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COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS

March 05, 2026

College and University Trustee Screening Commission

REPORTER: Jennifer Nottle

1 STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)

2 COUNTY OF RICHLAND)

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5 COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY TRUSTEE SCREENING Commission

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7 BEFORE: REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM R. WHITMIRE, CHAIRMAN

8 SENATOR SEAN M. BENNETT, VICE-CHAIRMAN

9 SENATOR A. SHANE MASSEY

10 SENATOR TAMEIKA ISSAC DEVINE

11 SENATOR MICHAEL JOHNSON

12 REPRESENTATIVE SETH ROSE

13 REPRESENTATIVE TIMOTHY A. "TIM" MCGINNIS

14 MACEY WEBB, STAFF COUNSEL

15 ELLIE CARRIGAN, RESEARCH ANALYST

15 * * * * *

16 DATE: MARCH 5, 2026

17 TIME: 12:45 p.m.

18 LOCATION: Blatt Building

19 1101 Pendleton Street

20 Columbia, South Carolina 29201

21 REPORTED BY: JENNIFER NOTTLE, COURT REPORTER

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1 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, tell them come on in. All
2 right, we'll have to read some stuff here first. All
3 right, make a motion to call to order the public hearing
4 for trustee screening. Do I have a second on that?

5 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All right, all those in
7 favor signify by saying aye.

8 (Ayes are heard.)

9 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All right, I'm going to
10 have to read the same thing. Oh, yeah. I hate to ask
11 this, but would one of you senators like to pray? I didn't
12 think so. I guess it's me again. All right, thank you.
13 Thank you, Senator Massey.

14 SENATOR MASSEY: Sure. Let's pray. Heavenly Father,
15 we thank you for this opportunity. Lord, we thank you for
16 the weather and the opportunity that we have to serve South
17 Carolina. We ask that you be with us during this meeting.
18 Lord, bless this meeting and help us to ask the right
19 decisions, ask the right questions, and make the right
20 decisions, Lord, as we screen these candidates. In the
21 precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Senator. Okay, I'll go
23 ahead and read the explanation of today's meeting. Today
24 we will resume and finish our trustee screening for this
25 round of candidates. After completing today's screening,

1 we at the same point in the near future will publish our
2 report in the House and Senate journals along with the
3 transcript from today's screening and Monday's screening.
4 A joint assembly of the House and Senate will eventually be
5 set by concurrent resolution setting an election date and
6 time. The election date may be sooner than two weeks after
7 the Screening Commission has issued its final report of
8 candidates. No candidate for a seat on the Board of any
9 institution or any other person may seek, directly or
10 indirectly, the pledge of a member of the General
11 Assembly's vote or directly or indirectly contact a member
12 of the General Assembly regarding screening for the seat
13 until the qualifications of all candidates for the office
14 have been determined by the Commission, and the Commission
15 has formally released its report as to the qualifications
16 of all candidates. Today we will be screening seats on the
17 Citadel Board, Lander University Board, South Carolina
18 State University Board, and University of South Carolina
19 Board. The purpose of the screenings today is to give each
20 candidate the opportunity to explain to us why they want to
21 be on the board of trustees for a university and give
22 commission members the opportunity to ask these candidates
23 any questions that they might have. Ultimately, at the end
24 of each candidate's testifying, we as a commission will
25 vote on whether to find the individual candidate qualified

1 and nominated and send them to the floor for the Joint
2 Assembly. Today's screening is being broadcast live and
3 recorded. You can find today's screening on the State
4 House website. In addition, we have a court reporter here
5 who will be transcribing everything we get on the record
6 today. I want to take a moment to remind all current
7 candidates and any future candidates that it is the job of
8 the Screening Commission to consider all the qualifications
9 of the candidates that appear before us and make
10 nominations to the General Assembly. Therefore, we conduct
11 thorough investigation of all candidates that appear before
12 us. During our investigation, we look at the many factors
13 that are laid out in statute. We look at the candidate's
14 knowledge of the institution, their ethical fitness, their
15 professional and academic ability, their character,
16 reputation, physical health, mental stability, experience,
17 and demonstrated support of and involvement with the
18 institution which they have applied. In addition, we must
19 determine the residency of each candidate to the seat to
20 which they are applying. When determining residency, we
21 look at various factors such as the address on your
22 driver's license, the location of your voter registration,
23 and for candidates who own their home, your residency
24 determined by the location of where you paid your 4% tax
25 assessment during the year you applied. The 4% property

1 tax assessment must be paid at this location for the term
2 of office. It has come to my attention that there has been
3 some confusion around the above requirements and therefore
4 I wanted to ensure everyone could hear the same message
5 today. We take your residency requirements very seriously
6 as a Screening Commission. With that in mind, I want to
7 remind you all and any future candidates that might be
8 listening that you as a candidate have an ongoing
9 obligation and duty to notify the Screening Commission
10 where any change might occur that would affect your
11 application and overall eligibility for serving on a board.
12 Please contact our staff immediately if there are any
13 substantial and significant changes that occur during your
14 application period, screening period, or period serving as
15 a trustee on a college board. It is paramount that you
16 understand that as a candidate, and even as a sitting board
17 member, you have an ongoing obligation and duty to report
18 to the commission any and all changes that would affect
19 your overall eligibility to serve in the seat to which you
20 have applied. I will now ask that we go into executive
21 session to start this screening day. There are a few
22 orders of business that we need to address and have the
23 opportunity to hear from our chief counsel. I need that.
24 Does someone make a motion to go?

25 SENATOR BENNETT: Motion.

1 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

2 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. There's a second. All
3 those in favor say aye. We are now in executive session.

4 EXECUTIVE SESSION

5 SENATOR MASSEY: I move that we come out of executive
6 session.

7 SENATOR BENNETT: Second.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: All in favor signify by saying aye.

9 (Ayes are heard.)

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: We are back in regular session. As
11 soon as he gets ready, we'll start. If you'd come on in,
12 please.

13 THE CITADEL:

14 KENNETH SCOTT BLAND:

15 MR. BLAND: Okay.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Just stand right there. And let me
17 swear you in. You'll raise your right hand. Swear to tell
18 the truth, the whole truth, but nothing but the truth, so
19 help you God.

20 MR. BLAND: I do.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: If you will state your full name for
22 the record, and then why you're interested in serving on
23 the Board, please.

24 MR. BLAND: Sure. My name is Kenneth Scott Bland.
25 I actually go by Scott. I'm

1 here today running for the at-large trustee position for
2 The Citadel. I'm a 1991 graduate of The Citadel and also a
3 2001 graduate of the MBA program at The Citadel's College
4 of Graduate and Professional Studies. As a note, I have an
5 identical twin brother, Jeff Bland, who also attended The
6 Citadel and graduated in 91. He's a U.S. Marine. He
7 served at Desert Storm. We both have sons that currently
8 attend The Citadel. My son's a senior. His son is a
9 junior. And then we have a younger brother who attended
10 Furman. However, his son also attended The Citadel and
11 graduated in 2025. And I say this to bring to your
12 attention the fact that the Blands are committed to The
13 Citadel. We've been passionate about The Citadel for a
14 long time. I think the core values of The Citadel since
15 1842 have been honor, duty, respect. Those things have
16 been instilled in what I have done and led me on the
17 pathway that I'm fixed upon. I think I may be doing a
18 little more intro here at the beginning than I was supposed
19 to, but I'll go ahead and finish and state it by saying
20 that my past history as an enlisted soldier, as a
21 commissioned officer, as a business leader. I got these
22 foundational core values from The Citadel. It's made me
23 successful, and I think I bring some of these core values
24 to The Citadel Trustee Board of Visitors position to offer
25 them guidance in the things that I've learned and hopefully

1 preserve them in the future. Not just as a college that
2 has an ROTC program, but as the senior military college
3 that they are recognized as the premier institution in
4 America. So on that, I'll close and answer any questions
5 you guys may have.

6 MR. BLAND - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

7 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Bland, can you**
8 **please state your current address?**

9 A. 120 Rustic Manor Court, Lexington, South Carolina
10 29072.

11 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address that you pay**
12 **your 4% property tax?**

13 A. Yes.

14 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
15 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

16 A. I do not.

17 **Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations**
18 **and responsibilities of serving on a public**
19 **institution's board of trustees?**

20 A. I do.

21 **Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any**
22 **member of the General Assembly and formally ask**
23 **for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours**
24 **after the Commission's report has been released?**

25 A. I'm aware.

1 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
2 contact members of the General Assembly on your
3 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
4 intervene in this process on your behalf?

5 A. I'm not.

6 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
7 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
8 any changes that might occur that would affect
9 your application and overall eligibility for
10 serving on a college Board?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Bland. Mr. Chairman,
13 I have no further questions.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: Does any member of the Commission have
15 questions for Mr. Bland? Yes, ma'am. Senator Devine.

16 MR. BLAND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

17 Q. Thank you, Mr. Bland, for offering yourself to
18 service, and thank you so much to you and your
19 family for your service to our country. Just a
20 little bit, I'm looking at your questionnaire.
21 One of the questions you talked about, The
22 Citadel does not need to attract more students,
23 and that they currently have a 98 percent
24 acceptance rate. Can you tell us a little bit
25 about, I guess, the criteria, and as a board

1 **member, what are some of your suggestions**
2 **regarding admissions at The Citadel?**

3 A. I mean, I can just give it from personal
4 experience. Again, this is a long time ago, but
5 I recall many of my friends -- I went to Irmo
6 high school, not everybody got accepted. But
7 it's pretty easy right now. I have a kid around,
8 my kids make fun of me on the Google machine.
9 You can just look it up. I mean, the acceptance
10 rate is upwards of 98 percent at The Citadel. To
11 me, that seems somewhat shocking that an
12 institution such as The Citadel that is very
13 selective, not only in physical fitness,
14 academics, all these things, would have a 100%
15 acceptance rate. And so for me, that's a little
16 bit concerning. I'd love to better understand
17 the facts, as a board member, as to why we've
18 come to that. I think, not to over-answer this
19 question, most of you are probably aware, The
20 Citadel freshman year has a higher attrition rate
21 than most colleges. But even at 10 plus percent,
22 it seems -- it doesn't really jive, and I'll go
23 back to my business background with the supply
24 and demand economic curves of if you have a 100
25 percent acceptance rate, are you getting the best

1 quality students and are you producing the best
2 quality?

3 **Q. Do you have any reason to believe that the**
4 **graduates right now that are coming out are not**
5 **quality, or are you just thinking that it needs**
6 **to be a little bit more selective?**

7 A. No, again, just logic. I don't have any reason
8 factually to believe that. I would like, as I've
9 said, to contribute long-term to preserving the
10 fact that I know -- you know, there are other
11 colleges you can choose to go to in South
12 Carolina or other states that are extremely good
13 academic colleges, but it's a different type of
14 person that chooses to go to The Citadel and
15 persevere with that challenging environment. And
16 I want to make sure that's maintained because I
17 think that does back to the supply and demand.
18 The demand for The Citadel is because -- I know
19 when I was growing up, and still the case, if you
20 have a Citadel degree, you are given pretty much
21 leeway that you're disciplined, you have honor
22 and integrity, you're going to work hard. Is it
23 always the case? Of course it's not. There are
24 exceptions to every rule, but I want to maintain
25 that. And I think in maintaining that high

1 demand, we'll be able to choose people that can
2 perform the best and preserve The Citadel
3 product. Maybe that's the best answer.

4 **Q. My last question for you, what is your opinion**
5 **regarding in-state versus out-of-state and the**
6 **mix of the student body at The Citadel?**

7 A. I think my opinion on that would be we've always
8 had a diverse in and out-of-state class at The
9 Citadel. Many of my classmates -- I can think of
10 three off the top of my head that I talk to every
11 day. One's from Connecticut, one's from
12 Pennsylvania. The current Commandant was from
13 Boston. So, I know him and I know him very well.
14 So I'm all for out-of-state. I think, dependent
15 upon why, I think it is critical. Is it a
16 finance thing? Because clearly out-of-state
17 tuition is more money, I'm not saying that's the
18 case. But I would like to preserve The Citadel
19 as South Carolina's military college. As I said
20 before, one of the premier senior military
21 colleges in America. There are only six of
22 those, by the way, and we proudly are one of
23 those. That tradition I'd love to be upheld, and
24 for South Carolinians to be able to participate
25 in that.

