MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Staff Congress

**Minutes for September 17, 2025 –Approved by Staff Congress October 15, 2025**
**Wells Hall, Room 118, and Zoom**

**Present:** Ken Ashlock, Dedrick Brooks, Hannah Durbin, Duane Dycus, Jodi Hanneman, Gerry Harris, Abby Hensley, Orville Herndon, Dayna Hutchinson, BJ Johnson, Trish Lofton, David Looney, Carlos Lopez, Audrey Neal, Kim Newbern, David Shelton, Mary Steely, Rachel Stewart, Kristen Swisher, Justin Thomas, Jenni Todd, Karami Underwood, Brian Williams, Lisa Willis, Casey Workman

**Absent:** Jeremy McKeel, Tressa Ross

**Guests:** Marcie Clark, Assistant Director of Benefits, Human Resources; Dr. Ron K. Patterson, University President; Camela Ramey; Lauren Smee, Wellness Coordinator, Human Resources; Dr. David Wilson, Staff Regent

**CALL TO ORDER:** Staff Congress President Audrey Neal called the meeting to order.

**REPORTS FROM SPECIAL GUESTS PRESENT:**
**Dr. Ron K. Patterson, University President:** Dr. Ron Patterson thanked Staff Congress for the opportunity to speak at Staff Congress meetings. He provided an update regarding which Upward Bound grants have been renewed and which have not been renewed. University administration is preparing options for staff affected by the non-renewal of grants.

The State of the University address is scheduled for September 18. The Board of Regents will meet on September 19. The beam topping ceremony for the new building for the School of Nursing and Health Professions is scheduled for October 30. Former University President Dr. Robert Jackson and former First Lady Karen Jackson will be honored at the ceremony.

Dr. Patterson said he gave a presentation before the Capitol Budget Advisory Committee in July. He is working with Capitol Solutions Lobbyist Ronny Pryor to move the university's priorities forward and to maintain communication with local, regional, and statewide legislators. The search for an Executive Director of Government and Institutional Relations will begin in the coming weeks. The Board of Regents will meet September 19 to vote on the approval of a contract with Greenwood Asher & Associates executive search firm to begin the search for a Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. Greenwood Asher & Associates is conducting the search for the Chief Financial Officer. Staff Congress will be asked to identify Staff Congress representatives to serve on the search committees for those positions.

Dates of on-campus sessions for the Racer Spirit Listening and Learning Tour have been sent to staff, faculty, and students. Dr. Patterson provided an update on the Racer Spirit Listening and Learning Tour sessions that have been held throughout the region. Persons may visit the University President's website to share ideas anonymously.

David Looney asked Dr. Patterson for his thoughts on staff concerns regarding staff compensation.

Dr. Patterson said the topic will be discussed at the State of the University address on September 18. He noted that an email which discussed his priorities was sent to university employees on the first day of fall classes. More information will be shared going forward.

BJ Johnson said he has been contacted by staff requesting news about the non-renewal of grants for Upward Bound. He thanked Dr. Patterson for the update on the situation.

Dr. Patterson said he, Dr. Robertson, and Human Resources, have been meeting since the first day of notification of non-renewal of the grants to find options.

Staff Congress President Audrey Neal listed which of Murray State's eight programs have received continued funding and which programs have had funding cancelled. Nine staff members at Murray State have been affected by the non-renewal of the grants.

Dr. Patterson has contacted Congressman Comer and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) concerning the grants.

**Marcie Clark, Assistant Director of Benefits, Human Resources:** Marcie Clark said the open enrollment for 2026 benefits is scheduled for October 17-31, through the online benefit program Benefit Focus. More information will be forthcoming. Employees with questions may contact Human Resources.

**Lauren Smee, Wellness Coordinator, Human Resources:** Lauren Smee said that access to the Sonic Boom wellness platform began on September 16 for employees enrolled in the Wellness Pledge for 2025. She listed some of the resources available through Sonic Boom. Staff may contact her with questions concerning Sonic Boom or the Wellness Pledge. Sonic Boom representatives will provide detailed information about the program at the Lunch and Learn session scheduled for October 14 via Zoom, from 12 noon to 12:45 p.m. A recording of the session will be available for employees to view. The Health and Benefits Fair will be held October 23, 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Benefit vendors will be available to answer questions at the fair. More information about the fair will be distributed.

