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Faculty Representative

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Student Representative

**The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
University Advancement and External Affairs Meeting
Thursday, September 10, 2020, 4:00 p.m.**

**PURSUANT TO GOVERNOR RAIMONDO'S
EXECUTIVE ORDER, THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY
USING THE WEBEX PLATFORM (BOARD ONLY) AND FACEBOOK
LIVESTREAM (PUBLIC VIEWING)**

MINUTES

Chair Christine Heenan, acknowledged that a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

Attendees present for this virtual meeting:

The URI Board of Trustees voting members:

- Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Chair
- Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds
- Ms. Cortney Nicolato
- Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni, Vice Chair
- Ms. Margo Cook (Board of Trustees Chair)

The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees ex officio members:

- Ms. Barbara Cottam, Chair, Board of Education
- Dr. Mayrai Gindy—Faculty Representative

The University of Rhode Island staff members:

- Michelle Curreri, Chief of Staff, and University Liaison
- Kelly K. Mahoney, Executive Director for External Relations and Communications, and University Liaison
- Lil Breul O'Rourke, President, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement (URIFAE)
- Lou Saccoccio, General Counsel for the University of Rhode Island
- Cheryl Trudel, Executive Assistant, External Relations and Communications

Invited Guest:

- Alfred J. Verrecchia '67, M.B.A. '72, Hon. '04, Board of Directors, Executive Committee Chair, URIFAE

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Chair Heenan called for a motion to accept the agenda for the September 10, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Vice Chair Sabitoni and seconded by Ms. Nicolato it was

VOTED: THAT The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee accept the September 10, 2020 meeting agenda.

VOTE: 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds, Ms. Cortney Nicolato, and Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 26, 2020 MEETING [Enclosure](#)

Chair Heenan called for a motion to approve the minutes for the August 26, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Mr. Sabitoni and seconded by Dr. Montilla Edmonds it was,

VOTED: THAT The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee approve the minutes of the August 26, meeting

VOTE: 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative.

YEAS: Ms. Christine M. Heenan, Dr. Karina Montilla Edmonds, Ms. Cortney Nicolato, and Mr. Armand E. Sabitoni.

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Chair Heenan announced to the Committee that there were two presentations prepared for the meeting: URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement activities, principally focused on the capital campaign and Public Relations and Marketing Initiatives. Chair Heenan expressed her enthusiasm

for the forthcoming campaign launch and the opportunity to leverage the campaign for reputational benefit for URI. She expressed hope that all Committee members and the full Board of Trustees be able to participate in the capital campaign launch event.

Chair Heenan informed the Committee that no further voting action would be necessary during the meeting.

a. Review of URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement activities

Chair Heenan invited Lil Breul O'Rourke to present to the Committee. Ms. Breul O'Rourke, President, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement, gave a presentation entitled, [URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement](#).

At the Conclusion of the presentation, Ms. Breul O'Rourke invited Committee members and Mr. Verrecchia to ask questions and/or provide feedback.

Mr. Verrecchia stated that it was critical to support the financial impact that COVID-19 has had on the University and that the Campaign needs to raise funds for the Annual Fund, which is unrestricted current use. The Campaign is off to a great start, and he is confident that it will reach the \$250M Campaign goal. He explained that while initial fundraising efforts are aimed at constituencies with a strong affinity to the University, the focus of solicitation efforts will be expanded to a broader constituency of prospects and donors.

Chair Heenan thanked Mr. Verrecchia, stating that she is particularly excited about exceeding the Campaign goal and one reason behind the creation of the University Advancement and External Affairs Committee was to make sure there is the support and assistance necessary in achieving and exceeding the Campaign goals, while continuing to work on the many complex issues and opportunities that Kelly Mahoney manages.

Dr. Montilla Edmonds commented on the Rhody Now initiative, which is aimed at helping students, who have had changed family circumstances due to COVID-19, continue with their studies without interruption, stating that even if that support is minimal, a \$1,000 funding source would allow many students to stay in school.

Ms. Nicolato also addressed the Committee, expressing her gratitude to several URI staff and Board members for their efforts and accomplishments raising funds for the Campaign. She also stated that the Rhody Now portion of the Campaign as being relatable to her own experience as a full-time student and how much a scholarship would have changed her life. She is thrilled that the URIFAE is focusing on helping bridge the financial gap for its students.

Vice Chair, Mr. Sabitoni, thanked everyone for raising funds for the University, and directed a question to Mr. Verrecchia related to state funding (while noting that last year the state gave URI less than what was requested) and how funding works between the URIFAE and the University.

Mr. Verrecchia stated that in addition to raising funds, the URIFAE also manages the endowment by investing the funds in order to yield a high financial return. Currently the Investment Committee works with a consulting firm, Cambridge Analytics, located in Boston, Massachusetts. This current fiscal year the URIFAE is able to provide the University with an increased payout from the endowment of five (5) percent.

Mr. Verrecchia reiterated that the goal is to grow the endowment, as URI has a very small endowment compared to peers and aspirational peers. The challenge is to raise more money for the endowment in order to support the University more significantly, going forward.

Chair Heenan thanked Mr. Verrecchia and asked if there were no other questions for Ms. Breul O'Rourke or Mr. Verrecchia, that she would like to move to Ms. Mahoney's presentation regarding the General Assembly, the uncertain future of the bond issues, as well as public dialogue related to recent issues around the University.

Dr. Gindy posed a question to Ms. Breul O'Rourke asking how the URIFAE finds the students who are in financial need.