1 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No further questions.**

2 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Senator Massey.

3 MR. BLAND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

4 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Bland, welcome.**

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 **Q. Do you know what the current breakdown is in**
7 **student body population from resident and**
8 **non-resident at The Citadel?**

9 A. You know I don't, off the top of my head. I'd be
10 scared to guess at it. So no, I don't.

11 **Q. Okay. I noted in some of your responses that you**
12 **identified state tuition at \$28,000 for residents**
13 **and \$53,000 for non-residents. You determined**
14 **that to be reasonable based on the economy and**
15 **compared to other institutions. Do you know what**
16 **the total cost of attendance is at The Citadel**
17 **for an in-state student?**

18 A. It goes down significantly after the first year.
19 In fact, roughly \$8,000 because you have to buy
20 the uniforms and everything. So, I mean, if you
21 do the math on that, you know, \$100,000. When I
22 looked up other state public institutions, we
23 were a little bit higher. I think what I saw was
24 around \$1,000 to \$1,500 higher. I don't know if
25 that's because of uniforms. I'd love for our

1 tuition to be lower, but at the same time, I
2 think there are other things that go into The
3 Citadel that maybe aren't in a traditional public
4 institution that cause a higher price.

5 **Q. Well, it is more expensive than the other public**
6 **institutions, and I think we would all recognize**
7 **that there's probably a reason that The Citadel**
8 **costs a little bit more than what some of our**
9 **other schools cost. It's my opinion that when**
10 **the total cost of attendance at any university**
11 **gets up into the 30s or approaching 40, it**
12 **becomes a real cost inhibitor for most South**
13 **Carolinians. And so I would encourage you, that**
14 **if you're successful in this appointment, that**
15 **that be something that you look at and that you**
16 **focus on that and that we consider as opposed to**
17 **not only how much money is necessary for**
18 **students, but also what are we spending. And are**
19 **we spending more than we need to spend, which is**
20 **going to then drive up that cost of attendance.**

21 **A.** And to comment, Senator Massey, on that -- as I
22 said, I have two brothers. My younger brother
23 went to Furman. I think we all know how much
24 Furman costs. My twin brother and I were at The
25 Citadel at the same time. My dad was a sales

1 guy, and the only way we could have attended is
2 because of the vast scholarships that were
3 available at The Citadel. And we both enlisted
4 in the military to pay for that. Now, I'm not
5 saying that's for everybody.

6 **Q. It didn't cost in the mid-30s when you were**
7 **there.**

8 A. No, I mean, relatively speaking, it was nine. I
9 mean, I don't know in 1989, relatively speaking,
10 what that is. Again, I'm not trying to debate
11 what you're saying. I think the cost should come
12 down. I think fiscally we need to look at that.
13 I think, again, with my background, my opinion is
14 that I can add to that governance. I don't --
15 I'm not sure that -- I don't know for a fact, so
16 who am I to judge? I'm not able to look at the
17 inner workings of The Citadel on this side of it,
18 but I would like to take a look at that.

19 **Q. All right. In the responses that you provided in**
20 **your written information, you disclosed being a**
21 **defendant in two lawsuits?**

22 A. Yes.

23 **Q. I would like to ask you some questions about**
24 **that. Are you comfortable doing that in open**
25 **session, or would you prefer to do that in ---**

1 A. No, I'm comfortable in open.

2 **Q. All right. Are there two lawsuits? That's all**
3 **I've seen. Is that right? Two lawsuits where**
4 **you were a defendant?**

5 A. No, one I was a --

6 **Q. The one you were a plaintiff.**

7 A. One I was a plaintiff, and one I was a defendant.
8 Now, ironically, they were in a similar business
9 situation, but go ahead.

10 **Q. All right. The summary that I read was that**
11 **there was a default on a promissory note. Is**
12 **that right?**

13 A. It was.

14 **Q. Was the allegation that the other person**
15 **defaulted on the promissory note?**

16 A. Yes.

17 **Q. Okay. The second suit that I see was that there**
18 **was a lien filed against you. Is that right?**

19 A. It was.

20 **Q. Can you tell me about that?**

21 A. Yeah, it was -- we had owned a building. We had
22 a manufacturing facility. And we had contracted
23 with this particular person to consult us on
24 that. The -- in our opinion, he filed a
25 frivolous lawsuit, so we defended it. We went to

1 court. We settled it. It's over.

2 **Q. Outside of lawsuits, have you had any other**
3 **defaults on financial obligations or liens**
4 **instituted against you?**

5 A. None. I'm happy to say I actually have the
6 perfect credit score because I just had that
7 looked at. So I'm trying to teach my kids that.
8 That's really important down the road.

9 **Q. Very good. Thank you very much.**

10 A. Sure.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Senator. Any other
12 questions? All right, I'll entertain a motion and a second
13 for a favorable report.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: So moved.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, all those in favor, please
17 signify by raising your right hand.

18 (All hands are raised.)

19 MR. CHAIRMAN: Got it. Any opposed? Thank you.
20 Well, Mr. Bland, thank you for your willingness to serve on
21 the Senate Board, and particularly thank you for your
22 military service for our country.

23 MR. BLAND: Thank you. Thanks for having me back.

24 MR. CHAIRMAN: Good luck, sir. Up next, we have
25 Lander University. I'm glad to see my former House

1 colleague that we served together for many years sitting
2 back there. So up first is Thomas Balek of Union for the
3 3rd Congressional District seat 5, or is that seat 3? Is
4 that 5? If you would just give us your name and the reason
5 you'd like to serve on the Lander Board.

6 LANDER UNIVERSITY:

7 THOMAS BALEK:

8 MR. BALEK: Yes, sir. My name is Thomas Balek.
9 Please call me Tom. And I'm from the 5th Congressional
10 District. And the reason that I have applied for the
11 position at Lander is I have a lifetime commitment to
12 public service. I'm retired now. I have the time and the
13 ability and the interest to take on a position like this.
14 I have a deep background in financial and operational
15 corporate executive management. So I understand the
16 numbers, and that's of interest to me. I also have a
17 background in education as a former instructor and coach
18 and continue to be involved with education as a mentor for
19 a group of junior high boys. I also continue to do
20 coaching. And I think I'm an excellent fit for the
21 position at Lander. I'm very interested in it.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Macey.

23 MR. BALEK - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

24 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Balek, can you
25 please state your current address?

1 A. Yes, 897 Mt. Tabor Church Road, Union, South
2 Carolina.

3 Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay
4 your 4%?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Thank you. And is this address within the
7 Congressional District to which you have applied?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Thank you. And do you currently serve on any
10 local or state board, commission, committee, or
11 elected office?

12 A. I do. I'm on the Union County Planning
13 Commission.

14 Q. Okay. So there is some AG precedent, as I have
15 shared with you, that that is a dual office
16 holding conflict. If we do have a dual office
17 holding conflict, according to prior AG opinion,
18 if you are selected to the institution's board of
19 trustees to which you have applied, you, at the
20 time of being officially elected to the Board,
21 will no longer be eligible to serve in your
22 initial position with the other entity. Based on
23 prior Attorney General opinions, the public
24 office you currently hold will be vacated upon
25 you being elected to the new public office. Do

1 you understand that?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations
4 and responsibilities of serving on a public
5 institution's Board of trustees?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
8 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
9 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
10 after the Commission's report has been released?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
13 contact members of the General Assembly on your
14 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
15 intervene in this process on your behalf?

16 A. No.

17 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
18 obligation and duty to report to the commission
19 any changes that might occur that would affect
20 your application and overall eligibility for
21 serving on a college Board?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Well, are you aware?

24 A. Did I understand that correctly? Please repeat
25 the question.

1 **Q. Yes. Are you aware that you have an ongoing**
2 **obligation and duty to report to the commission**
3 **any changes that might affect your eligibility**
4 **for serving on a college Board?**

5 A. Yes.

6 **Q. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I have no further**
7 **questions.**

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Any commission questions?
9 Senator Massey.

10 MR. BALEK - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

11 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Balek, thank you**
12 **for being here. I noticed in the information you**
13 **provided that you've lived at your current**
14 **address for four years.**

15 A. Yes.

16 **Q. Is that right? How long have you lived in South**
17 **Carolina?**

18 A. About 12 years.

19 **Q. The information that I have indicates that you**
20 **believe that Lander should attract more students.**
21 **Can you give me your thoughts on that?**

22 A. I believe my observation was that Lander has
23 quite a history of enrollment growth, and I don't
24 see any reason why that would not continue. My
25 visits there with students and with faculty

1 impressed me very much, and I expect nothing but
2 continued success for Lander.

3 **Q. Do you know what the total student enrollment is**
4 **at Lander right now?**

5 A. Yeah, I think it's about 4,000.

6 **Q. Okay. I noted that when you submitted the**
7 **written information that you weren't aware of**
8 **what the tuition was at Lander. Have you been**
9 **able to look at that?**

10 A. It's about 11,000. And they've maintained that
11 tuition level for, I believe, 11 years in a row.

12 **Q. I think Landers is one of the lowest cost**
13 **attendances in the state. How many times have**
14 **you been to the campus?**

15 A. Two.

16 **Q. You said you met with students and faculty while**
17 **you were there?**

18 A. I met with students and faculty, yes.

19 **Q. Tell me about those meetings.**

20 A. I went to the Student Union building and met with
21 a couple of groups of students there and asked
22 them questions about their pros and cons of going
23 to school at Lander. I heard nothing but great
24 things.

25 **Q. How did those meetings come about? Did you walk**

1 **in and start talking to people?**

2 A. Yes.

3 **Q. How about faculty? Have you had conversations**
4 **with them?**

5 A. I did have conversations with one faculty, a
6 department head, as it was.

7 **Q. How did that meeting come about?**

8 A. Very enlightening. I learned an awful lot about
9 the institution. And again, it was very
10 favorable to Lander. There are some issues from
11 the faculty, nothing really earth-shaking. As
12 any large organization, there's always room to
13 evaluate opportunities, change directions in some
14 ways. That's in order there.

15 **Q. Why Lander?**

16 A. Why Lander? I was encouraged by my congressman,
17 Ralph Norman, to fill an empty position at
18 Lander. The trusteeship has been vacant for some
19 time. But in addition to that, it's my
20 commitment to public service, and specifically
21 education, that interests me.

22 **Q. Sure, I understand. It just seemed to me that**
23 **Lander was an odd choice for someone who had not**
24 **been there.**

25 A. And it seems odd to me, too, but I'm more

1 enthused about it by the day.

2 **Q. Okay. All right, thank you.**

3 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? All right, entertain a
4 motion and a second for a favorable report.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Motion.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Second.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favor, please
8 signify by raising your right hand.

9 (All hands are raised, except Senator Massey and Senator
10 Bennet, who abstained from voting.)

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone against? Thank you, sir, thank
12 you for your willingness to serve. Up next, we have
13 Christopher Sean Foxworth of Inman. Just come up here and
14 raise your right hand, please, sir, and I'll swear you in.
15 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
16 nothing but the truth, so help you God?

17 CHRISTOPHER SHAWN FOXWORTH:

18 MR. FOXWORTH: I do.

19 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Just tell us your name for
20 the record and why you want to serve on the Lander Board.