**Staff Regent Report:** Staff Regent Dr. David Wilson said that the Board of Regents will meet on September 19 to appoint a Treasurer, to hear a naming opportunity proposal, and to vote on a personnel services contract to conduct the search to fill the Provost position. Breakfast on the Farm will be held at the Murray State Arboretum on September 18. Dr. Wilson thanked Staff Congress officers Audrey Neal, Jeremy McKeel, and BJ Johnson for their presentation of the Staff Survey at the Board of Regents Retreat on August 28.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Justin Thomas made a motion to approve the August 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes as presented. Dedrick Brooks seconded. President Neal asked if there was any discussion. There was none. President Neal called for the vote. The motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF TREASURER'S REPORT:**

**Approval of July 2025 and August 2025 Treasurer's Reports:** Trish Lofton made a motion to approve the July 2025 and August 2025 Staff Congress Treasurer's Reports. Dedrick Brooks seconded. President Neal asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, she called for the vote. The motion carried.

**STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**Executive Committee:** President Neal said the Executive Committee presented the 2024-2025 Staff Survey Results at the Board of Regents retreat on August 28. Board of Regents Chair Dr. Robbie Fitch contacted President Neal prior to the retreat to ask questions about the survey. He provided her with his phone number so that she may contact him with questions.

The executive officers invited the Staff Congress committee chairs to attend the September meeting of the Executive Committee. President Neal plans to invite the committee chairs to attend future Executive Committee meetings. She has asked the chairs to provide suggestions for guest speakers at Staff Congress meetings. Suggestions received to date include requesting speakers from Procurement, Student Financial Services, Human Resources, and Information Systems. Committee chairs also suggested having a guest speaker to provide guidance on conducting department assessment as part of the university's assessment plan. Staff Congress members may also provide suggestions for guest speakers.

President Neal has started a Google document to compile a timeline of Staff Congress work and activities developed from the Staff Congress Constitution and Bylaws. She has given the Staff Congress committee chairs access to the document to

provide input from their respective committees. The Executive Committee has assigned the preparation of the Staff Congress Annual Report to the Communications Committee. The annual report was initiated by Trish Lofton when she served as Staff Congress President. The Executive Committee discussed topics for mini-surveys and listening sessions. If Staff Congress committees have topics which require staff feedback, those questions can be sent to President Neal to be included in mini-surveys for staff.

An internal Google calendar has been created for Staff Congress members for planning purposes. The link was emailed to Staff Congress members. A link to a Google calendar of Staff Congress events has been posted on the Staff Congress website. Google Chat is being used for quick communication with Staff Congress representatives.

**Credentials and Elections Committee:** Orville Herndon reported that Joshua Tillson has resigned from Staff Congress. Mr. Herndon will contact the staff member who received the next highest number of votes in the April 2025 Staff Congress Election to ask if that person will serve on Staff Congress. Mr. Herndon explained the process for filling vacancies on Staff Congress.

**Staff Recognition and Special Events Committee:** Kim Newbern said the deadline for Staff Excellence Award nominations is September 30. She asked Congress members to encourage members of the university community to submit nominations. The Staff Recognition and Special Events Committee has been working with President Neal to prepare a Google document with dates for special events. Some of those events include the presentation of the Staff Excellence Awards at the Staff Recognition Luncheon in December; the Children's Christmas party, hosted in partnership with the Residential College Association; and the Staff Appreciation Breakfast in May. The Staff Recognition and Special Events Committee will meet to plan the details for those events.

Dr. Patterson asked who sponsors the Staff Appreciation Breakfast.

President Neal said the Staff Appreciation Breakfast in May and the Staff Recognition Luncheon in December are organized through the Office of the Vice President of Finance and Administrative Services. The Staff Recognition Luncheon in December is a buffet-styled lunch and includes a program which lasts approximately 30 minutes. During the program, staff are recognized for their years of service at the university and the Staff Excellence Awards are presented.

