

Minutes of June 7, 2000 meeting

2:30 p.m., Room 404 A/B Union



Present:
Julie Andrews, Bettie Bey, Woodson Boyden, Betty Brown, Jonie Camp, Onice Carter, Mary Chrestman, Buster Clark, Sylvia Denton, Cherry Douglas, Judy Fos, Melissa Hudson, Clay Jones, Buddy Kahler, Anne Klingen, Denise Knighton, Jonnie Manning, Janea McDonald, Mark Miller, Lynn Mills, Traci Mitchell, Jerry Moore, Conny Parham, Donna Patton, Calvin Sellers, Michael Vanderlip, Sherry Wall

Excused:
Martha Deal, Laura Gillom, Theresa Knight, Etta Miller, Lamar Pickens

Unexcused:
Shirley Fisher, Shellie Harrison, Jim Stephens

President Traci Mitchell called the meeting to order and introduced guest speakers **State Senator Gray Tollison**, **State Representative Jay Eads** and **Janis Baker**, Director of the Lafayette County Department of Human Services. Senator Tollison described CHIP, a federal government program created in 1997 to help provide health insurance to children of low income/working families. The program provides for a 5-1 dollar match of federal to state contributions to the program. The state of Mississippi has allocated \$10 million from the tobacco settlement award and received \$50 million from the federal government to fund this program and is now seeking to publicize it. There are an estimated 85,000 children between the ages of 5-19 who are uninsured. The coverage runs for 1 year and then must be renewed and applicants requalified. For a family of four, the income cutoff is \$40,000. Tobacco money is also being used to expand Medicaid for the elderly, including the expansion of community and home-based services, such as Meal on Wheels.

Janis Baker encouraged everyone who is eligible to apply for CHIP, because the money is available. She also noted that there are other medicaid programs available for pregnant women and children up to age 19. Application for these programs is fairly simple, requiring only such information as children's names, SSN's, proof of age, and proof of one month's income. DHS will check on eligibility of applicants for all relevant programs. If applicants are not eligible for medicaid assistance, DHS then verifies for the CHIP program. Once verified, eligibility is good for 12 months, regardless of any change in circumstances. CHIP has one important criteria which should be noted: if a child is or has been covered by insurance within the previous six months, the child is not eligible. Senator Tollison and Rep. Eads noted that there is a possibility that that time frame (6 months) could be reduced to 1-3 months. House Bill 1469 directs the state to request the lowest waiting period possible from the Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA), the federal agency which oversees and administers medicare and medicaid. Presently DHS is looking at the problem of individuals who have health insurance available from employers but who cannot afford it and is investigating the possibility of the state helping with payment of premiums.

CHIP is like private health insurance, administered through Blue Cross/Blue Shield, with no restrictions on which physicians patients can see. Medicaid recipients are assigned to a physician. There was a general discussion of how to get this information about Medicaid coverage and the CHIP program to University employees and others in the community who might be eligible. Ms. Baker, Senator Tollison and Rep. Eads all volunteered to help in any way, and they will discuss with Clay Jones and Sherry Wall the best way to accomplish that goal, including the possibility of having a sign-up day on campus very soon. Applications are available at DHS, on the Web and at the Human Resources Office on campus.

The next guest speaker was **Andy Mullins**, Executive Assistant to the Chancellor, who reviewed the legislative session and distributed a handout of pertinent 2000 legislation. He noted that there has been a great deal of criticism of the

passage of HB 1281, the Retirement Bill, which provided for a controversial increase in retirement benefits for members of the legislature. However, there is a benefit contained in that bill for University employees, giving retirees the option to choose a partial lump sum distribution of their retirement benefits. This affects those retirees with either 28 years of service or those who have at least four years of service and are 63 years of age.

SB 3315, the Bond Bill which was passed, included \$2.5 million for the relocation of the UM Physical Plant and \$1.5 million for renovation and repair of some other UM campus facilities. The Legislature's Bureau of Buildings Committee had an inspection on the Ole Miss campus on June 6, 2000. The University has received preplanning authority for proposed changes to Guyton Hall and the Education Building. It is hoped that the University will receive bond money for these two projects next year and plans to request for preplanning authority for changes to Meek Hall. There was \$2.5 million designated for IHL repair and renovation projects. The University is putting together a plan to request part of that money, probably to be used for ADA renovations.

The law which allows state employees to donate leave was a sunset bill which will expire July 1, 2000, because it was not renewed by the legislature. Anyone wishing to donate leave must do so before July. Mr. Mullins reported that part of the problem with this bill was the concern about what constitutes "catastrophic illness or injury" and what cap should be put on the amount of donated leave an employee could receive. He seemed to expect that a similar bill would be introduced next year which would be more specific and have a better chance of approval. There was some discussion of the need for specific language to define "catastrophic illness or injury" and it was noted that this policy had been abused in some instances.