21 MR. FOXWORTH: My name is Christopher Sean Foxworth.
22 I go by Sean. I want to serve in this position because I'm
23 passionate about Lander. I'm a graduate of Lander, 1997.
24 My experience there and time there really molded me into
25 who I am today, and it really set me up to have a great

1 career. And I've had a really great life since graduating
2 from Lander. So I'm very thankful for that time, and I
3 want to serve my university. My wife is also a graduate of
4 Lander. I met her there. We married soon after
5 graduating, and we also have a daughter who is a graduate
6 of Lander, and I'm very proud of that, and I want to
7 continue that tradition. I want my grandchildren and my
8 great-grandchildren to graduate from Lander. So Lander is
9 very personal to me. I've also spent a lot of time since
10 graduating going back to campus. I've been involved in
11 many different ways. I've given back to the university the
12 best I can, whether through donations or just through time.
13 I've served on the alumni Board, and I've also served --
14 currently serve on the Lander Foundation Board. So I've
15 really been involved, and this opportunity to me is serving
16 at a new level because I can help continue what's going on
17 at Lander for a long period of time. I really am impressed
18 by Dr. Constantino, the president there, and his energy and
19 his vision for the school. I'm very impressed by the
20 faculty and staff, and I want to support them.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: Macey.

22 MR. FOXWORTH: Let me say one other thing, please.
23 One of the things I think I bring to the table that's a
24 little different from the current trustees is my
25 manufacturing background. I've spent time since graduating

1 Lander in various roles, continuous improvement, operations
2 management, project management. I've been a plant manager.
3 I've also spent a lot of time in supply chain. So I think
4 I bring a different way of thinking to the Board.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: Macey.

6 MR. FOXWORTH - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

7 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Foxworth, can**
8 **you please state your current address?**

9 A. 384 S. Woodfin Ridge Drive in Inman, South
10 Carolina 29349.

11 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**
12 **your 4% property tax?**

13 A. Yes, it is.

14 **Q. And is this address within the congressional**
15 **district to which you have applied?**

16 A. It is, yes.

17 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
18 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

19 A. I do not.

20 **Q. And do you understand the obligations and**
21 **responsibilities of serving on a public**
22 **institution's Board of trustees?**

23 A. Yes.

24 **Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any**
25 **member of the General Assembly and formally ask**

1 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
2 after the Commission's report has been released?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
5 contact members of the General Assembly on your
6 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
7 intervene in this process on your behalf?

8 A. No.

9 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
10 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
11 any changes that might occur that would affect
12 your application and overall eligibility for
13 serving on a college Board?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Thank you, Mr. Foxworth. Mr. Chairman, I have no
16 further questions.

17 MR. CHAIRMAN: Commission questions? Senator Bennett.

18 MR. FOXWORTH - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR BENNETT:

19 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr.
20 Foxworth, for being here and for your willingness
21 to serve. Are you familiar, sir, with Lander's
22 financial condition?

23 A. Financial condition? Just from what I've been
24 able to gather by being on the alumni Board and
25 the foundation Board.

1 Q. Is it strong?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. You said that Lander has experienced significant
4 growth over the past.

5 A. Absolutely.

6 Q. How long has that growth been occurring?

7 A. I feel like over the last 10 or 11 years, it's
8 grown 72 percent.

9 Q. Is that on campus? Is it remote? Is it --

10 A. I don't know the exact breakdown. I do know that
11 there are opportunities to improve, parking at
12 Lander, for example. Which tells me -- which is
13 a sign that on campus it's growing as well. But
14 I don't know the exact breakdown.

15 Q. The candidate before you indicated that it was
16 about 4,000 students. Does that sound right to
17 you?

18 A. 4,600. 4,600.

19 Q. 4,600. How do you feel -- are you aware of
20 Lander's position and embracement on remote or
21 online course work as opposed to in-person course
22 work? I mean, are there more programs that are
23 offered online than there are, or maybe not more,
24 but is that part of the growth?

25 A. I'm not sure what the breakdown is. I do know

1 they offer online options.

2 **Q. What's your feeling on online options?**

3 A. Personally, I'm a face-to-face person throughout
4 my career. I've more preferred face-to-face over
5 remote work and that type of thing, so I think
6 it's the same for students. However, I think
7 it's a good option to have because not every
8 student has the opportunity to go live on a
9 college campus.

10 **Q. Sure. It's good to hear that Lander is growing**
11 **like that. I'll be honest with you, I was not**
12 **aware of that growth trajectory. Do you know how**
13 **many public colleges and universities operate**
14 **within the state of South Carolina?**

15 A. I do not.

16 **Q. Would it surprise you if I said it was over 32?**

17 A. I don't think it would surprise me to know.

18 **Q. You know, when we talk about educating our kids**
19 **here, what do you believe? Do you believe that**
20 **there is a higher concentration of in-state or**
21 **out-of-state students at Lander?**

22 A. There's definitely a higher concentration of
23 in-state, mostly in-state.

24 **Q. Do you know if that growth rate has been mostly**
25 **in-state or has there been an influx of**

1 **out-of-state?**

2 A. I don't know.

3 **Q. That's all I have.**

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Senator. I think over the
5 years we've realized that Lander does have one of the
6 largest number of in-state students among all our colleges.

7 MR. FOXWORTH: The statistic that I love is 82% of the
8 Lander graduates stay in South Carolina, work in South
9 Carolina, pay taxes in South Carolina.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: I wish we had the rest of the schools
11 doing the same, so thank you on that. Anyone else have a
12 quick -- Senator Devine.

13 MR. FOXWORTH - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

14 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much for**
15 **applying. Just a couple questions, and you**
16 **mentioned about the parking spaces, but in your**
17 **questionnaire you talked about additional**
18 **buildings and dorms are areas where the school**
19 **can improve. Tell us what you mean by that and**
20 **what are some of your ideas.**

21 A. Well, that there are not enough beds at Lander,
22 and I know that from personal experience because
23 my daughter was there from 2020 to 2023. And
24 Lander's done a great job with incoming freshmen
25 in providing them a really good place to stay.

1 They've got two newer dorms that really supports
2 that group very well. But as the students become
3 upperclassmen, there's not as many options,
4 unfortunately. And I think the challenge is
5 Lander does not have a lot of room. It's
6 landlocked. So we're going to have to get
7 creative with how we add dorms and add beds, but
8 it can be done.

9 **Q. And then you mentioned your activities with the**
10 **alumni, you and your wife. Tell us, do you know**
11 **currently what's the percentage of alumni giving**
12 **at Lander, and is there opportunities for growth**
13 **there?**

14 A. I don't know the percentage exactly, but I know
15 it's a large topic of conversation within the
16 alumni group as well as the foundation Board.
17 But there's a lot of energy behind it, and we
18 just had Giving Day a few weeks ago, and Lander
19 set a new record on Giving Day. So it's starting
20 to turn in the right direction. So I don't know
21 the exact percentage, but at the same time,
22 there's a lot of really good energy and strategy
23 behind improving that.

24 **Q. Do you know of the current Board, are the Board**
25 **members more alumni of Lander, or is there?**

1 A. From what I can tell, it's a mix. I don't think
2 it's majority alumni of Lander by any means.

3 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, no further questions.**

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Senator. Any others? Let's
5 entertain a motion and a second for a favorable report.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Motion.

7 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor, please signify by
9 raising your right hand.

10 (All hands are raised.)

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any against? Mr. Foxworth, thank you
12 so much.

13 MR. FOXWORTH: Thank you.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: Now we will turn to the At-Large Seat
15 15. This is Kathy R. Taylor from Union. She's the
16 incumbent and the governor appointee. If you just raise
17 your right hand, repeat after me, you swear to tell the
18 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help
19 you God.

20 KATHY R. TAYLOR:

21 MS. TAYLOR: I do.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Just, for the record, state your name
23 and why you want to serve on the Lander Board.

24 MS. TAYLOR: Thank you. My name is Kathy Taylor, and
25 I am a resident of Union County. I was not born in South

1 Carolina, but we relocated here when I was three, and so
2 I'm a proud product of Union County Schools. In '91, I
3 graduated and had the opportunity to be the first in my
4 family to attend a four-year university, and that was
5 Lander University. In '95, I graduated with an elementary
6 education degree. From there, I returned back home and
7 became an employee with Union County Schools, and I'm proud
8 to say I'm completing my 31st year with Union County
9 Schools. During that time, I've been teacher,
10 administrator in all aspects from elementary, middle, and
11 high school. And I attribute that strong path that I had
12 from my opportunity at Lander. I feel like my professional
13 journey has given me a good knowledge base for K-12
14 education. and I feel like that would bring a thoughtful,
15 well-rounded perspective to the Lander Board. Currently,
16 for the past almost 11 years, I've been principal at
17 Jonesville Elementary Middle School, where we serve
18 students in 4K through 8th grade. As stated already,
19 Lander, by others, Lander holds a special place in my
20 heart. I remember it being a university where the
21 importance for building relationships, feeling supported
22 and safe. I feel like it's a mission that I have gathered
23 since I've been back. I've only been at two Board
24 meetings, so I'm a very fresh incumbent. But I do feel
25 like my K-12 experience will bring to the board a

1 perspective and understanding in what students need and the
2 supports they need to be successful at the higher education
3 level.

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: Macey.

5 MS. TAYLOR - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

6 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Ms. Taylor, can you
7 please state your current address?

8 A. 229 Christopher Lane Union, South Carolina.

9 Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay
10 your 4% property tax?

11 A. It is.

12 Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state
13 board, commission, committee, or elected office
14 other than the Lander Board?

15 A. I do not.

16 Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations
17 and responsibilities of serving on a public
18 institution's Board of trustees?

19 A. I do.

20 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
21 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
22 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
23 after the Commission's report has been released?

24 A. I am.

25 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to

1 contact members of the General Assembly on your
2 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
3 intervene in this process on your behalf?

4 A. No, I am not.

5 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
6 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
7 any changes that might occur that would affect
8 your application and overall eligibility for
9 serving on a college Board?

10 A. I do.

11 Q. Thank you, Ms. Taylor. And, Mr. Chairman, I have
12 no further questions.

13 MR. CHAIRMAN: Commission, questions? Senator Massey.

14 MS. TAYLOR - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

15 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Taylor, thanks for
16 being here. You indicated in your written
17 responses, and this, I think, is consistent with
18 what we just heard from Mr. Foxworth, that since
19 2015, that Lander has grown by nearly 72 percent.
20 Does that sound right?

21 A. It does.

22 Q. And you indicated, and I think he did too, that
23 that makes it the fastest-growing state
24 university. Is that right?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Do you know, I mean, what was -- I understand
2 that the student count is around 4,600. Does
3 that sound right to you? Which means that it's
4 grown by probably about 2,000 students in the
5 last 10 or 11 years.

6 A. I would agree.

7 Q. Is that right?

8 A. Uh-huh.

9 Q. And I realize your service has been recent, but
10 was that a strategic decision by the university
11 to grow in that manner?

12 A. In my opinion, I would think so, yes.

13 Q. And do you know why has the university decided to
14 have that kind of significant growth over that
15 period of time?

16 A. I think the current administration has been very
17 influential in that and making that a goal, a
18 priority focus over the last several years has
19 been enrollment.

20 Q. Does the university need to continue to grow in
21 that manner?

22 A. I would agree. I would say yes. I think the
23 goal there, we would like to see 5,000 by the
24 fall.

25 Q. Five thousand students by the fall of '26?

1 A. Close there.

2 Q. Is there a target number that the university is
3 going after? A total number? A total number --
4 where does the university want to go, with
5 students?

6 A. Well, according to Dr. Constantino, 5,000 is the
7 immediate goal.

8 Q. All right. And as a current Board member, do you
9 support that?

10 A. I do.

11 Q. Does the university have the residential space
12 for a student enrollment of that territory?

13 A. I believe so.

14 Q. Do you know what the university could accommodate
15 right now with its current capital?

16 A. I do not.

17 Q. Its current infrastructure, how many students
18 could it support now? Does the university have
19 more land that's available?

20 A. Potentially.

21 Q. Okay. And there's been a lot of construction
22 that's gone on across the street in the last 10,
23 12 years. And I don't know how much land that
24 the university has on that side of the road. Do
25 you know, is there more land available that's

1 just not been developed yet? Are you aware of
2 that?

3 A. Potentially, I think.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I'm not sure.

6 Q. I mean, the primary campus sits right in the
7 middle of a residential area, right?

8 A. Right, right.

9 Q. And so I know there's been the growth, and I know
10 there have been some new buildings that have been
11 built on that campus. But from my observations,
12 I mean, the most significant growth has been on
13 the other side of the road. Is that right? Do
14 you agree with that?