Trish Lofton and Staff Regent Dr. Wilson provided additional information about the Staff Recognition Luncheon. Before COVID closures, the reception was a lunch banquet that was held in August before classes started. The lunch and included staff recognition program lasted approximately two hours. Some staff have commented that they were not able to leave their offices for that amount of time. When the recognition program resumed after COVID closures, the luncheon was combined with the Staff Holiday Reception in December as a come-and-go event. The Staff Excellence Awards were presented at the Staff Holiday Reception, and a Staff Appreciation Breakfast was added in May. At the December reception, staff with 15 or more years-of-service were recognized. Previously, staff were recognized during the luncheon program for five years-of-service and above. Feedback from staff indicates that some staff would like the luncheon program to resume recognizing staff with five and ten years-of-service.

Dr. Patterson asked committee chair Kim Newbern to contact Jill Hunt to schedule a meeting with Dr. Patterson to discuss the recognition luncheon.

**Communications Committee:** President Neal gave the Communications Committee report on behalf of committee chair Jeremy McKeel who was unable to attend today's Staff Congress meeting. Ms. Neal thanked Staff Congress members for sending their brief biographies to Jeremy McKeel to post on Staff Congress social media as a means of introducing Staff Congress members to the university community. She asked that Staff Congress who have not sent their biographies to Mr. McKeel please do so. She would like the Staff Congress members' biographies and photographs to also be included on the Staff Congress website.

A question was asked about how to be updated when staff leave the university or change to a faculty position so that they can be removed from the Staff Congress emails that are sent to staff constituents. Some Staff Congress members have

received replies to their emails to staff constituents thanking them for the information. Some of the replies indicate that the recipients have accepted off-campus employment or have accepted a faculty position. President Neal asked that those changes be forwarded to her so she can update the staff constituent email list.

Dr. Patterson noted that the university community should receive communication when staff leave the university so that updates can be made. Dr. Patterson said he will speak with Human Resources Director Courtney Hixon about communicating updated staff lists to the university community.

**Working Conditions Committee:** BJ Johnson reported that the Working Conditions Committee is continuing to gather information from peer universities regarding flexible work schedules and arrangements and summer work schedules.

**Staff Survey Committee:** Dedrick Brooks said a Doodle Poll has been sent to Staff Survey Committee members to determine the next meeting date for the committee. The committee will meet in October to discuss possible updates to the Staff Survey for 2025-2026.

**Textbook Scholarship Committee:** Karami Underwood reported that the Textbook Scholarship Committee received four applications for the fall textbook scholarship. Two textbook scholarships will be awarded. The application received for the professional development fund was for the spring 2026 semester.

Discussion followed regarding encouraging staff to apply for the textbook scholarship. Some staff have commented that they didn't apply because they thought another staff member may have a greater need for the scholarship. Also discussed was the requirement that textbooks be purchased from the university store. Some staff purchase or rent their textbooks from off-campus sources which offer reduced prices compared to the university store prices, and may not want to purchase them from the university store when they might not receive the textbook scholarship. The committee will consider revising the requirement that textbooks must be purchased from the University Store in order to apply for the scholarship. Ms. Underwood noted that the textbook scholarship funds are low.

**Personnel Policies and Benefits Committee:** Trish Lofton reported on the August meeting of the Personnel Policies and Benefits Committee. At the meeting, the committee prioritized tasks based on the Staff Congress 2025-2026 Goals and Objectives. The committee prepared a statement of support for fair and equitable compensation for staff as well as opportunities for promotion. The statement (Resolution to Retain Staff through Equitable Compensation) was developed based on feedback from the Staff Survey. The statement was sent to Staff Congress before today's Staff Congress meeting. If Staff Congress votes to approve the statement, it will be sent to Dr. Patterson and the Board of Regents.

Ms. Lofton and President Neal reviewed items in the Resolution to Retain Staff through Equitable Compensation. President Neal said the Staff Congress listening sessions that were held in May focused specifically on items that have been included in the resolution. Ms. Neal forwarded the comments and concerns from the listening sessions to the Personnel Policies and Benefits Committee. The resolution is also based on feedback from the Staff Survey. The statement has the support of the Personnel Policies and Benefits Committee and the Staff Congress Executive Committee. President Neal asked if there was any discussion.

