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## PRESENT

Chris Binkley, Jessica Cantu, Jon Chandler, Shane Colter, George Drinnon, Darrell Easley, DeAnna Flinchum, John Goddard, Gina Hale, Rita Jackson, Melissa Jenkins, Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Mary Lucal, Rachel McClelland, David Moore, Kim Raia, Blake Reagan, Marchelle Robinson (Guest Speaker), Sam Smith, Andrea Stedman, Ken Wagner, Matt Ward, Tanya Washington, and Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

## ABSENT

Emma Burgin, Tom Cervone, Marcus Hilliard, James Hodge, Bonnie Johnson, Kevin Thompson, Leslie Wereszczak, Norma Wilcox

## 1. WELCOME

John Goddard, Chair of the Exempt Staff Council, welcomed everyone to the September meeting and introduced Dr. Mary Lucal, Associate Vice Chancellor for UT Knoxville Human Resources, for a Human Resources Update.

Dr. Lucal shared a few HR updates with the Council. Annual UT Compliance training has been sent out to all employees through K@TE. She expressed that she learned some new things this year, particularly with the Informational Technology (IT) sections. She also suggested that if you are the type of person to work on trainings in sections, then it would be good to create calendar reminders. The annual compliance training is due December 31, 2022. Dr. Lucal advised that it would be good to complete the trainings before the winter administrative break because no one will be available to assist with any technical issues that may arise after December 24, 2022.

Dr. Lucal finished her update by reminding the group that Annual Open Enrollment will begin October 1, 2022 and will close on October 14, 2022. She emphasized that it is important to be aware of the upcoming changes with open enrollment. Marchelle Robinson will review in more detail later in this meeting.

Mr. Goddard made a comment on basic life insurance and reductions in coverage beginning after age 65. Ms. Robinson responded that on the basic life insurance plan,

coverage will decrease 65% starting at the age of 65 and continue to decrease at other age milestones (such as coverage being 30% at age 75). She then recommended that employees explore enrolling in a voluntary term life insurance policy. With the voluntary term life insurance, employees who retire or leave the university will be able to continue their coverage at the same premiums they were paying as a UT employee. There are also no age restrictions with the voluntary term life insurance. Those already enrolled in a voluntary term life policy should have received a postcard from Securian saying they can increase their coverage by \$5,000 with no questions asked. The premium rates do start to increase at a certain age and will continue to increase every five years.

## 2. GUEST SPEAKERS

### a. Open Enrollment – Marchelle Robinson, Assistant Director of Benefits & Retirement

Marchelle Robinson introduced herself and stated that she would be talking to the group about the changes in insurance for the upcoming year. She remarked that there are a lot of changes to the plans, but not many that the employee has control over. The big changes are that premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance will be increasing with some plans. Ms. Robinson also emphasized that making changes to the basic life insurance can be risky. It is important to understand what the changes mean.

Ms. Robinson showed the [September 2022 HR newsletter update](#) that was sent to Knoxville campus employees the previous week, as it summed up the changes to insurance well. Open Enrollment is October 1-14, 2022 and any changes made during this period will go into effect January 1, 2023. She said if employees don't want to make any changes then they do not have to do anything during this period.

There will be no annual open enrollment paperwork physically mailed out to employee homes. There is [an online newsletter](#) that has more information regarding enrollment. Changes can be made through the Edison link in the IRIS Web Portal. You will log into IRIS as normal and there will be an Edison link in the top right corner. Employees should do this instead of logging in through the Edison website.

Important changes include the following: (1) Health savings accounts (HSAs) funding for Consumer Driven Health Plan (CDHP or high deductible plan) members will increase. Funding will be \$500 for the employee only tier and \$1,000 for all other family tiers. (2) Deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums for several plans will increase. (3) Emergency room costs for Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) plans will change from copay to deductible. (4) Drug costs for specialty drugs and CDHP maintenance medications are changing. (5) Benefits-eligible employees will automatically have basic term life up to 1.5 times base annual salary even if not

enrolled in health insurance, up to a maximum of \$50,000. (6) The vision vendor is changing to Eye Med. Current enrollees will be automatically transferred to the new vendor. To view all 2023 Health Benefit Updates, see <https://www.tn.gov/partnersforhealth/ae/about-enrollment/important-2023-benefits-updates.html>.