15 A. I do. I do feel like there's beginning stages of
16 plans for that.

17 Q. Okay. Have there been any conversations about
18 where, I mean, you said you've attended two
19 meetings so far?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. All right. During those two meetings, or even in
22 private conversations that you've had with
23 university leadership or other Board members,
24 have there been any conversations about what's
25 the strategic plan about where do we want to go

1 **with total student enrollment? Have you heard**
2 **any conversations along those lines?**

3 A. Again, I think the immediate goal is 5,000.

4 **Q. But beyond the next academic year, you've not**
5 **been part of any conversations on that?**

6 A. Not yet.

7 **Q. Okay. Do you know -- do you know what Lander's**
8 **graduation rate is for four or six years?**

9 A. Currently, around 51%.

10 **Q. Do you -- is that acceptable?**

11 A. No. Obviously, we'd like to see that higher. I
12 believe it's more like 65 when you look at Lander
13 and some other institutions, a combination. But
14 obviously, we'd already like to have --

15 **Q. Which other institutions would we combine with?**

16 A. Just like if they did part-time at Lander and
17 then left and went to another institution, just
18 graduation rate of those students.

19 **Q. Okay.**

20 A. I do know that that's a focus coming up is the
21 whole recruit, retain, and graduate. So
22 graduation is a focus of the Board.

23 **Q. Yeah, I would hope that the Board would continue**
24 **working on that.**

25 A. Absolutely.

1 Q. I think a graduation rate in around 50% is below
2 what we need it to be. Even though Lander is
3 probably the most cost-effective for students at
4 a very good rate, and I appreciate the fact that
5 Lander held tuition flat even before the
6 legislature started imposing conditions, and I
7 think that's commendable. I've been impressed
8 with the president and his work over there. I
9 got one other question for you, and that is you
10 are on the Board by virtue of an interim
11 appointment from the Governor. Is that right?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Tell me how that came about. Did you solicit an
14 appointment, or did they come to you?

15 A. I had kind of crossed paths with Adam Taylor, and
16 we've been having conversations about the Board
17 and potentially maybe down the road becoming a
18 part of that. And when it came open, we did have
19 a conversation about the open, the vacancy.

20 Q. Do you know how long that position was vacant
21 before you received the interim appointment?

22 A. I am not exactly sure. I don't feel like it was
23 long, but I could be mistaken.

24 Q. Were there any conversations that you had with
25 the Governor's office about whether to receive an

1 interim appointment versus just waiting until now
2 to run for the position?

3 A. Not that I'm aware of.

4 Q. Okay. How did it come about that you -- how did
5 you get in touch with the Governor's office? Was
6 that something that you did or something that
7 they contacted you about?

8 A. Who?

9 Q. The Governor's office. The Governor's office
10 made the interim appointment, right?

11 A. Right.

12 Q. You're serving in that position now by virtue of
13 an interim appointment.

14 A. Right.

15 Q. That interim appointment was issued by the
16 Governor. So did the Governor's office contact
17 you?

18 A. No. I was in contact with Lander.

19 Q. You were in contact with Lander?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. And then is it your understanding that Lander was
22 in contact with the Governor's office about
23 making that appointment?

24 A. I'm not sure.

25 Q. Okay. You expressed interest to an employee at

1 **Lander University?**

2 A. Uh-huh.

3 **Q. Is that right?**

4 A. Yes.

5 **Q. And then Lander -- you believe Lander worked with**
6 **the Governor's office to effectuate that interim**
7 **appointment?**

8 A. I'm not sure. I just completed the application
9 process. I'm not sure. I'm not sure of what
10 conversations.

11 **Q. That's all. Thank you, ma'am.**

12 MR. CHAIRMAN: Go right ahead.

13 MS. TAYLOR - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR BENNETT:

14 **Q. Thank you. I'd like to follow up on that in just**
15 **a moment. You've been there for two meetings.**

16 A. Correct.

17 **Q. What's your experience of how the Board operates?**
18 **Does the Board challenge leadership, or do you**
19 **feel that the Board responds to leadership?**

20 A. I feel like they respond to leadership.

21 **Q. So would you categorize that as kind of a**
22 **rubber-stamp type relationship, or are there good**
23 **quality discussions --**

24 A. Yes.

25 **Q. -- about the future and the details of Lander**

1 **that go on in those Board meetings?**

2 A. Yes, I feel like there are.

3 **Q. The latter? The latter?**

4 A. Yes.

5 **Q. Thank you.**

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Motion and a
7 second for a favorable report.

8 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Motion.

9 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor, please raise your
11 right hand. Okay. Any opposed? Thank you, Ms. Taylor,
12 and thank you for your service as an educator. All right,
13 that finishes up Lander. So now we will go to South
14 Carolina State University. And we have three candidates
15 for the At-Large Seat 12, and the first is Donald Beatty of
16 Spartanburg. Welcome, Judge.

17 SOUTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY:

18 DONALD BEATTY:

19 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY: Thank you for having me. I was
20 down in the hall that I thought I'd be gotten to last here.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: No, sir, you're first.

22 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY: Well, let me say good afternoon
23 to each of you and thank you for taking the opportunity to
24 give me an opportunity.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, if you would, let me swear

1 again.

2 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY: Yes, sir.

3 MR. CHAIRMAN: Swear to tell the truth, the whole
4 truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

5 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY: I do. Thank you very much.
6 Get an opportunity to ask me all the questions.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: You're in trouble. I'm sorry. Yeah,
8 if you would, just for the record, state your name and the
9 reason you're running for the SC State Board.

10 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY: Thank you very much, Mr.
11 Chairman. My name is Donald W. Beatty. I reside at 733
12 Glen Ridge Road in Spartanburg County. I pay taxes at that
13 location at 4%. And the reason that I'm running for SC
14 State Board is, quite frankly, it's a long -- I won't say a
15 long story, but it's an important story to me. My roots
16 run deep at SC State. I, as well as three of my siblings,
17 are graduates of that institution. I have 15 other family
18 members who are graduates of that institution. I've spent
19 probably more time on that institution campus than most
20 folk over the years. When time came for me to apply to a
21 university, after graduating from high school, I only
22 applied to one, SC State. And there was a reason for that.
23 I have a deep and passionate love for that institution.
24 And I have to give it credit for making me, excuse me, the
25 person that I am today. I want to lend whatever talents

1 that I might have for the future and continued growth of
2 that institution. During the time that I attended SC
3 State, it was in this heyday. Wonderful institution, well
4 regarded nationwide. Things kind of changed over the
5 years. But I am happy to say, at this point in time, we're
6 on the upswing. And I want to be a part of that continued
7 growth, a part of that continued progress of that
8 institution. And I want to lend whatever talents that I
9 have to that institution. I notice our Board, at this
10 point in time, does not have a lawyer on Board. Although
11 the institution has a lawyer, I am, quite frankly, of the
12 opinion that it needs a lawyer in the Board. The
13 institution now has, over the years, been engaged in quite
14 a bit of litigation that was completely avoidable, in my
15 opinion. And without a lawyer on that Board, giving it
16 some instructions, some opinions, if you will, that might
17 be beneficial in some of the decisions that the Board has
18 made. Thank you, sir.

19 MR. CHAIRMAN: Macey.

20 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

21 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Chief**
22 **Justice Beatty. And can you please state your**
23 **current address for the record?**

24 A. 733 Glen Ridge Road, Spartanburg.

25 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**

1 **your 4% property tax?**

2 A. It is.

3 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
4 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

5 A. No, I do not.

6 **Q. And do you understand the obligations and**
7 **responsibilities of serving on a public**
8 **institution's board of trustees?**

9 A. I do. I've served on quite a few boards over the
10 years, and I've not served on the board of
11 trustees of any university or institution. But,
12 yes, I understand what a board member's duties
13 and responsibilities are.

14 **Q. Thank you. And are you aware that you cannot**
15 **contact any member of the General Assembly and**
16 **formally ask for a vote commitment or pledge**
17 **until 48 hours after the Commission's report has**
18 **been released?**

19 A. I do.

20 **Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to**
21 **contact members of the General Assembly on your**
22 **behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to**
23 **intervene in this process on your behalf?**

24 A. I have not, and I am not aware of anyone who has
25 done so. However, I have introduced myself to

1 quite a few legislators that I don't know and
2 those that I'm reacquainting myself with.

3 **Q. Yes, sir. And please just note for the record**
4 **that candidates are free to introduce themselves**
5 **to members. It's specifically the vote**
6 **commitment pledging provision.**

7 A. Yes.

8 **Q. All right. And then are you aware that you have**
9 **an ongoing obligation and duty to report to the**
10 **Commission any changes that might occur that**
11 **would affect your application and overall**
12 **eligibility for serving on a college Board?**

13 A. I do.

14 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Beatty. Mr. Chairman, I have no**
15 **further questions.**

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Commission questions? Senator Massey.

17 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

18 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chief Justice, good**
19 **to see you.**

20 A. Senator.

21 **Q. Chief, are you aware -- and I know you're not on**
22 **the Board now, but it's a good thing you're not**
23 **up here or somebody would be going to jail.**

24 A. Oh, it's not my fault.

25 **Q. There would be some irony there if that were you.**

1 **Are you familiar with the university's financial**
2 **position today?**

3 A. Totally no, quite frankly. Although I'm told and
4 what I've read that it's in pretty good financial
5 shape at this point in time. It's my
6 understanding we got a clean audit, that last
7 audit that was conducted on campus. As to the
8 particulars of the financial situation of the
9 institution, I am not aware of. And to be quite
10 frank with you, from my discussion with some
11 Board members, they are not aware of the
12 financial status of the university either, if
13 we're going to get into the financial.

14 **Q. That concerns me. But I do think that it's, I**
15 **think the university's financial position is much**
16 **better than where it was, say, 10 years ago.**

17 A. Without a doubt. Without a doubt.

18 **Q. No question. I ask you that question because,**
19 **not just because of the history there, but also**
20 **because I noticed in the summary that we have of**
21 **the written information that you provided, it**
22 **indicates that you don't believe that the**
23 **university needs to attract more students. Do**
24 **you agree with that?**

25 A. That's a good question, good point. I'd like to

1 qualify that a little bit, if I might.

2 **Q. Sure.**

3 A. Tuition is the lifeblood of any institution. The
4 more students you have, the more tuition you're
5 going to collect. But it's my firm belief that
6 an institution should not accept students that
7 it's not prepared to provide for. We have a
8 history at SC State of admitting students that we
9 don't have dormitory rooms for, bed space for.
10 We have a history of other things not being
11 prepared for our students. And quite frankly, if
12 you notice over the last three or four months,
13 we've not had a secure campus. So I don't think
14 we ought to bring additional students onto that
15 campus until we can take care of the students
16 that we do have.

17 **Q. Do you know -- Chief, do you know what the**
18 **student enrollment count is now?**

19 A. It's about 3,000.

20 **Q. Okay. That number, and I can't remember what it**
21 **was 10 years ago, but the number had dropped**
22 **pretty significantly at one point, hadn't it?**

23 A. Oh, yeah. Almost 1,000 below that.

24 **Q. Yeah. And I'm wondering what does the -- as you**
25 **said, tuition is the lifeblood to some extent.**

1 So I'm curious as to what the number needs to be
2 for the university to thrive. Because there is a
3 minimum number, right, that you're going to have
4 to have in order to operate. You can go too
5 many, but there's a number that you need to have
6 just in order to be able to make ends meet.

7 A. Yes, you do need a baseline, and to be quite
8 frank with you, our sheer admitting more students
9 that we could really provide for tells you right
10 there that we've not been meeting that. And what
11 that number is that it's going to take to manage
12 an institution successfully, quite frankly, I
13 don't think we've had the sufficient revenue to
14 reach that guess yet.