Justin Thomas made a motion to approve the Resolution to Retain Staff through Equitable Compensation. Orville Herndon seconded the motion. President Neal asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, she called for the vote. The motion carried.

Ms. Lofton said the Personnel Policies and Benefit Committee has been reviewing the tuition waiver policies of peer institutions. She discussed some of the tuition waiver policies of peer institutions.

The committee will ask Human Resources for the number of tuition waivers used. Murray State employee tuition waivers have a waiting period before staff can use them. The waivers do not cover course fees or web fees which can amount to hundreds of dollars. Due to their work schedules, some staff are unable to attend an in-person class and must choose a

web course. Some courses are available only as a web course. Ms. Lofton thanked the committee for their work with the tuition waiver policy.

President Neal added that the tuition waiver benefit has deteriorated over the years. In the past, CPE waivers were available to Murray State employees to use at other Kentucky universities. In the past, tuition waivers were also provided to part-time staff and university retirees. The tuition waiver for spouses to pursue a master's degree was removed from the tuition waiver benefit. President Neal said the tuition waiver is a low-cost benefit that has a positive impact on employees.

Ms. Lofton said the tuition waiver benefit contributes to employee loyalty and the retention of staff with years of university institutional knowledge. The tuition waiver helps build enrollment by allowing staff dependents to use the waivers to attend Murray State.

Discussion followed regarding what Staff Congress members would like included in a proposed revision to the tuition waiver policy. Also discussed was the need for clarification on the stacking order, or the order in which tuition waivers are applied to the balance due in relation to scholarships and financial aid.

Ms. Lofton said the Personnel Policies and Benefits Committee will develop a proposed revision to the tuition waiver policy. If the proposed revision to the tuition waiver policy is approved by Staff Congress, the proposal will be forwarded to Faculty Senate and the University-wide Insurance and Benefits Committee for approval as the policy affects all employees.

Dr. Patterson said that when he worked at the University of North Alabama, the administration supported his pursuit of a doctorate degree and reimbursed a percentage of the cost of obtaining the degree. The university also presented him with financial compensation upon completion of the degree.

Ms. Lofton said that some of the peer institutions also provide financial compensation to employees upon completion of a degree.

Discussion followed concerning researching policies of universities outside of the list of peer institutions but with similar enrollment and operational funds as those of Murray State.

Also discussed was a request for clarification of how and when the taxes for using tuition waivers are withheld from pay. Some staff reported having the total amount of taxes withheld from one pay disbursement while other staff said the tax withholding was distributed across multiple pay disbursements.

Ms. Lofton thanked Staff Congress representatives for sending the brief survey to their constituents to ask for feedback concerning the cost-share percentage for 2026 insurance. The feedback was helpful for the University-wide Faculty and Staff Insurance and Benefits Committee when preparing a recommendation to forward to university administration.

**Community Involvement and Access Committee:** Kristen Swisher said that at its September meeting, the Community Involvement and Access Committee reviewed feedback from the spring Staff Success Week and discussed future Staff Success Week events. She thanked Staff Congress members for emailing their constituents with the link to the Staff Congress website that has the recordings of the previous Success Week sessions. The committee would like to schedule the next Success Week for the end of the spring semester. The committee will meet in November to begin developing the Staff Success Week schedule for the spring semester.

**UNIVERSITY-WIDE COMMITTEES:**

**Faculty and Staff Insurance and Benefits Committee:** Orville Herndon reported that he was re-elected as chair of the Faculty and Staff Insurance and Benefits Committee. He thanked Staff Congress for the opportunity to serve on the committee. He listed the committee's meeting dates for the fall semester: October 17, November 21, and December 5, at 9:30 a.m., via Zoom. At the October meeting, the committee will discuss forming subcommittees for the 2025-2026 year and adding grandchildren and foster parents to the university leave policies.

