tapping into the so-called "rainy-day fund." Senator Farris responded that rising debt service is an issue, but limited use of the rainy-day fund will not lower the state’s bond rating.
W. Scarborough asked for the source of the 3.7% projection figure the Legislature is using. Senator Farris replied that the 3.7% projection, arrived at some time ago by legislative staff, remains a reasonable figure, and reiterated that even at the Governor’s projected level of 2% revenue increase the budget remains in good shape.

M. Henry indicated that given a choice he would prefer to defer cuts in hopes that the Legislature's revenue projections stand up, than to take cuts at the front end of the budget.

1. **Call to Order**. President Laughlin called the meeting to order at 3:45 p.m.

2. **Approval of Agenda**. The agenda was approved with the addition of one item of new business, a resolution regarding construction of the university budget [see 7.1 below].

3. **Minutes Approval**. Minutes of the February meeting were approved as distributed.

4. **Executive Committee Reports**

4.1 **President’s Report**. Pres. Laughlin delivered the following report:

**Budget:**

During the past month, I have been involved in several discussions of the budget process. Michael Forster and I discussed the Senate’s budget resolution with President Fleming, Provost Griffin, and Vice President Gilbert in a meeting a few weeks ago. The President has no objection to a faculty budget committee; however, since we are already into the process for this year, the faculty representative in these meetings will be the Faculty Senate President.

Let me tell you what is planned for the next couple of weeks and then we can discuss how to proceed from there. Provost Griffin was charged with devising a procedure to follow in conducting budget hearings and he will preside at those meetings. The group will consist of the President, the Vice-Presidents, and the presidents of the Senate, the Staff Council, and the two student organizations. Late next week, this group will meet to get some overall information about the budget, and to talk about priorities. On April 4-6, this same group will hold hearings where every college and vice presidential unit will have 45 minutes each to discuss their strategy and priorities. Each unit has been asked to discuss 5% and 10% reduction strategies. However, during the Cabinet meeting this morning, we were informed that the reduction might be less than anticipated, depending upon how IHL
distributes funds. Out of these meetings during the next couple of weeks, a recommendation will be made to the President, who will make the final decision on the budget.

Given the current budget schedule that we have, I am proposing that we appoint an ad hoc budget committee to review the information that I have now and will receive in the next couple of weeks, and to advise me as we move through the budget process. Then, early next fall, the Senate should establish a more formal process for participation in budget deliberations. That process should be in place and should be discussed with the Provost and the President in the fall. Susan Hubble and Bob Smith have volunteered to be on the ad hoc committee that would begin immediately. If that is agreeable, I would need at least one more faculty member for this committee.

Risk Management Consultant:

On April 16th, the University will have on campus a risk management consultant, by the name of Brett Sokolow. He will be talking to several groups about sexual assault and harassment issues. He will speak to the Faculty Senate and Staff Council from 2:00 until 2:30 that afternoon. I will send you more details as I get them.

Suspension Policy:

I sent out an email about a proposed change in the suspension policy and several of you have responded to it. I would like to refer this matter to the Academic and Governance Committee, and we will discuss it briefly as part of that committee’s report.

Nominating Committee:

We need to appoint a Nominating Committee for Faculty Senate officers. This committee will present nominees for Secretary Elect and President Elect at our May meeting. The election of officers will take place at the June meeting. Traditionally, the President-Elect chairs that committee, and Susan Hubble has agreed to do so. I need two or three additional volunteers.

Phased Retirement:

You may have seen the draft policy on phased retirement that was circulated a couple of weeks ago. This has to do with the ability for the university to offer limited continuing employment after retirement. There is some disagreement at PERS as to whether this is all strictly legal under current state law, so we are waiting for a PERS ruling.
Commencement:

Former Lt. Governor Evelyn Gandy will receive an Honorary Degree at the 2:30 May commencement. Amy Tuck will be the speaker for that ceremony. This will be the first time they have been on the same stage together. Representative Chip Pickering will be the speaker for the evening ceremony.

[end of president's report]

D. Alford moved to allow President Laughlin to appoint an ad hoc budget committee to work through the budget discussions this year. W. Scarborough seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. President Laughlin commented that it makes sense to include President-Elect S. Hubble on the committee, and also that R. Smith has volunteered. Suggestions of others to include on the ad hoc committee are welcomed by President Laughlin and should be forwarded to her as soon as possible.

4.2 President-Elect’s Report. S. Hubble reported that Governor Musgrove met with a group of 18 members of the Faculty Senator on March 16 (Friday of Spring Break week). The governor presented his case for conservative revenue growth estimates in the context of his conflict with the Legislature over next year’s state budget. The meeting was positive, but unfortunately the governor left little time for questions.