15 Q. One of the other areas that I wanted to ask you
16 about, and you brought this up, but if, I have a
17 daughter who is a junior in high school. So
18 we've been in the college looking business
19 recently, and that's only going to intensify, I
20 think. If I were a parent and SC State was one
21 of my child's targets, I would be concerned about
22 the safety of my child there based on -- and you
23 mentioned this, but based on some of the things
24 that have happened recently, do you have, other
25 than that being a problem, do you have thoughts

1 **on that and how the Board should be involved in**
2 **that issue?**

3 A. The Board is required, in my opinion, to be
4 involved in that issue. I mean, that's the
5 Board's responsibility to oversee the management
6 of the institution. So now, the Board is not
7 getting to the minutiae of the actual day-to-day
8 of running the institution, but issues like
9 safety for students and the campus, that's a
10 priority, in my opinion, of the Board. Now, do I
11 have ideas about that? I'm not in the security
12 business, but I'll tell you what, the first thing
13 I would have done was consult a consultant that
14 has that experience, that knowledge, and do
15 something about it. Now, our current president,
16 thankful for us, I think, has a military police
17 background. Now, unfortunately, I don't think
18 we've had the resources to provide for that
19 institution and its safety. We've had safety
20 issues at the institution for quite some time.
21 But the good thing about it is that we have
22 always had good students, good people there, and
23 our troubles have generally come from outside.

24 **Q. That's right.**

25 A. Not inside the institution. But we should be in

1 a position where we can provide for those who are
2 there, hire sufficient and competent staff to
3 provide security for the institution. We've not
4 done that to this day.

5 **Q. And that's a great point, Mr. Chief Justice.**
6 **From my impression that the safety issues have**
7 **not come from the student body itself, it's come**
8 **from outside influences.**

9 A. That is correct.

10 **Q. Who then come onto the campus and cause problems**
11 **for the students.**

12 A. That is correct.

13 **Q. I've not heard about any issues with the students**
14 **causing problems, more than being the victims.**

15 A. Yes, and again, I sent my daughter there who's
16 graduated not long ago. And fortunately she's
17 moved on and got a master's and a PhD, not from
18 that institution, but outside in Boston, to be
19 quite frank with you. But I thought well enough
20 about the institution to send my daughter there,
21 my youngest. It's a good institution, good
22 people, good staffing, but we've never had
23 sufficient resources to do what we need to do at
24 that institution.

25 **Q. Do you believe that is the legislature not**

1 **funding appropriately?**

2 A. Of course. And I mean there's no doubt about it,
3 of course. But I must say the legislature is
4 doing better now and I hope you continue.

5 **Q. And part of that's got to be the university**
6 **providing a space where parents are comfortable**
7 **sending their children to, such that students**
8 **will come and then provide the tuition, right?**
9 **It's a combination, isn't it?**

10 A. One feeds off the other.

11 **Q. That's right. The other area I wanted to explore**
12 **with you is are you familiar with State's**
13 **graduation rates?**

14 A. Yes, sir. Well, a four-year graduation rate is
15 less than 15%, and that's unfortunate.

16 **Q. Isn't it worse than unfortunate? I mean 15% is**
17 **not acceptable.**

18 A. And the Board has not put sufficient emphasis on
19 that point.

20 **Q. Is that something that the Board should do?**

21 A. Of course. I mean that's what they're there for.
22 Now as far as I understand, the institution has
23 made strides recently in hiring someone in
24 retention and, I think, student assistance, and
25 hopefully we can do better with that. But we

1 lose a lot of students because of financial
2 reasons as well. So you just can't take that out
3 of the picture and say, well, we're bringing in
4 bad students who cannot make the grade. Quite a
5 bit of it is financial. They can't afford to be
6 there.

7 **Q. Sure. Well, and Chief, I know you've been --**
8 **you've made your point about the legislature**
9 **needs to consider the funding situation there,**
10 **and I think that's a fair point to make. You**
11 **understand, don't you, that with a 15% graduation**
12 **rate, that makes some of the legislature say, eh.**

13 **A. But you have to dig into those numbers. It's not**
14 **-- like I said, it's not because you're admitting**
15 **students who cannot make the grade.**

16 **Q. Well, for whatever reason it is, 15% completing -**
17 **- I mean, obtaining a degree after four years, or**
18 **maybe it's a little bit higher, 25% after six**
19 **years. For whatever the reason is, the**
20 **university's got to do better in that respect,**
21 **doesn't it?**

22 **A. And it takes leadership to do that.**

23 **Q. It does.**

24 **A. And that's one of the -- I'll tell you to be**
25 **quite frank with you, Senator, that's one of my**

1 pet peeves. Why is that situation the way it is?
2 And I've looked into it. I've not gotten into it
3 probably deep enough to understand the full
4 panoply, if you will, of reasons why that exists.
5 But it's a problem, and it is the Board's duty to
6 do something about it.

7 **Q. Well, yes, sir, and I appreciate your comments.**
8 **I'll just say that I think if any university --**
9 **not just State, but any university, is bringing**
10 **children in, young adults in, they're charging**
11 **that kind of money for tuition, and we're**
12 **graduating less than a quarter of the population**
13 **in six years, I think it's almost criminal what**
14 **we're doing to the kids.**

15 **A.** Well, that's why when you asked me that initial
16 question about not needing additional students,
17 raising them, when I said I had to qualify, that
18 is the reason. We need to be prepared to deal
19 with the students that we bring into that campus
20 and be prepared to graduate those students and do
21 those kinds of things that it takes to get a kid
22 from first year through the fourth.

23 **Q. And frankly, if we're not prepared -- and I say**
24 **we, because we're all in this part together. And**
25 **I understand the Board has an important role**

1 there. But if we're not prepared to provide the
2 course work and the opportunities to earn a
3 degree --

4 A. Why are we there?

5 Q. Within four or six years, then we've got to be --
6 It's not fair to those kids, to do that to them.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Mr. Chief Justice, thank you.

9 A. Thank you very much.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator Devine.

11 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

12 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Chief
13 Justice, for being here. I've known you for
14 many, many years, and I've learned something
15 reading this. I did not realize that you had a
16 military background, so thank you for your
17 service.

18 A. Thank you. SC State did that for me.

19 Q. A lot of my questions, I had actually written
20 down the Senator from Edgefield addressed, but I
21 want to dig deeper on a couple of things. It
22 sounded like to me, and I don't want to put words
23 in your mouth, so tell me if this is what you're
24 saying, is that, of course, ideally, more
25 students brings in more income, and you'd want

1 **that. However, before you're ready to do that,**
2 **you need to deal with the challenges right now**
3 **with the current student body and the current**
4 **students that are coming in.**

5 A. That is correct.

6 **Q. If you, as a Board member, had three things that**
7 **you believe the Board needs to be focusing on as**
8 **far as to do that, what would those things be?**

9 A. Student retention and preparation, number one.
10 Of course, you've got to have a secure campus and
11 an environment where students can learn. And you
12 have to be engaging and accepting. Over the
13 years, SC State has had an issue with
14 misleadership, of not discussing issues, not
15 being transparent about problems, not
16 collaborating, if you will, with those that could
17 assist with certain things, certain issues, and
18 we need to get past that. But my number one, if
19 I had to do anything -- if I had to choose two,
20 campus security, so students, parents, folks in
21 the public will feel comfortable coming to the
22 institution. And two, I should say they're
23 probably on the same plane, student preparation
24 and retention.

25 **Q. And then let me ask you this, I asked the Lander**

1 candidates, you are alumni, you talked about the
2 strength of alumni. South Carolina State has
3 huge, very rich alumni, passionate alumni here in
4 the state of South Carolina. My predecessor,
5 Senator John Scott, Congressman Clyburn, I mean,
6 the list goes on and on, Chief Justice Finney,
7 who now has his portrait at the law school, so it
8 goes on and on. Where do you believe that state
9 is, I know that the alumni is very passionate,
10 showing up, but where is the state with alumni
11 giving, and as a Board member, do you believe
12 that the Board plays a role in encouraging the
13 increase of alumni giving?

14 A. Of course. You know, most folks don't want to
15 give unless they see you give it. You can't ask
16 someone to give if you've not given yourself.
17 And fortunately, I think we are fortunate in that
18 our Board of Trustees now has what we call a
19 middle society member or two on that Board of
20 Trustees. And if I'm fortunate enough to succeed
21 in this election, I'll be one of those as well.
22 A middle society member is one who has given at
23 least \$100,000 to the school over time. And this
24 year, I believe we have inducted our largest
25 class of those middle society members. I believe

1 we might have added 20-some odd people this year.
2 And so, yes, our giving has increased
3 significantly over past years when we talk about
4 alumni giving, and it's only going to do better.
5 We have a situation now where alumni now have
6 renewed interest in the institution. And they're
7 showing that renewed interest in the institution
8 by their giving. If you attend any of our
9 functions now, sometimes in the past they've not
10 been well attended, but you attend any of them
11 now, and there's students everywhere. I should
12 say students, but alumni everywhere. So, yes,
13 ma'am, we're on a good trajectory right now, I
14 think, and I think we should stay there, and if I
15 can help the institution in continuing that
16 upward trajectory, I want to do that. But yes,
17 giving is a big deal, and we need it.

18 **Q. My last question will be for you is, I think the**
19 **conversation that you and the senator from**
20 **Edgefield was very good. I think that that is**
21 **part of what we need is to have open dialogue and**
22 **understand needs, challenges, and where we can**
23 **work together as partners. What is your view**
24 **regarding the Board's participation in that on an**
25 **ongoing basis, not just South Carolina State Day**

1 **or when you're in front of budget?**

2 A. Well, I think if you look out here today, I think
3 you might see a couple of members of our Board
4 here, a few of them here, maybe four. They're
5 interested in the institution. They participate.
6 And if there's anything that the institution is
7 doing, I think you'll find a Board member or two
8 there. Even at sporting events, you'll find them
9 there. They support the institution. They
10 believe in the institution, I think.

11 **Q. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, no further questions.**

12 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Senator. Any other
13 questions? Senator Massey.

14 CHIEF JUSTICE BEATTY - RE-EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

15 **Q. Just one other point, Mr. Chief Justice. I**
16 **appreciate your willingness to engage in the**
17 **dialogue.**

18 A. Oh, without -- any time. Not only here, but ---

19 **Q. You've always been open and willing to talk, and**
20 **I appreciate that about whatever issue. I**
21 **appreciate that. I would just -- you know, it's**
22 **-- you surprised me a little while ago when you**
23 **reported that in some conversations with other**
24 **Board members, and we don't need to name anybody,**
25 **that you're not sure how much the other Board**

1 members are familiar with the financial position
2 of the university.

3 A. And I'll stick to that, firmly.

4 Q. And I would hope that -- well, I suspect there
5 are probably some Board members, whether they're
6 here or not, or watching, or they may be
7 listening. I would hope that when those Board
8 members come back for a re-screening, or when you
9 come back, if you're successful here, that if a
10 commission member asks about the financial
11 institution of the university, that a Board
12 member is able to talk about that. It would be
13 disappointing for people who have served on the
14 Board not to be able to have a conversation -- at
15 least high level, a conversation about the
16 financial condition of the university. So I just
17 want to make the statement, I appreciate your
18 interest in that, and I would hope that when
19 other Board members come before us. It's
20 understandable, I think, for someone who's not
21 served on the Board to not be familiar. But if
22 we get people who come up and they're seeking
23 reappointment, and they're unable to have a real
24 conversation about, and not just for this
25 university, but for any, if they can't have a

1 OFF THE RECORD

2
3 (Senator Bennett assumes Chair at 2:35 p.m.)

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, we are back in session. We
5 will continue on with South Carolina State Board of
6 Trustees election. Our next candidate is Johnny Sellers.
7 Oh, there you are. Mr. Sellers, good afternoon. If you
8 would please allow me to swear you in, if you'll raise your
9 right hand and repeat after me. Say your name. Do you
10 swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
11 the truth to help you God?

12 JOHNNY MYRON SELLERS:

13 MR. SELLERS: I do.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you sir. If you'll please
15 for the for the boards -- or for the Commission rather
16 state your name, position you're running for, and if you
17 have a brief opening statement we'd be glad to hear that.

