Welcome to the Senate-sponsored forum on the proposed leaves policy. Thank you for coming to ask questions and express your opinions on behalf of those who could not be here. I am delighted to see so many faculty people who have come as advocates for the staff members and their families.

A forum on benefits strikes me as an ideal time to say a couple of words to you about austerity and families.

Since 2012, we have been hearing a lot about saving money for families—the families who scrimp and save to send their children to Purdue. They are my heroes. May I ask you to raise your hand if you are or have been the parent of a Purdue student? Then you know what I mean!

But Purdue faculty and staff also have families. We also send our children to preschool and college, and we care for our elderly parents. Our families have setbacks. Our kids get sick and have to stay home. We also want to buy homes and save for retirement. Purdue families matter too.

You have heard the senate ask for things for our families this year. We asked Purdue to follow the state autism mandate, and we have asked for bigger raises so we can continue to recruit and retain the best faculty and keep Purdue outstanding. Without faculty, there is no Purdue, and the market will tell us if the salaries are what we need to maintain preeminence as a research-intensive institution.

But this should never, ever be set up as a competition for resources between the faculty and staff. For the university to work right we need adequate resources at all levels.

Staff and their families matter. Without staff, there is no Purdue. There would be no labs or offices or programs. There would be no grants or patents or start-ups. There would be no neat grounds or clean buildings or hot meals in the residence halls. There would be no pro-active advising.

In recent years, staff at Purdue University has felt squeezed from all sides, and those on the bottom of the pile are feeling crushed. Austerity management has meant that, through attrition, one person may be doing the job of two or three. Many live with the constant stress of worrying that they might be downsized. Did you know that up to 14% of the clerical and service staff who work full time have second jobs? A full-time employee in my department built a house with Habitat for Humanity. A number of clerical and service staff live below the 2015 federal poverty guidelines.

If there are low raises and shrinking benefits, it becomes harder and harder to sustain the positive work environment that we need for preeminence.
I suspect your presence here is not just about the leaves policy; leaves are just one part of a bigger picture. Your eagerness to be here reflects a growing feeling throughout the university that, taken too far, the austerity discourse hurts the morale and reputation of the institution. Indiana University has just raised the minimum wage. Illinois, Michigan, and Penn State gave raises of 4.3%, 3.8%, and 3% respectively last year. The year before, they gave 2.9, 4.6 and 3.0. People often say to me, if we don’t have enough money in the budget to remain competitive with salaries and benefits, then isn’t something wrong?

We have known for some time that a dramatic change was coming to the leaves policy. The current leaves system is extremely complicated, and it was clear that it was on the way out. The proposed new system is sleek and streamlined; however, the senate leadership has been hearing loudly from every part of campus from people at every level that this policy is not acceptable in its present form. People are telling us loudly that they feel their leaves are being reduced. Today we will hear the straight information, and you can ask all of your questions and say what you need to say.

We have some very good people to explain it to us today. Interim Vice President for Human Resources, Trent Klingerman, Director of Benefits, Eva Nodine and Associate Director Teresa Wesner, and others have been tremendous advocates for the faculty and staff in this process. They went to great lengths to talk to people and get feedback from all around campus.

I myself was part of the committee that gave advice at different points in the process. Along with David Williams, I helped Trent organize some faculty focus groups and heard presentations. When I had opportunities to give input, I underscored things we learned from the faculty focus sessions, namely that you wanted longer parental leaves for fathers and adoptive parents, and more bereavement time. When we were told that the PTO or paid time off plan had been chosen, we argued successfully for payouts of existing accrued benefits. Although we didn’t ever vote on the plan, there was nearly unanimous agreement that lack of Short Term Disability protection and long time to Long Term Disability were shortcomings of our current benefits.

Chairman Lechtenberg can tell you how the design subcommittee worked, and how they arrived at the final plan. He has given a big chunk of his life at this stage of his career to this project, and I respect him very much.

I hope that, even as you ask your most pointed, probing questions, and speak out loudly and vehemently on these things that matter so greatly to people’s lives and families, that you will first listen intently. VP Klingerman and Chairman Lechtenberg have promised to attend to everything we say here today and carry our messages back to the people in the upper administration who make all final decisions. Let’s listen closely, and then give them plenty of intelligent, constructive, and forceful things to take back.
To the faculty in the audience, you have a mighty muscle that you can flex on behalf of our staff, so please listen and learn.

I'll turn the floor over to Chairman Lechtenberg.

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