Ms. Robinson then clarified the changes to the basic life insurance and cautioned that it can be risky to change things since it is very hard to get it back if it is dropped. If you're a benefits eligible employee, then you are automatically enrolled in \$20,000 of basic life and \$40,000 in accidental death. If you are enrolled in medical coverage, the basic life coverage will increase according to your salary, at a rate of 1.5 times your salary, with a maximum of \$50,000. So, if your salary is \$34,000 or more, you're automatically at the cap of \$50,000. Accidental death will be capped at \$100,000. Employees may opt out of the amount of coverage over \$20,000 for basic life and over \$40,000 in accidental death. She once again cautioned that if you opt out of this, you cannot get it back unless you experience a special qualifying event. Ms. Robinson also mentioned that dependents will be automatically enrolled in \$3,000 in basic life. If you do not want the dependent coverage, then you will have to opt out of it.

Ms. Robinson then promoted [Alex, the virtual assistant](#). The Alex platform can help employees find which plans work the best for their life and needs by walking through various scenarios. There have been a few emails regarding Alex distributed. Ms. Robinson noted that some people had the emails go to their spam folder, so she suggested to check there if you haven't received any of the emails. There are also [annual enrollment webinars](#) on September 29, 2022, October 5, 2022, and October 13, 2022. Blue Cross and Cigna also host [their own webinars](#) to talk about their coverage and products.

[A Flexible Benefits Open Enrollment email](#) has also been distributed. Changes can be made October 1-31, 2022. Open enrollment for flexible spending accounts must be done through Optum Bank's website. More email should be coming with further information. For more information, visit: [FSA enrollment complete document.pdf \(mcusercontent.com\)](#)

Jon Chandler asked for clarification on Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) and wanted to know if changes to contributions for HSAs must be made through Optum Bank as well. Ms. Robinson answered that although the HSAs are managed through Optum Bank, the contributions are done in-house since payroll is managed by UT. Changes to HSA contributions can be done through [a form on the UT website](#).

### 3. NEW BUSINESS

a. Meeting Modality and Guest Speaker Interest

A survey was distributed to the Council asking how they would like to meet going forward (i.e. Zoom, in-person, or a combination). It also asks what topics or guest speakers are of interest for this academic year.

Mr. Goddard also emphasized the importance of finding a proxy to attend ESC meetings in your place if you are unable to attend. Please send an email to John Goddard ([jgoddard1@utk.edu](mailto:jgoddard1@utk.edu)) and Sam Smith ([SamSmith5@utk.edu](mailto:SamSmith5@utk.edu)) with the name and contact information for your proxy prior to the meeting they will attend. Mr. Goddard expressed that it is important to attend every meeting since you are representing other people.

b. Committee and Commission Updates

George Drinnon will continue to serve on the Faculty Senate. Shane Colter will serve on the Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB), which has not set a date to meet yet. John Goddard will serve on the Police Advisory Council and Beth Kurtz will serve on the University Leadership Council (ULC) and Council for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI). Ms. Kurtz reported that she has not met with the ULC yet, but she does have an update from CDI, which includes the Chancellor's Commissions.

Ms. Kurtz reported that the Commission for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) officially started their commission in September 2022, and in January 2023 the Commission for Latinx will launch. A survey was sent out to members of the Commissions, plus a few others, to which 75 people responded. It looked to see how well members understood the commissions and their goals. It was found that some members of the commissions do not fully understand what their goals are. The survey also found that there was a need for ongoing leadership development and the participants want to have more professional development opportunities integrated into the commissions. They also want people to have a better understanding of intersectionality. For example, not only women are invited to the Commission for Women. You do not have to be representative of that group yourself to be involved in the group. There was discussion around goals and challenges in the academic year.

The AAPI Commission had a big part in the [Knoxville Asian Festival](#) recently and there was a huge crowd that attended. They will be having a celebration for the founding of the commission but are waiting to host that until their website is up and running.

The Commission for Blacks will have their first meeting this coming week. They want to take a deep dive into the history of the Commission for Blacks so they can

understand their history as a commission and where they are presently. This will help them to establish their goal for the upcoming year. They also conducted a black staff report this past year and a lot of great information came from it for recruitment, retention, and professional development opportunities.

The Commission for Disability has had two meetings so far this academic year. They are considering a focus on emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities on campus.

The Commission for LGBT People has met once so far. They haven't decided on their goal for the year but are currently working on gender inclusive housing. They also want to support more safety rights and helping the group feel more a part of the community.

The Commission for Women is also working to establish their goals for the academic year.

The Graduate Student Senate spoke about how 40% of graduate students have food and housing insecurity. A big portion of those students are international, and the group is working on ways to support them. They are also working on peer-to-peer contact with international students to connect them to the resources that we have on campus, such as Smokey's closet. They want to get more graduate students involved with the Commissions and Council.