4.3 Secretary’s Report. No report.

4.4 Secretary-Elect’s Report. D. Alford read the proxies received. [See "Members Represented by Proxy," above.]

5.0 Committee Reports.

5.1 Academic and Governance. M. Lux asked for input on the proposed change of policy regarding academic suspension referenced in President Laughlin’s report [the proposal had been circulated via the Senate listserv].

5.2 Administration and Faculty Evaluations. No report.

5.3 Archives. S. Nielsen was absent.

5.4 Athletic Liaison. No report.

5.5 Awards. S. Graham-Kresge announced the following award winners: Mary
5.6 Faculty Welfare. J. Rachal reported three committee actions. First, a resolution on travel vendors [distributed prior to the meeting via email] was developed for consideration and vote at next month’s meeting. The resolution is as follows:

As a cost-saving measure, the USM Faculty Senate urges the IHL/Legislature to allow university employees to purchase travel tickets from vendors other than the state-contracted vendor when said tickets can be purchased for an amount less than the lowest price offered by the state-contracted vendor for comparable service.

[end of resolution]

Second, the committee recommended to the president and secretary that information on the status of resolutions be included on the Senate website. At present the resolutions themselves are available, but without indication of any actions taken and the current status of the resolutions.

Third, the committee emailed to Commission Layzell a request for follow-up on the Senate’s resolution on tuition portability.

5.7 Constitution and Bylaws. R. Smith reported that the committee had reviewed the constitution and bylaws and distributed a handout of recommended changes to be considered at next month’s meeting.

5.8 Elections. S. Hubble reported on election preparations, distributing materials related to senatorial terms and eligibility for re-election, draft ballots, and reapportionment. Senators were asked to check the information for accuracy and notify the committee of any apparent errors.

5.9 Environment. No report.

5.10 Faculty Development. No report.

5.11 Government Relations. No report.

5.12 Technology. No report.

5.13 Transportation. W. Scarborough reported improvement in parking enforcement with the addition of two ticket writers and the assistance of regular police in writing tickets. He also noted that the City is planning to pave a number
of streets, but it is not clear when the work will be done.

5.14 AAUPLiaison. M. Dearmey announced an AAUP organizational meeting to be held March 29, 4:30 p.m., in Liberal Arts 101. Two representatives from AAUP will be present. The focus of the meeting will be on formation of a local chapter.

5.15 Faculty Handbook Task Force. No report.

5.16 University Faculty Senates Association (UFSA). A. Kaul reported the following:

The next regular meeting of UFSA should be in early April, prior to the April 17 flag vote. At that meeting Kaul will follow up on the tuition waiver transportability issue.

A date will be announced in April when Ward Symon will be on campus to discuss the Mississippi Association of Educators with interested faculty.

The Ole Miss faculty senate endorsed the new state flag and encouraged people to vote on April 17.

6. Old Business.

6.1 Senate position on the state flag issue. D. Cabana moved adoption of a resolution endorsing IHL’s position in support of the new state flag design, in lieu of the Senate taking a position on its own. K. Austin seconded the motion.

Discussion on the motion:

J. Palmer and M. Dearmey spoke against the motion, reminding the Senate that it had already voted to take a position on the flag issue. D. Alford distinguished between voting on the issue as a senator and as an individual citizen, and argued that one action does not directly affect the other. J. Smith noted that the Senate might approve the resolution, and still take a stand separately.

B. Coates called the question [necessitating a vote to end debate; a two-thirds favorable vote is required]. President Laughlin called for a vote in favor ending debate. Less than the required two-thirds voted in favor of ending debate; debate continued.

A. Kaul suggested that the Senate might take a position simply encouraging citizens to vote on the issue on April 17. M. Henry reiterated that the Senate’s intention at its last meeting was clearly to take a position in favor or against the
new flag. J. Smith indicated his desire for a strong statement on the issue, which is drawing international attention to Mississippi.

J. Palmer appealed to the body to determine if the resolution is germane in light of the Senate's intention to take a position on the issue, whereupon D. Cabana and K. Austin withdrew the motion, ending discussion.

M. Dearmey moved that the Senate take a position in favor of the new flag. J. Smith seconded the motion.

Discussion on the motion:

W. Scarborough spoke against the motion, suggesting that the attack on the Confederacy represented by the new flag campaign will severely damage race relations within the state.

E. Harrison indicated that College of Nursing faculty are generally in favor of retaining the current flag.

D. Duhon said that the majority opinion in the College of Business is that the flag should not be a Faculty Senate issue; hence he would abstain or vote against the motion.