He thanked staff for responding to the Insurance and Benefits Committee Survey which asked staff to indicate which of the two options they prefer for moving the employer/employee cost distribution for insurance to an 80/20 split. At the September meeting, the Insurance and Benefits Committee voted to recommend cost-sharing option B.

Mr. Herndon thanked David Looney for preparing a summary of the insurance discussion at the committee's September meeting. Staff Congress members forwarded the summary to their constituents.

President Neal also thanked Mr. Looney for preparing the summary of the committee's September meeting.

Mr. Herndon said that during this academic year, the committee will examine the insurance plan in depth to discuss any proposed revisions for the 2027 insurance. Listening sessions will be held in November or January to request employee input regarding the insurance plan. The committee will ask the university's health insurance consultant, Marsh McLennan Agency, to attend the listening sessions. Comments and feedback for the committee can be forwarded to Mr. Herndon.

**Intercollegiate Athletic Council:** No report.

**Naming Campus Facilities Committee:** Dedrick Brooks reported that the following naming proposals were approved at the Board of Regents meeting on August 29: the *Jim and Sue Cash Baseball Clubhouse* and *The Murray Bank Baseball Videoboard*. Another naming proposal will be announced pending approval by the Board of Regents.

**Judicial Board:** No report.

**Sick Leave Appeals Committee:** No report.

**International Studies Advisory Committee:** No report.

**Budget Advisory Committee:** President Neal said the Budget Advisory Committee activity has been paused while the search is in-process for a Vice President of Financial and Administrative Services.

**Shared Governance Committee:** No report.

**Parking Advisory Committee and Staff Congress Ad Hoc Parking Benefit Committee Combined Report:**
Duane Dycus reported that the Parking Advisory Committee has a tentative meeting date of November 11. The committee is compiling a list of agenda items for the meeting consisting of items employees have communicated to the committee.

Mr. Dycus said the proposed Resolution for Parking Benefits for Years of Service was emailed to Staff Congress members prior to today's Staff Congress meeting. If the resolution is approved by Staff Congress, it will be forwarded to Faculty Senate for consideration as a joint resolution from Staff Congress and Faculty Senate.

Trish Lofton made a motion to approve the Resolution for Parking Benefits for Years of Service. Brian Williams seconded. President Neal asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, she called for the vote. The motion carried.

**Affirmative Action Committee:** No report.

President Neal said that some university-wide committees meet only as needed. Staff Congress is required to appoint representatives to the university-wide committees in the event the committees meet.

**AD HOC COMMITTEES:**
**Business List Revision Committee:** Jodi Hanneman reported that the Business List Revision Committee is contacting hotels near the Murray campus and the regional campuses as well as contacting Kentucky state parks to inquire about

discounts for university employees. The committee plans to contact phone services to ask if a discount exists for university employees.

President Neal will contact Charley Allen, Web and Digital Advertising Manager in Branding Marketing and Communication, to discuss posting the discount list in a different format on the website, rather than in an Excel spreadsheet, as was the most recent format.

**Staff Regent Bylaws Revision Committee:** No report.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**
**Staff Congress 2025-2026 Goals and Objectives:** President Neal emailed Staff Congress members the Staff Congress 2025-2026 Goals and Objectives prior to today's Staff Congress meetings. The document contained the updates discussed at the August 2025 Staff Congress meeting. Trish Lofton made a motion to approve the Staff Congress 2025-2026 Goals and Objectives. BJ Johnson seconded. President Neal asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, she called for the vote. The motion carried.

**NEW BUSINESS:**
**Staff Congress 2025-2026 Meeting Dates:** President Neal said the March 18 Staff Congress meeting date is currently scheduled during spring break. Staff Congress will need to set a different date for the March meeting. She asked representatives to check their calendars. The March meeting date will be discussed at the October Staff Congress meeting.

**INFORMATION ITEMS:** None.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Orville Herndon made a motion to adjourn. Brian Williams seconded, and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned.

Racer Spirit Award certificates were distributed to Staff Congress members to present to the nominees. President Neal asked Staff Congress representatives to take a picture of award nominees receiving their certificates. The pictures should be forwarded to Communications Committee Chair Jeremy McKeel to post on the Staff Congress Facebook page.