George Drinnon gave an update on the Faculty Senate meeting. Most of the previous meeting was about the curriculum proposal submission process, specifically, how its impact has changed with the new budgetary allocation model and the way that tuition was distributed to units. In the last cycle of curriculum proposals, there were around 800 pages of submissions from colleges due to the implementation of volunteer core. There were some units that did not realize that other units had submitted changes to the curriculum that could have an impact on the revenue that those departments received. A resolution was approved that will charge the Chair of the Undergraduate Council to examine those processes and look for ways to improve them to increase clarity and understanding of the impacts that proposals could have to other units.

#### 4. CONSTITUENT ISSUES

##### a. Ramp in the Communications Building Parking Lot

**(Q):** There is no ramp in the back of the communications building and not enough parking in the front. I believe we have twice as many handicapped faculty and staff as we do parking spots. Additionally, the influx of extra students this semester means more students park in our lots than ever before. You must walk or wheel yourself

uphill to the front of the building. Can the university address this or at least re-evaluate based on ADA guidelines and make us aware of what actions could be taken?

**(A):** Mr. Chandler reached out to the Parking Services Director, Mark Hairr. He responded that he would have to defer to UT Facilities Services to address the issue of building access. Regarding the parking issue, there are two accessible spaces in the Staff 30 lot behind Communications that have been there for many years and are existing non-conforming spaces. They are allowed to be kept since they existed before the current ADA regulations. At the same time, we are unable to add additional accessible spaces in this lot due to the accessible building and pathway constraints. Mr. Hairr noted that they have added additional accessible spaces in the Staff 30 lot toward the front of Communications so there are a total of five accessible spaces located at the east and west ends of that lot. The ADA regulations for parking are based on each individual parking lot and specifies the number and type of accessible spaces required. In several cases, UT does provide more accessible spaces than required when demand warrants this. The designation of the spaces is appropriate and within the regulations. I would be glad to discuss this particular accessible parking issue in more detail.

Ms. Kurtz mentioned that she has had issues in the Staff 30 lot this academic year due to students parking in the staff lot or other people parking where they aren't assigned. They were not getting ticketed, so someone in her office called parking to let them know. Parking then began to look at the permits more closely since then. Ms. Kurtz also noted that a ramp at the back of the building is necessary since there is an elevator at one of the entrances.

Mr. Chandler commented that he also works in the building connected to this parking lot and has noticed that there is a limitation in access to the entrances in the back of the building. On P2 of the lot, there are about 10 handicapped parking spaces that would allow you to take the Andy Holt Tower elevator up and across the breezeway and then back down the elevator to go to access the Student Services Building. There are an additional 5 handicap spaces on P1 that have accessibility there. Mr. Chandler also mentioned that he has reached out to Mike Brady, Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Services, and is awaiting a response.

Mr. Goddard asked what Mr. Chandler would do since he has personal experience using the parking lot in question. Mr. Chandler responded that there is an awareness issue of knowing where to have access and appropriately communicating that to someone that may be impacted. He noted that only one or two of the handicap spaces were in use when he had looked earlier.

Dr. Lucal mentioned that she was concerned about this issue when Human Resources first moved into the Student Services Building. While it is technically accessible, it is hard for someone who wants to apply to UT to get into the Human Resources office, as the only entrance for the public is from the outside of the building. Otherwise, an HR staff member would have to meet the person in the hallway to let them into the office through the back entrance since the suite is always locked. She is very interested in seeing what Mr. Brady has to say about the issue.

Rachel McClelland noted her concern that the accessible route still requires a lot of walking and could be a big impact on someone who has a disability but is still mobile. Dr. Lucal thanked Jon for the information from Mr. Hairr.

b. Travel Reimbursements

**(Q):** Are there any plans to hire more people to process travel reimbursements? Waiting on reimbursements can create a hardship, especially for those who travel quite a bit and may be waiting on \$1,000 or more in payments.

**(A):** Mr. Chandler informed the group that this question came up at the past March 2022 meeting. The response then was that reimbursement turnaround is typically 10 business days once the travel expense report is received. In the past few months, the office has recently hired new employees and are currently onboarding them.