K. Davis said that the majority of faculty in Music favor a flag change.

M. Forster indicated that Social Work faculty also are strongly in favor of the proposed new flag.

Replying to the view that the flag is not an appropriate Senate issue, D. Alford argued that USM faculty are state employees and that therefore the flag, a premiere symbol of the state, is a highly relevant issue.

R. Smith expressed mixed feelings, finding value to all points of view on the issue.

J. Smith emphasized the impact of the flag vote on Mississippi's image throughout the country and the world; the outcome of the vote will be read as a sign of the state's readiness to move ahead on a whole range of issues, notably race relations.

G. Stringer stated that he was in favor of the motion on the floor.

J. Rachal extended support for the motion after giving careful thought to abstaining.

D. Beckett expressed continued reservation about representing other faculty on the issue.
L. McDowell offered support for the motion, and indicated that in doing so she represents faculty in her area.

D. McCain stated that he would abstain.

D. Cabana suggested he too would abstain, since his constituency does not support a flag change.

A. Jaffe argued that it is legitimate for each senator to vote in what he or she believes is the best interest of the university, and not necessarily as it is believed the majority of his or her constituents would vote.

M. Henry agreed with J. Smith's earlier characterization of the impact of the flag decision, and indicated that he would vote in favor of the motion.

W. Scarborough requested that the vote on the motion be taken by secret ballot.

President Laughlin directed the distribution of ballots. S. Hubble and J. Palmer collected and tallied the marked ballots. W. Scarborough and J. Smith observed the vote tally to ensure accuracy. Final count: 22 "yes" votes, 7 "no" votes, 10 abstentions. Motion carried.

7.0 New Business.

7.1 Resolution on construction of the university budget. G. Stringer distributed a resolution asserting the priority of Academic Affairs in the University budget, and moved to suspend Senate rules to allow an immediate vote on the resolution. D. Cabana seconded the motion. There was no discussion and the motion passed on a voice vote.

G. Stringer moved, and C. Hoyle seconded the motion, that the Senate adopt the following resolution:

Whereas The University of Southern Mississippi is first and foremost an academic institution whose highest priority is the creation and dissemination of knowledge through its research and instructional missions, the Faculty Senate of The University of Southern Mississippi endorses the following principles in the construction of the university budget for the upcoming year and calls on the President to implement them:

a. that the Vice-President for Business and Finance be instructed clearly to identify for those involved in the budgetary process all resources, from all sources and in all accounts and/or categories of expenditure, that are available for the construction of the FY 2002 budget;
b. that the Provost be recognized as the most powerful voice in the determination and implementation of University priorities; and specifically,
c. that the section of the budget allocated to Academic Affairs be accorded priority status and not be subject to a reduction proportionate to the university-wide percentage.
d. [end of proposed resolution]

Discussion on the motion: J. Palmer expressed discomfort over the word "powerful" in section (b) of the resolution. G. Stringer moved to amend the original motion by substituting "important" for "powerful" in the resolution. D. McCain seconded the motion to amend. The motion carried with one "no" vote. Discussion on the amended motion: G. Stringer emphasized that the intent of the resolution is to assert unequivocal priority to the academic function of the University. M. Henry stated that the resolution clarifies the question of what weight should be given to the voice of Academic Affairs in budget discussions. D. Beckett asked if the Senate position might change if faculty lacked confidence in the provost. G. Stringer responded that the resolution concerns priorities rather than personalities; thus the Senate's position should remain the same. S. Oshrin questioned whether the resolution might put faculty at odds with Staff Council and other members of the University community. J. Smith, G. Stringer and M. Dearmey all responded along similar lines, namely that Academic Affairs is the heart of the University, and should be recognized as such by the entire community. J. Smith asserted that a greater concern than giving offense to non-academic colleagues is the growth in the number of non-academic, non-research voices surrounding University decision-makers. President Laughlin called for a vote on the motion to adopt the amended resolution, which read as follows:

Whereas The University of Southern Mississippi is first and foremost an academic institution whose highest priority is the creation and dissemination of knowledge through its research and instructional missions, the Faculty Senate of The University of Southern Mississippi endorses the following principles in the construction of the university budget for the upcoming year and calls on the President to implement them:

e. that the Vice-President for Business and Finance be instructed clearly to identify for those involved in the budgetary process all resources, from all sources and in all accounts and/or categories of expenditure, that are available for the construction of the FY 2002 budget;
f. that the Provost be recognized as the most important voice in the determination and implementation of University priorities; and specifically,
g. that the section of the budget allocated to Academic Affairs be accorded priority status and not be subject to a reduction proportionate to the university-wide percentage.

Presented and passed at the Faculty Senate meeting on March 23, 2001.
The motion to adopt passed unanimously.

8.0 Announcements. There were no announcements.

9.0 Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 5:19 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Michael Forster, Faculty Senate Secretary