18 MR. SELLERS: Great, my name is Reverend Johnny
19 Sellers and I'm running for the Board of Trustees Seat At
20 Large 12 for South Carolina State University. I'm running
21 for this Board seat because I am a proud graduate, 2000
22 graduate, of South Carolina State University as well as my
23 beautiful wife is sitting in the audience, a proud
24 graduate, so we have a long history also at South Carolina
25 State University, whether it's our cousins, our family

1 members, her dad. And I'm from Bennettsville, South
2 Carolina originally. I live in Easley, South Carolina, the
3 great city of the upstate. But this seat at South Carolina
4 State has helped me and groomed me into who I am today as a
5 leader, as a father, as a community leader, military wise.
6 I'm a former combat vet and it has groomed me. So it's
7 time to give back to South Carolina State University.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: Very good, thank you sir. I'll hand it
9 over to Ms. Webb, who has a few questions for you and then
10 we'll get into questions from the Commission.

11 MR. SELLERS - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

12 **Q. Thank you Mr. Chairman. Mr. Sellers, can you**
13 **please state your current address?**

14 A. Yes, it's 112 Still Meadow Lane in Easley, South
15 Carolina.

16 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**
17 **your 4% property tax?**

18 A. Gladly.

19 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
20 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

21 A. None.

22 **Q. And do you understand the obligations and**
23 **responsibilities of serving on a public**
24 **institution's board of trustees?**

25 A. I do.

1 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
2 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
3 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
4 after the Commission's report has been released?

5 A. I do.

6 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
7 contact members of the General Assembly on your
8 behalf or are you aware of anyone attempting to
9 intervene in this process on your behalf?

10 A. I do not.

11 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
12 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
13 any changes that might occur that would affect
14 your application and overall eligibility for
15 serving on a college Board?

16 A. I do.

17 Q. Thank you, Mr. Sellers. And Mr. Chairman, I have
18 no further questions.

19 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Macey. Before we get
20 started, let me just say thank you for your service the
21 United States military and it's very nice, I might add,
22 that the last two folks not only had military service but
23 were United States Army. Hooah.

24 MR. SELLERS: Hooah.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, are there any questions?

1 Senator.

2 MR. SELLERS - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

3 Q. Mr. Chairman, Reverend Sellers, thanks for being
4 here.

5 A. Thank you, Senator.

6 Q. One of the questions that Ms. Webb just asked you
7 was if you're familiar with the duties and
8 obligations of a person who serves on a board,
9 and you answered yes. What does that mean to
10 you?

11 A. What it means is that a board provides governance
12 whether it's for this year, whether it's putting
13 a strategy in place, a strategic plan in place
14 for a president and CEO to follow and that we are
15 active participants in policymaking for an
16 organization.

17 Q. What does that mean to be an active participant
18 in policymaking?

19 A. That you have to be present. You have to have an
20 understanding of what's happening throughout the
21 organization itself.

22 Q. Okay, are you -- and I realize you're not an
23 incumbent, you're seeking the position that's
24 vacant. Are you familiar with the university's
25 financial position?

1 A. I think the university personally is in a good
2 financial position because Moody says, one of the
3 highest ratings. Moody says that we're in a good
4 financial position right now.

5 **Q. Okay, you know what the cash flow is?**

6 A. I think if I'm gonna try to answer this, I'm not
7 particularly sure, but if it was 200 and
8 something unrestricted funds.

9 **Q. Okay. And look, I'm not expecting you to be**
10 **familiar with all the details because you're not**
11 **there.**

12 A. Right.

13 **Q. But I do think that's an important part of the,**
14 **as a board member, being somewhat familiar with**
15 **those numbers and asking questions about those**
16 **things. The Chief Justice and I just had a**
17 **conversation about graduation rates. Are you**
18 **familiar with the graduation rates at the**
19 **university?**

20 A. Somewhat I am.

21 **Q. I think the Chief indicated a four-year**
22 **graduation rate of around 15 percent. I think**
23 **the six-year graduation rates tell you about 10**
24 **percentage points higher than that. Does that**
25 **sound about accurate to you?**

1 A. It sounds about accurate. You know, from my
2 understanding, I think a six-year rate is about
3 29 percent. Four-year rate ranges from, I think,
4 16 to 20 percent.

5 **Q. Okay. Is that adequate?**

6 A. Is that adequate? I personally feel that we can
7 do better. I personally feel we should do
8 better. As a graduate of South Carolina State,
9 we want our kids, a good graduation rate and high
10 graduation rate is attractive to people coming to
11 our universities, good quality students coming to
12 our university. And I think when we show that we
13 have a great graduation rate, right, it shows
14 that what we say in our values for South Carolina
15 State University, if you look at our strategic
16 plan, it says that we value accountability and we
17 want to show accountability.

18 **Q. You think that's happening now at the university?**

19 A. I do think that's happening in our university. I
20 do think --

21 **Q. You think 15 percent to 30 percent graduation**
22 **rate suggests accountability?**

23 A. When I think it's happening. I think it's moving
24 towards that that we're trying to do better. And
25 I think we can do better. But we can't -- we can

1 do better with everybody playing their part. Of
2 course, the university, of course, our president,
3 of course, our Board of Trustees, and of course,
4 you all the legislators, right?

5 **Q. No question there's a role here. Absolutely.**
6 **What do you think the Board's role is -- as a**
7 **board member, what would be your role in trying**
8 **to improve graduation rates?**

9 A. You know, retention is important to me. You know
10 retention is important to me, right. I have a
11 thing that says retention before expansion
12 sometimes, right? We continue to work on our
13 expansion, we continue to work on our
14 infrastructure, especially housing. Housing
15 plays a big deal in kids coming to your
16 university. When you see all housing, our
17 laboratories, the things that other universities
18 may have that's attractive to those -- to those
19 young people when they come to visit our
20 university and our families. Like, hey, you got
21 great dorms, you got a great basketball, football
22 stadium. That's attractive to people that want
23 to come and stay.

24 **Q. Yeah. Well, from my perspective, I hope if**
25 **you're successful in your pursuit of this**

1 position. My hope is that you will focus on that
2 as a Board member, on ensuring that the young men
3 and women who come to that university and expend
4 a significant amount of money in order to pursue
5 an education there, that they do have the
6 experience that you had, and that they are --
7 that they do have the opportunities to pursue the
8 course work for the majors that are meaningful.
9 And that they can do it in a reasonable amount of
10 time. Otherwise, I think we're doing a real
11 disservice to those young men and women if we're
12 only graduating 25%, 30% in a period of six
13 years. So I would hope that if you're successful
14 in this effort, that you will think about that as
15 a board member and try to pursue policies that
16 will help improve that, because it's going to
17 help the children, young men and women.

18 A. Right.

19 Q. The last question I wanted to ask you about is
20 safety. What do you think the Board's role is in
21 ensuring that the young men and women who come
22 there are safe, that the campus is safe from
23 outside events that have impacted the
24 university's campus?

25 A. Well, safety is important. If you lived in

1 Orangeburg for a long time, I was a student there
2 at South Carolina State. I came there a lot.
3 And you know, some of that was happening way back
4 then, right. But we've been able to maintain
5 that over the years. A little bit more now
6 that's happening across South Carolina State.
7 Again, you heard earlier that it's not us, you
8 know. It's not South Carolina State University
9 students, it's from outside.

10 **Q. Parents aren't going to want to send their kids**
11 **there if you have people getting shot.**

12 A. Right. What's important is that we make sure
13 that we answer the call to what's happening.
14 Without a shadow of a doubt that we have to
15 probably put that as some of our top priorities -
16 - our top priority to when people come in and
17 security-wise. I'm not a security person, to say
18 the least, right? But however, I do understand
19 when I come through that gate, and when we come
20 through the gate, we want to ensure that when the
21 proper checks are happening, all at the same
22 time, still believing that we still are an open
23 public institution.

24 **Q. Thank you, sir.**

25 A. You're welcome.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator.

2 MR. SELLERS - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

3 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Pastor
4 Sellers, for being here and offering yourself.
5 Just, I'm not going to reiterate, I think the
6 Senator from Edgefield covered a lot of what I
7 wanted to talk about. But let me ask you, South
8 Carolina State has a great president and first
9 lady. I'm very impressed, and of course, they're
10 both State grads as well, so I think that goes to
11 the strength of the alumni coming in and really
12 trying to make sure that the school addresses the
13 concerns and move forward. Tell me about, I
14 guess, your alumni participation and the thoughts
15 of having the alumni maybe being able to be a
16 part of the addressing the needs of the
17 university and moving forward.

18 A. Yes, so I'm a life member of Alumni Association.
19 I'm a member of the Greenville chapter, as well
20 as my wife, a member of the Charlotte chapter.
21 We've always participated ever since we graduated
22 from college. I think it's highly important
23 because a lot of our alumni have the talents and
24 the skills, right, to give back to our
25 university, help our university become even

1 better than what it is now. And we have to think
2 that we are ambassadors. Each one of us who
3 graduated from South Carolina State University,
4 we are the first ambassadors of our university,
5 of who we are.

6 **Q. So as a board member, do you believe that it**
7 **would be, if you were successful, is that part of**
8 **the role of the Board to try and increase that**
9 **alumni giving, alumni support?**

10 A. Yes, yes, wholeheartedly. You know, I just
11 turned 50, right. And you know, younger alumni -
12 - I probably align more with more young alumni
13 across generations because I can look and hang
14 out with 65-year-old givers, but then we need
15 those 24, 25, 23, 30-year-old givers too. Where
16 we can be able to have those conversations and
17 align ourselves generationally with each other.
18 So I think it's important that the Board have
19 folks who, generationally, that can talk to other
20 alumni to be able to support.

21 **Q. And although I think Dr. Conyers is doing an**
22 **amazing job as a board member, how do you see**
23 **your role in interacting with the president? Is**
24 **it there to challenge him? How would you address**
25 **situations where you might not, you might have a**

1 **different perspective than the president?**

2 A. Right, because I've served on other Boards, you
3 know, I see myself as a compass and a clarity and
4 direction. So you provide the plan to the
5 president and he drives the plan and put it in,
6 implements it in place. And we like it, we're
7 advisors, right. Because if something goes
8 wrong, we can't say and -- you know, honestly pat
9 him on the back and we have to address it
10 straight up. I deal with conflict resolution. I
11 like to think I'm good at it because I pastor the
12 church, right? And so I don't hesitate to
13 address conflict.

14 **Q. Thank you so much.**

15 A. You're welcome.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry about that. Is there a motion
17 for a favorable report?

18 SENATOR DEVINE: Motion.

19 SENATOR MASSEY: Second.

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion and a second. All
21 those in favor, raise your right hand.

22 (All hands are raised.)

23 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? Thank you, sir.

24 Mr. SELLERS: Thank you very much.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, next up we have Douglas

1 Twitty. Make the acknowledgment here, another army man.

2 Lead the way. Good afternoon, sir.

3 DOUGLAS M. TWITTY:

4 MR. TWITTY: Good afternoon.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: If you please raise your right hand and
6 let us swear you in, please. Do you swear to tell the
7 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help
8 you God?

9 MR. TWITTY: I do.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. Mr. Twitty, we're
11 going to hand that over. If you'd like to make a brief
12 opening statement and then we'll hand it over to Ms. Webb
13 for a few opening questions as well.