Sam Smith reached out to Tisha Marshall, Director of Accounts Payable with the Treasurer's Office, to see if there was a more current update. Ms. Marshall responded that she understands the frustrations, but their office is still working through staffing issues. They always recommend travelers apply for a UT Travel Card to use instead of their personal credit cards. That way, the length of time to audit a report does not become a financial burden. However, they have also changed the audit process for mileage a few months ago. Any trip with the Trip Business Purpose of Mileage Only skips the Processor Approval and goes to payment instead. This has sped up mileage reimbursements.

Tanya Washington explained that the person who asked this question, and herself, have travel cards but felt there is a lot of scrutiny on what is purchased with it. This has made it difficult to use the card for everything but hotel accommodations. She uses her own cards and then submit receipts for reimbursement since she feels it is less hassle, but it takes weeks to get the reimbursement out of a pending status.

c. Outside Interest Disclosure Form Issues

David Moore stated that he and a constituent has had issues with their Outside Interest Disclosure forms. He said the form does not allow you to go back to check previous pages as it will delete all the parts you have already filled out. There was

also not an indication if the form had been received. One individual had to submit the form four times. Dr. Lucal mentioned that these comments had been passed on to the Conflict of Interest team so they have feedback on the process.

## 5. OTHER BUSINESS

### a. Minimum Pay

Andrea Stedman noted that facilities workers will be asking for \$25 an hour by the end of 2025, and in response, staff have asked that the minimum salary be raised due to the current increase in cost of living. Ms. Stedman asked what the next step would be to get this issue addressed.

Dr. Lucal stated that the minimum wage increases are decided by the Chancellor, as was done earlier this year. Ms. Stedman responded that a United Campus Workers' petition was signed by 150 staff. She also mentioned that she was told in a meeting with the Chancellor that the next step on salary raises would be the Exempt Staff Council. Dr. Lucal said that merit/market/minimum hiring rate decisions for the campus are not generally made at the staff councils. The ESC provides feedback for our leadership to take into consideration. The Governor's budget comes out in the first of the year, and from there, additional discussions proceed at the cabinet with final decisions made later in the year.

Dr. Lucal suggested that it be recorded in the minutes that the topic of minimum pay rate is of interest to ESC and that Ms. Stedman could give the petitions to the Chancellor if she had not already. Mr. Goddard agreed that was the best course of action for the moment.

### b. Educational Assistance

Kim Raia brought up the issue of fee waivers for staff and their dependents as a follow up to the discussions on this topic in the past two meetings. Ms. Raia mentions that a report done on colleges in the USA has shown that the fees that universities are charging disguise the tuition. Ms. Raia notes that she understands that other organizations and committees are really the deciders in these issues, but she wanted to gauge interest in presenting a proposal to the ERAB for changes on the educational assistance policy.

Dr. Lucal mentioned that she does not know when the next ERAB meeting will be or how they decide when to meet since Covid forced things online. She will follow up on trying to get a date for when they are meeting next.

Mr. Goddard summarized an email to the group that Ms. Raia has sent to him prior to the meeting. The email had stated that tuition is half price, but due to the fees from various colleges this benefit is less than stated in the policy. Ms. Raia added that she



feels there should be a change to the way the university is describing the benefit to employees. Dr. Lucal stated that she had the Employee Relations team investigate how Human Resources and Recruiting was advertising the educational assistance benefit. They found that our materials are describing the benefit exactly as it is, which is half off maintenance fees. She also mentioned that she has tried to get the term to be changed in the policy, but it has not gotten traction. Maintenance fees are not the total fees that will be billed; maintenance fees are the University's tuition. Each college may have their own additional fees. Dr. Lucal stated that there are two responsibilities and accountabilities. One is with the University to state correctly what the benefit is, and the other part is on the person who's contemplating their benefits package to make sure they understand what that means. She closed by saying that she does not like the terms currently being used and will continue to advocate for a change in the terms since there is a difference between tuition and differential tuition.

Ken Wagner added that he has received complaints about the policy from his constituents as well. They were not expecting all the extra fees associated with each class or college to not be included in the fee waiver. Dr. Lucal mentioned as background information that the State only requires that the University to give 25% off maintenance fees, so UT doubles that currently.

c. General Announcements

Mr. Chandler announced that we will need to conduct an ad hoc election for the Provost's area. He has reached out to DeAnna Flinchum for the next steps.

6. REMINDERS

- a. Next meeting: October 25, 2022 from 2:30 – 3:00 p.m. eastern via zoom.
- b. Please email constituent questions to Sam Smith ([samsmith5@utk.edu](mailto:samsmith5@utk.edu)) or Jon Goddard ([jgoddard1@utk.edu](mailto:jgoddard1@utk.edu)).