Mr. Mullins reported that the university is facing the possibility of a budget cut. There was a \$16 million shortfall in the IHL budget. He noted that the tuition increase will help offset a budget cut for the University. Andy thinks that in the future IHL will probably look at the possibility of tying tuition increases to the cost of living. Most private and many public institutions in other states already do this.

Sen. Tollison noted that the crucial period for next year's state budget will come in September, when the legislative budget commission holds hearings. He noted that Mississippi has not been utilizing the maximum federal money that is available to us now, and that all state agencies should be scrutinized to assure that they are getting and using all the federal money available, so that we can use the general funds from the state for other programs and agencies.

In discussing the future financial outlook for the state, Senator Tollison and Rep. Eads noted that the state has a "Rainy Day" fund that has a balance of nearly \$300 million. When asked how to lobby for state and university employee pay raises next year, they suggested that we write to Governor Musgrove and members of the legislative budget committee, beginning now. They also suggested that we and the other Staff Councils write to those same persons.

Traci Mitchell thanked all of our guest speakers for their presentations.

Minutes:

The minutes of the May, 2000, Staff Council meeting were approved with no corrections.

Announcements:

Traci thanked everyone who worked on Staff Appreciation Week events, both Staff Council members and other employees, without whom these events would not have been possible. Anne Klingen asked that the following Law School staff members who manned the drink tables be especially thanked: Barbara Vinson, Kristen Fletcher, Julie Davis and Linda Scott.

Clay Jones announced that the Chancellor has responded positively to our request that there be staff representation on all University Standing Committees, and requested volunteers to serve on several of those committees.

Traci reminded everyone that the July Staff Council meeting has been changed to July 12 and will be held in room 405 of the Ole Miss Union. She also noted that proof sheets of photos from Awards Day and the picnic are available. Donna Patton will have them for a couple of days if anyone wishes to see them.

Deborah Lemmons, a guest at the meeting, was asked if she had received any reaction/response to a letter which she had recently written to the editor of *The Daily Mississippian*. She noted that she had received strong support from staff, but as yet had received no reaction from the Chancellor or any of the administration. Traci noted in response to a question about staff raises that when she, Clay and Donna Patton attended the Chancellor's Strategic Planning Retreat recently, there was a great deal of discussion about raises for University employees. It was noted by several council members that the administration seems to have made this a priority and will continue to do so.

Reports:

MASCO--Clay Jones attended the MASCO meeting at Mississippi State in May where several representatives from the IHL discussed the legislative session and cuts to higher education. The IHL is making a strong push to settle the Ayers case. In response to a question about the two tuition proposals which MASCO had presented to the University Presidents' Council (to restore the 100% tuition benefit for employees and to make tuition portable for employees' dependents), it was announced that the Presidents' Council has asked the IHL Commissioner to do a cost study of those two proposals and report back.

Concerns--Clay noted there was one concern pending regarding traffic and parking.

Project Discover--Buster Clark reported that a new office is being created to deal with the processes of Procurement to Payment, which will combine at least the Purchasing, Receiving and Accounts Payable offices into one unit with one location (yet to be determined) easily accessible for vendors. Also, SAP consultants have been on campus to work on the upgrade of 4.6 B, which is the platform for the implementation of SAP for student data management and fund recovery.

Miscellaneous:

Mary Chrestman thanked Human Resources for giving employees an opportunity to sign up with The Vanguard Group as a new option for a vehicle for our 403(b) tax-sheltered plans. At least ten people were needed to sign up with Vanguard in order to meet the criteria on this campus for the addition of a new company/mutual fund to the University's list; over twelve have already signed up as of the May 31 deadline.

Outgoing President Traci Mitchell thanked the other outgoing Staff Council officers, especially Past-President Onice Carter, who is rotating off the Council, and turned the gavel (figuratively speaking) over to new President Clay Jones. Other new officers include Sherry Wall, President-elect; Mary Chrestman, Treasurer; and Jonnie Manning, Secretary.

Clay noted that the past year had been an especially difficult one for the Staff Council President, with such controversial issues as the implementation of the new payroll system and the new state health insurance network, and he commended Traci on the excellent job she has done. Clay presented Traci with a plaque to honor her service as Staff Council President for 1999-2000.

The meeting was adjourned.

/s/Traci Mitchell, President
/s/Clay Jones, President-Elect
/s/Conny Parham, Secretary

Staff Council e-mail address: staffcouncil@olemiss.edu

Staff Council Homepage: http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/staff_council/

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