Ms. Breul O'Rourke explained that while the URIFAE does manage endowed scholarships, the funds for the Rhody Now Campaign are held in cash financial aid accounts managed by Dean Libutti and his team in enrollment services. That team is focused on finding and retaining financial at-need students. Enrollment Services funding is directly applied to the student's account for those students they hear from with appeals for financial assistance.

Dr. Gindy further inquired as to how far along is the URIFAE with reaching their Rhody Now \$1M goal? Ms. Breul O'Rourke stated that the account at present is funded with approximately \$150,000 upwards to possibly \$200,000 in challenge grant funds. Given that the Campaign is at the beginning stages, and while it will be a year-long effort, the funds are immediately available and held in a rotating account.

Dr. Gindy indicated that she is planning to contribute to the Rhody Now Campaign and asked Ms. Breul O'Rourke if it is possible for the URIFAE to reach out to former URI graduates who were given similar scholarships to ask them to "pay it forward" and sponsor a student with a \$500 to \$1,000 gift.

Ms. Breul O'Rourke responded saying that this is a great idea, and that this strategy will be used as part of the messaging and noted the level of solicitation for smaller gifts of \$500 to \$1K as manageable.

Chair Heenan thanked both Dr. Gindy and Ms. Breul O'Rourke and was inspired by Dr. Gindy and Ms. Nicolato's example pledging to also make a gift to the Rhody Now Campaign and concurred that this as a critically important way to make a difference for students.

Chair Heenan stated that like many Universities, URI was increasingly navigating controversial academic freedom issues, and also questions and policies borne of an elevated focus on race and inclusion. She asked Ms. Mahoney to walk the Committee through her presentation reviewing URI's public relations and marketing initiatives.

b. Review University public relations and marketing initiatives

Ms. Kelly Mahoney, Executive Director for External Relations and Communications gave a presentation entitled, [URI Board of Trustees Advancement and External Affairs Committee: Public Relations and Marketing Initiatives](#).

During the portion of Ms. Mahoney's presentation related to the recent media coverage involving two controversial issues, Ms. Nicolato asked Ms. Mahoney to elaborate on a strategy of communicating to the Board of Trustees in order that they are prepared and able to respond accordingly with high level talking points in such situations.

Ms. Mahoney responded that it is her goal to ensure that all Board members receive University communications prior to the release of such notices to the general population. She further stated that there may be times when those communications are sent to the Board with very little advance notice, but it is her priority to communicate on vital topics with as much notice as possible.

Upon completion of Ms. Mahoney's presentation, Chair Heenan asked Mr. Sabitoni if he had any unique insights and/or anything he wanted to add to Ms. Mahoney's update with regard to bond issues. Mr. Sabitoni stated that Ms. Mahoney was "spot on" with her summation of the elections. He also asked that with URI now having an independent Board, when lobbying for funds for the University, if that process is still handled through the Board of Higher Education or directly addressed to the General Assembly. Ms. Mahoney stated that lobbying for funding for URI is now handled directly.

Mr. Sabitoni also asked Ms. Mahoney to explain to him where RICAP (Rhode Island Capital Improvement Program), money comes from. Ms. Mahoney explained that RICAP is a program where the University receives a substantial amount of funding on an annual basis—as a major infusion of cash from the State of Rhode Island's budget to do maintenance updates, such as new roofs, elevator repairs, electrical work, etc.

Ms. Mahoney further stated that the University owns a substantial amount of the State's property and relies heavily on asset protection funding from RICAP, and that while the state has worked hard with URI over the years to increase that funding, it always falls quite a bit short of what's actually needed in order to maintain the facilities. This year the challenge is that RICAP is funded after the rainy day coffers are filled (which were pretty much exhausted in the last budget cycle), and the University is anticipating having very little asset protection capital funding from the state for this fiscal year because it is required, by law, to refill those coffers before the program can start again.

Chair Heenan thanked Ms. Mahoney for her very helpful presentation. She stated that factors such as the uncertainty at the federal level and by extension at the state level, along with changing politics in an election year, and the instability in government at all levels, that URI is fortunate to have both the insights and members of the Committee, as well as Ms. Mahoney's deep insights, relationships, and connections in her close monitoring with our University team and the University's lobbying team.

Chair Heenan asked URI Board of Trustee Chair, Ms. Cook if she had anything that she wanted to add prior to calling for a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Cook thanked everyone for their participation. She also informed the Committee that she plans to reserve a block of time during the second half of the full Board meeting on September 11 to provide the URI Board of Trustees with greater opportunities where members have more exposure to the University in order that they may educate themselves about the University as it relates to faculty research, students, etc. Ms. Cook encouraged the Committee to think about any opportunities and/or specific topics or areas of interest that they might want to see brought forward, either within the Committee, or by the full Board.

Chair Heenan thanked Ms. Cook and agreed, while also stating that there is deep interest with Committee members to understand and learn as much as possible about the University.

Ms. Nicolato liked the idea of opportunities to assist Board members to be better informed and to be able to help, support, and share insights about the University to better understand the mission of the University.

4. ADJOURN

Chair Heenan called for a motion to adjourn for the September 10, 2020 meeting.

On a motion duly made by Mr. Sabitoni and seconded by Ms. Courtney Nicolato it was,

VOTED: THAT The University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee adjourned the meeting of September 10, 2020.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

The next URI Board of Trustees University Advancement and External Affairs Committee meeting is scheduled for October 23, 2020.