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UVI Faces Hiring Freezes and Service Cuts If Budget Reduction is Implemented, Says Outgoing President

Dr. David Hall appeals to the 35th Legislature to reject the proposed \$2.2 million cut, citing negative impacts on staff salaries, student services, and the incoming president's ability to lead effectively

Government / **Published On July 30, 2024 06:07 AM /**

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Outgoing UVI President David Hall at the V.I. Legislature on Monday, July 29, 2024. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

“As we have done in the past, we are asking this committee, and ultimately the 35th Legislature, to be our saving grace.” That was the appeal from Dr. David Hall, the University of the Virgin Islands outgoing president, as he denounced a \$2.2 million reduction in the university’s general fund allotment for FY2025.?

“That proposal has some major challenges, which, if not addressed, will have a very negative impact on the university's operation,” Mr. Hall told members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. The proposed appropriation is \$36,751,293, down from the \$38,951,293 allocated to UVI in FY2024. With less funding, he anticipates “hiring freezes and budget reductions in all areas.” These are decisions that will undoubtedly affect the student and learning experience. “Many areas are already understaffed, and additional cuts will seriously jeopardize the quality of service,” stated the [departing president](#).

Mr. Hall further outlined that with \$2.2 million less, UVI would be challenged in fulfilling contracted salary increases. “Because the administration is committed to providing...the equivalent salary increase as the teaching faculty, this will require an increase in our budget of \$1.3 million” if the governor’s recommendation is approved. “If we don’t do that,” he told Senator Samuel Carrion, “then we are again sending the message to employees that we don't value your contribution, and what happens then is individuals leave.” He lamented UVI’s inability to provide consecutive salary increases during his entire 15-year tenure.

Scheduled tuition increases and an anticipated rise in enrollment in the upcoming academic year will apparently do little to cushion the blow. “Increased costs for insurance and other mandatory expenditures will also eat away from the increased revenue,” explained Dr. Hall. UVI is expected to receive half a million dollars from increased tuition costs but will receive \$500,000 less from its endowment due to liquidity issues. “It becomes a wash,” noted Mr. Hall.

The outgoing president has asked the 35th Legislature to “reject this proposed reduction.” Its approval, he said, would adversely affect UVI’s incoming president, Dr. Safiya George. “She doesn't need a \$2.2 million reduction in our operating budget, tying her hands as she begins her illustrious career,” he said.

UVI needs most of its budget – \$30,305,458 – to cover operational costs including salaries and benefits. This figure does not include the \$1.3 million needed for salary increases. Dr. Hall has also requested \$9 million for other programs including the Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning, the Construction Manager Program, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and senior citizen tuition assistance. While reserve funds are currently sufficient to cover UVI’s touted free tuition program, Dr. Hall warned that “in the next couple of years, this appropriation will need to be added back to the university's budget to continue to implement this transformative policy.”?

UVI’s plea moved Senator Javan James. “I understand what the Governor proposed, but thank God for the separation of powers, we have the final say,” he declared. “The same way we could have found \$5 million to fund VIGL for the horse track which hasn't even started as yet...is the same way we can fund the University of the Virgin Islands.” For Mr. James, the government has an “obligation to make sure that we put our money where it counts.” Senator Novelle Francis, too, promised to “advocate for that to be maintained.”?

Receiving the full budget request would still be insufficient to meet several of UVI’s key needs. “This budget does not include additional funds for marketing, and that is one of the things that we really need to work on,” Mr. Hall noted. He said the university has “one of the most compelling stories” but “it's hard to tell that story when you don't have funds that are directed exclusively to marketing.” It’s what competitors are utilizing, he said. “I could go on and on”, he said but hesitated given his awareness of the territory’s current fiscal challenges.

In his final budget defense as the president of the University of the Virgin Islands, Mr. Hall reminded lawmakers in a last plea for sufficient funding that “ this legislative body has been a

sincere and loyal supporter of UVI.”

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