14 MR. TWITTY: Yes, sir. My name is Douglas Twitty.
15 I'm running for South Carolina State At-Large Seat 12. And
16 first of all, I'll just give you a little bit of background
17 about myself. I am a 1995 graduate from South Carolina
18 State. I'm also a 2006 MBA graduate from Webster
19 University. I'm a retired lieutenant colonel. I have been
20 deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan, where I
21 was awarded the Bronze Star. I was selected by the army to
22 participate in training with industry program, where I
23 worked with Coca-Cola for a year, where I took their best
24 business practice and brought it back to the military. I'm
25 currently a business owner. I have multiple businesses. I

1 have a home health care agency, where I have over 20
2 employees. I also have a general construction company,
3 where I have up-fitted over 500 apartment units within the
4 last six years. I'm married with three kids. My wife,
5 she's been working with CVS for over 30 years. She's a
6 pharmacist supervisor. My kids, my two oldest kids, they
7 are students at the University of South Carolina. And my
8 youngest daughter, she graduated this year, and she will be
9 a student at University of South Carolina in June. And all
10 three of my kids are followed in my wife's footsteps. She
11 is an alumni of USC. So saying that out loud, you probably
12 know who runs my household. But the reason that I want to
13 be on the board for South Carolina State is because all my
14 accomplishments are owed to South Carolina State. I was
15 raised by a single mom, first generation to ever go to
16 college, and I had no aspiration to go to college. But my
17 ROTC instructor, my freshman, my senior year, asked me a
18 question that no one ever asked me in my life. Doug, what
19 are you going to do with your life? And at that time, I
20 didn't know. I was good with just being a manager and
21 working in Lancaster. But at that day, he called South
22 Carolina State because he was alumni, and he saw something
23 in me that I didn't see in myself. The -- I took the SAT
24 the last day it was given, and I got accepted to South
25 Carolina State. And when I got to South Carolina State, I

1 had to take all remedial classes because I didn't prepare
2 myself when I was in high school. And so South Carolina
3 State invested the time and resources in me. And now that
4 I'm retired and I have successful business, now I want to
5 give back my time and resources to South Carolina State and
6 invest in the students the way South Carolina State
7 invested in me.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. Ms. Webb.

9 MR. TWITTY - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

10 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Twitty, can you**
11 **please state your current address?**

12 A. Yeah, 3011 Dream Catcher Circle, Fort Mill, South
13 Carolina 29715.

14 **Q. Thank you. And is this where you pay your 4%**
15 **property tax?**

16 A. I do not pay four percent. I'm exempt.

17 **Q. This would be your primary residence, that**
18 **address that you just stated on the record, you**
19 **would be able to show proof of -- if the**
20 **Commission were to ask for a water bill or voter**
21 **registration, that would show that that would be**
22 **your primary residence?**

23 A. That's correct.

24 **Q. Okay, thank you. And do you currently serve on**
25 **any local or state board, commission, committee**

1 or elected office?

2 A. No.

3 Q. And do you understand the obligations and
4 responsibilities of serving on a public
5 institution's board of trustees?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
8 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
9 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
10 after the Commission's report has been released?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
13 contact members of the General Assembly on your
14 behalf or are you aware of anyone attempting to
15 intervene in this process on your behalf?

16 A. No, no.

17 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
18 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
19 any changes that might occur that would affect
20 your application and overall eligibility for
21 serving on a college Board?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Thank you, Mr. Twitty. And Mr. Chairman. I have
24 no further questions.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions for Mr. Twitty?

1 SENATOR MASSEY: Mr. Chairman.

2 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator Massey.

3 MR. TWITTY - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

4 **Q. Mr. Twitty, thanks for being here. Similar to**
5 **questions I've asked the candidates who preceded**
6 **you, what are your thoughts on the Board's role**
7 **in trying to improve graduation rates for the**
8 **students?**

9 A. So I think it's actually a double-edged sword
10 because South Carolina State's strength is
11 first-generation students, but first-generation
12 students that stays in South Carolina tends to
13 live in rural areas, which is very, very poor.
14 And then those are the same individuals that are
15 not prepared for college. So those are the
16 individuals that we're focusing on. And those
17 are the reason that our graduation rate and
18 retention is somewhat pretty low.

19 **Q. Well, if that's the case, if those are the people**
20 **that the university is trying to attract, and I**
21 **think that's noble. If that's the target**
22 **audience, shouldn't the university be making even**
23 **more of an effort to ensure that those people are**
24 **graduates so then they could break the cycle?**

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. We can't just bring those kids into the
2 university, take thousands of dollars from them,
3 and then have them not get a degree, right?

4 A. Well, I think the intent is to graduate these
5 students.

6 Q. I understand the intent, but the results are 15%,
7 25%. How can the Board help to improve that?

8 A. Well, the -- and I know it's been mentioned
9 several times. There's things that we've got to
10 get in place, the infrastructure. Because if
11 we're not going to target those students, we got
12 to target the A and B students. And that's kind
13 of hard for South Carolina State because the --
14 where's South Carolina State at? It's in
15 Orangeburg, South Carolina. The biggest thing
16 going on is South Carolina State. And so you
17 don't have too much to attract the A and B
18 students, except for if you got the -- if the
19 institution, the university, going to be the sole
20 source of attracting those A and B students. So
21 housing, definitely, adequate housing, making
22 sure that you have the resources on campus that
23 are going to attract different types of students.
24 And just -- and then you got to make sure you got
25 the faculty to support that.

1 Q. Well, I -- Harry Truman once said that the C
2 students run the world. And I would hope that
3 the university would not just assume that just
4 because you come in with a C average that you're
5 going to be a failure in life. And then I would
6 hope that we would put the -- put whatever
7 resources we need into ensuring that those
8 children are getting the college education to
9 help them. You indicated that when you came in,
10 you needed some remedial course work. I hope
11 that's still available to children if they -- and
12 I keep saying children, and I recognize these are
13 probably -- that's probably not an appropriate
14 term. We're probably talking about young men and
15 women at this point. But I would hope that there
16 would be those same types of opportunities
17 available to the young men and women who come to
18 state, regardless of what their class rank was or
19 whatever. If they're eligible to be admitted, if
20 they are admitted, I would hope that the
21 university provides them with the opportunities
22 to be successful there. And I would hope that
23 they keep that as a focus. Can you give me your
24 thoughts on what can be done to help make the
25 campus a more secure environment for the

1 **students?**

2 A. Yes, sir. And the incident that happened about
3 two, three weeks ago, the university took action.
4 They put some security perimeter in place, but
5 those are operational. It needs to be a kind of a
6 deep dive into actually root cause. And I think
7 the policy and procedures need to be looked at
8 within the security department. Because over
9 time, you know, like any organization, if you run
10 an organization and year to year, you do the same
11 things and you don't go back and refine your
12 policy and procedures. They get outdated. And
13 so I think that the Board or a third party needs
14 to come and look at policy and procedures and
15 hold the leadership accountable.

16 **Q. That's fair. And you know, the incident that**
17 **happened just a few weeks ago was not isolated.**
18 **There was an incident last year, I believe.**

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 **Q. Where there was some fatalities on the campus**
21 **from a shooting. And I think it was an athletic**
22 **event.**

23 A. It was homecoming.

24 **Q. But there have been other incidents as well. And**
25 **I think we have an obligation, especially to the**

1 students, but to anyone who comes onto the campus
2 to make sure that they are arriving at a safe
3 environment. And I would hope that the Board of
4 Trustees would take that seriously as well and
5 ensure some accountability with there so that
6 parents feel comfortable sending their children
7 there. And that other members of South Carolina,
8 or the alumni base, feel comfortable coming back
9 to the football game, that they're going to be
10 safe. Thank you, sir.

11 MR. TWITTY - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

12 Q. Hey, Mr. Twitty, good to see you. Just same as I
13 have the other two candidates. As far as alumni,
14 just can you just tell us your perspective on the
15 alumni's role, not just as an ambassador of the
16 organization, but to really be part of a partner
17 with the school on success?

18 A. Yeah, I'm also a lifetime alumni member as well.
19 And I think that the alumni need to be more
20 engaged with donation. And I know that some
21 alumni chapters, they are putting together a plan
22 to donate towards scholarships. But I think with
23 any alumni, it needs to be some type of incentive
24 program for the alumni to give back. If I'm just
25 giving back and there's no recognition, I'm going

1 to stop donating. Because I want to feel
2 appreciated that if I'm giving \$5, \$20, whatever
3 the amount is, I want to feel appreciated that my
4 contribution means something. So one initiative
5 could be that you set up something like a
6 subscription program, just like a gym membership,
7 where alumni pays \$100 a month. And based off
8 that \$100 a month, there's an incentive where the
9 alumni may get free parking, or free game pass,
10 or season pass, or whatever it may be based off
11 the amount of the donation. So I think there can
12 be a lot from the university that we can do to
13 kind of edge that on. But we just got to make it
14 happen. Because we have over 30,000 alumni. And
15 I really believe that we can get at least 10,000
16 alumni to donate at a minimum of 50 to \$100 a
17 month.

18 MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Twitty, let me just say a couple of
19 things here. And I'm not sure that there's a question
20 that's going to arise here, but there may. But I do want
21 to take the opportunity. Your story is a fantastic one
22 about how you got to South Carolina State, what you found
23 yourself ill-prepared for, the assistance that you received
24 there, the education that you got, and the life that you
25 built afterwards. I think the concern that we have, and

1 that we want to continue to express -- and I also think
2 it's wonderful that other members of your Board are here
3 also to hear this, and not just the folks that are being
4 screened to join the Board. I think the concern is to put
5 it differently, when you were at South Carolina State, my
6 guess is, at the end of your tenure there, you didn't look
7 around and see where 8 out of every 10 of your fellow
8 students around you weren't graduating with you. And
9 that's what's happening right now at South Carolina State.
10 And I understand that there are a myriad of reasons why
11 people struggle and don't graduate. But we want this
12 university to succeed, and we want it to produce quality
13 students that are going to come back and join the ranks of
14 -- of folks contributing every day in South Carolina,
15 making it the great state that it is. You know, I was here
16 when I first joined the General Assembly in 2012-2013.
17 South Carolina State was in rough shape, very rough shape.
18 And if you probably remember, there were real discussions
19 over in both of these buildings about whether or not South
20 Carolina State should be kept open. And to the alumni's
21 credit and to the supporters' credit, things turned around
22 at South Carolina State. And they did -- you all did a
23 great job of righting the ship. We just don't want to see
24 it go back in the other direction. That's why I think you
25 hear a lot of concerns from all the folks being questioned

1 today about that graduation rate, particularly. So, again,
2 no question at the end. Just wanted to make sure that you
3 were aware that we appreciate your pathway to get here and
4 what the university is doing. And we hope it will continue
5 to do great things.

6 MR. TWITTY: Yes, sir. And I look at my story, not a
7 South Carolina State story, America's story.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right. Luckily, your story is
9 repeated a lot. And you need to tell that story. And
10 other folks need to tell their stories. So, thank you.
11 Any other questions? Hearing none, is there a motion?

12 SENATOR DEVINE: So moved.

13 SENATOR MASSEY: Second.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion and a second. Any
15 further discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor,
16 raise your right hand. Anybody opposed? Thank you, sir.

17 MR. TWITTY: All right, thank you.

18 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, I think that wraps up South
19 Carolina State University. We move now to the University
20 of South Carolina, James Strom Thurmond. Good afternoon,
21 sir.

22 UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA:

23 JAMES STROM THURMOND, JR.:

24 MR. THURMOND: Good afternoon.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: If you don't mind, we'll swear you in

1 before we get started here. You'll raise your right hand
2 and repeat after me. Do you swear to tell the truth, the
3 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

4 MR. THURMOND: I do.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. We'll turn it over to
6 you for any opening remarks you might have, and then turn
7 it over to Ms. Webb for some opening questions.

8 MR. THURMOND: Thank you very much, and members of the
9 Commission, good afternoon, and thank you for this
10 opportunity to promote my qualifications for this important
11 position. I'm seeking this position because I have the
12 depth and breadth of experience, having spent the last 28
13 years in law, government, business, and public service to
14 effectively assist in governing my alma mater, the
15 University of South Carolina, and our state's flagship
16 university.

17 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

18 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Thurmond, can
19 you please state your current address?

20 A. 4120 Banks Mill Road, Aiken, South Carolina.

21 Q. Thank you, and is this the address where you pay
22 your 4% property tax?

23 A. It is.

24 Q. And is this the address within the judicial
25 circuit to which you have applied?

1 A. It is.

2 Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state
3 Board, commission, committee, or elected office
4 other than the University of South Carolina
5 Board?

6 A. I do not.

7 Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations
8 and responsibilities of serving on a public
9 institution's board of trustees?

10 A. I do.

11 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
12 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
13 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
14 after the Commission's report has been released?

15 A. I am.

16 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
17 contact members of the General Assembly on your
18 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
19 intervene in this process on your behalf?

20 A. I have not.

21 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
22 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
23 any changes that might occur that would affect
24 your application and overall eligibility for
25 serving on a college board?

1 A. I do.

2 Q. Thank you, Mr. Thurmond. And Mr. Chairman, I
3 have no further questions.

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Macey. Questions for Mr.
5 Thurmond?

6 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

7 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

8 Q. Mr. Thurmond, thank you for being here today. I
9 want to have somewhat of a just philosophical
10 question with you about universities in general,
11 but specifically the University of South
12 Carolina. There are two growing trends that I've
13 seen for universities. Either universities have
14 decided to stay small, intentionally, and small
15 being 22,000 to maybe 30,000 students, or grow
16 very large, 55,000, 65,000, 75,000 students.
17 They're two totally different methods, and both
18 of them work depending on what university you're
19 at. What do you believe is the -- of those two,
20 and USC is showing a propensity to go one way, is
21 that the way to do it? Is it to grow, and
22 continue to grow, and get larger and larger, and
23 bring in more students? Or would the university
24 be better off by perhaps raising academic
25 standards and bringing in less students, and

1 **keeping the school smaller? I'm just curious**
2 **your thoughts on that.**

3 A. I think we touch more South Carolinians with the
4 current model. We are currently approaching
5 60,000 students at eight campuses and 20
6 locations, and there's some new sloganeering that
7 we're just not the University of South Carolina,
8 that we're the university for South Carolina,
9 because we have such a statewide footprint. I
10 think that we can be bigger and better, but I
11 think we need to make sure that we are remaining
12 student-centered, student-focused, and that the
13 decisions for this really large organization are
14 all being made through that lens.

15 **Q. Well, I noted in your questionnaire, you said one**
16 **of the biggest potential weaknesses for USC is**
17 **its sheer size. What types of things, you've**
18 **been on the Board six months now. And what kind**
19 **of conversations do you all have internally about**
20 **how to manage that size, and how to make sure**
21 **that you are student-oriented, and that the**
22 **students always come in first?**

23 A. Sure, those conversations take place regularly,
24 both in the board room and with staff. It's a
25 large organization. It's 60,000 students,

1 12-15,000 employees, eight campuses and 20
2 locations, a \$2 billion annual budget. And we
3 just need to be ever mindful that this is about
4 the student and about the student experience. I
5 want kids to graduate -- young adults to graduate
6 in four years at a reasonable price, reasonable,
7 and get the best job they can possibly get in
8 South Carolina. And I also want them to leave
9 USC as a good citizen. I do think that the
10 Carolinian Creed means something, and I want
11 students to leave the university treating other
12 people how they would like to be treated.

13 **Q. Just curious, in the six months that you've**
14 **served on the Board, how often have you visited**
15 **one of the campuses?**

16 A. Senator, I'm glad you asked that question. I was
17 appointed September 4th of 2025. So I've been
18 here right at six months. And in that time, I
19 have either attended or participated in 31 events
20 at the university. In my official capacity as a
21 trustee, that is excluding athletic events. And
22 just to give you a sampling of them, I attended
23 the State of the University Address, Veterans Day
24 Breakfast, USC Aiken Commencement, USC
25 Commencement, Impacted Leadership Awards at USC

1 Aiken, Martin Luther King Breakfast in Columbia,
2 House Ways and Means Higher Education
3 Subcommittee, and Carolina Day at the Statehouse.
4 I've been in Columbia a lot, so much so that the
5 president recently asked me if I needed a dorm
6 room.

7 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Thurmond.**

8 A. Thank you.

9 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator from Richland.

10 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

11 **Q. Good to see you, Mr. Thurmond. Thank you. And**
12 **this is probably not fair for you because I**
13 **probably should have asked this to some of the**
14 **other candidates. But this is top of mind for me**
15 **because I'm in Columbia, and it's what I do, and**
16 **we just had a recent incident here in Columbia**
17 **with a USC student that had some mental health**
18 **challenges. So kind of wanted to know from the**
19 **Board's perspective, we've got a generation of**
20 **kids who've gone through COVID and social media,**
21 **and so the challenges for young people and their**
22 **mental health seem to be a lot greater than it**
23 **was when you and I were going through college.**
24 **And so just kind of wonder what is the thought**
25 **process of the Board. And I know you all are in**

1 **the minutiae of the day-to-day, but I do think**
2 **that that's a major challenge for universities,**
3 **especially a university of your size. So is that**
4 **a conversation that the Board has and how the**
5 **university is responding to the students' needs**
6 **all over, but especially in mental health?**

7 A. Yes, Senator. In our most recent Board meeting,
8 we had some materials prepared by staff at the
9 university specifically relating to mental health
10 counseling services available at the university
11 and the frequency that those services were being
12 used. I've spent much of my career as a state
13 and federal prosecutor, and as good as our law
14 is, it really is not well equipped to deal with
15 mental health problems or children for that
16 matter, but I think it's a challenge here. I
17 think the university is aware of it. I think
18 there are different stresses on young people than
19 there were when I was coming along. And I think
20 mental health issues and mental health crises are
21 real, and that we need to have the resources to
22 offer that to those students when they need it.

23 **Q. Do you feel like y'all are addressing those**
24 **resources now? I guess that's my question.**

25 A. I'm sorry, what was the question?

1 Q. Do you feel like that, I know you said you had a
2 recent conversation or presentation, but do you
3 feel like you all are addressing those resources,
4 or are there things that the State needs to be
5 aware of regarding your ability to address the
6 needs of the students?

7 A. Well, everything that is done at the university
8 can be done better. I mean, everything from top
9 to bottom. But I think the current level of
10 service is being provided, but I think it's just
11 something that needs to continue, continuously be
12 monitored for any changes or trends with the
13 student body.

14 Q. And then my last focus, I guess, for questioning
15 is, the university is growing, continues to grow.
16 It was always a challenge with me on the city
17 level as the university continues to grow into
18 neighborhoods and expand the footprint. And so
19 what is your perspective as far as the Board on
20 the growth of the university and the need to
21 continue to expand the footprint, or looking at
22 ways to be more efficient in making sure that
23 you're not growing too much and taking over areas
24 that traditionally are more residential or even
25 could be commercial, but not taking off the tax

1 **rolls?**

2 A. Right, so, yes, ma'am, I think there are unique
3 challenges in having a university this size in
4 the middle of a large city without kind of
5 defined campus boundaries, like other places in
6 the state. I think housing is an issue. I think
7 there's several housing projects in the works
8 right now. But the university is growing and
9 more students are coming. More students from out
10 of state are coming, and it's an issue and a
11 challenge that is certainly on the radar and
12 being addressed by the Board.

13 **Q. Thank you.**

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose.

15 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

16 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Thurmond, I had a**
17 **question. What is the Board doing, what**
18 **conversations are you having about having more**
19 **in-state students, or what discussions are we**
20 **having pertaining to that?**

21 A. Sure.

22 **Q. Are you sure we're educating as many South**
23 **Carolinians as possible?**

24 A. So, I was with President Amiridis on the 29th
25 when he presented before the House Ways and

1 Higher Education Subcommittee, and he was asked
2 the exact question. And, you know, perception is
3 reality, but I think the perception is that
4 out-of-state students are getting seats for the
5 sons and daughters of South Carolinians. And,
6 Representative Rose, I don't think that's exactly
7 accurate. If you look at the snapshot from the
8 2025, fall of 2025, there are 60,000
9 applications. 15,000 of those were South
10 Carolina residents. 75 percent of those, or
11 11,250, were directly admitted. Another 15
12 percent, or 2,250, entered the bridge program.
13 So that was basically a 90 percent opportunity
14 rate to attend the University of South Carolina.
15 And that was -- so 13,500 South Carolinians were
16 admitted to the University of South Carolina, and
17 of that, 4,120 of them matriculated. So, I mean,
18 if a South Carolina student meets the academic
19 requirements, I mean, there is a place for them
20 here. Absolutely.

21 **Q. Well, I can tell you South Carolina is a very hot**
22 **institution right now because it seems to be, as**
23 **I talked to constituents and friends, a very**
24 **difficult place to get into. I had a constituent**
25 **reach out to me, and their child had been**

1 admitted to Wofford, admitted to Clemson, and had
2 been wait-listed at Carolina. And so, I mean,
3 obviously, that's a good thing that we're hot. I
4 just want to make sure that we're educating South
5 Carolinians. We want South Carolinians to be
6 Gamecocks and, you know, representing the campus
7 at USC. I must say a lot of times driving around
8 Columbia I do see a lot of out-of-state parking,
9 you know, cars, license tags, and you see a lot
10 of different states. And so -- but I appreciate
11 your answer. I have one other question. Driving
12 around Columbia, and Senator Devine talked about
13 this, the footprint of the university seems to be
14 growing. And living essentially on the campus of
15 USC, being a double alumnus myself, I always
16 cringe, particularly when I get to Assembly
17 Street. There's kids that are constantly,
18 especially when classes seem to be letting out,
19 walking across that major thoroughfare. And what
20 discussions, if any, is the university having
21 with pedestrian safety? We're talking about the
22 safety of children or these kids that are going
23 to different classes as the campus grows into the
24 city.

25 A. So, thank you. I'll say an issue that's very

1 personal to me.

2 **Q. Yes, sir.**

3 A. My sister was killed by a drunk driver crossing
4 the street while student at the University of
5 South Carolina. It is an issue. The Board is
6 aware of it. The administration is aware of it.
7 They are always looking at ways to safely get
8 students across the street. I know that the
9 pedestrian bridge that was built several years
10 ago over by fraternity row, has taken a lot of
11 pressure off of students crossing the street. I
12 think when new housing is coming along, that's a
13 concern as well, as far as foot traffic flow.
14 It's just a public safety reality of being in the
15 middle of a big city, an old city, that it's all
16 laid out on the grid.

17 **Q. Well, I appreciate your answer on that. I'd love**
18 **for there to continue to be discussions on**
19 **pedestrian safety. I am proud to say that this**
20 **legislature has put a lot of money, millions of**
21 **dollars in the last few years, into the**
22 **pedestrian safety projects here in Columbia. The**
23 **Harden Street project, in five points, this**
24 **legislature and the DOT helped make happen. It**
25 **was \$12,000,000. Obviously, we have the South**

1 Main project, which was completed, it was
2 \$27,000,000. And there's going to be a project
3 coming forth that's going to put a 10-foot-wide
4 sidewalk around the fairgrounds. I'm always
5 amazed as I'm leaving Williams-Brice Stadium,
6 there's no sidewalks and things of that nature.
7 We're oftentimes looking at DOT. And I know
8 money doesn't grow on trees, but certainly, if we
9 can make projects work and partner with the
10 university at some level for the safety of the
11 kids, because I know you guys can't -- I don't
12 believe you can put money towards state projects
13 or state roads, but you do have some discretion
14 if it's for safety. But there's a lot of good
15 things happening, and I do want to commend you
16 and the current Board as well, because the
17 university seems to be able to up and up in a
18 very desirable place, and so great things are
19 happening. So that's all I want to say.

20 A. Thank you. It's a very, very exciting time.

21 SENATOR MASSEY: Mr. Chairman.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator.

23 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

24 Q. Solicitor, good to see you. To follow up on
25 Representative Rose's questions, I heard you say

1 that there were 13,500 South Carolina students
2 that were admitted for the 2025 fall class. What
3 was the breakdown of non-resident versus
4 residents in that class?

5 A. So in that class, 52.7 percent South Carolina
6 residents.

7 Q. Okay. So it's 47.3 percent non-resident?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Because what, just a few years ago, five or six
10 years ago, it seemed like there was a freshman
11 class that was a majority non-resident class. I
12 don't know if you remember that.

13 A. I don't, sir.

14 Q. It got a lot of attention up here when that
15 happened. Are there conversations at the Board
16 level about that? And I understand what you're
17 saying, that we're going to admit any qualified
18 South Carolina student, but how many
19 non-residents are enough? What should that be?
20 Do you have a thought on that? Is 52 percent --
21 is 52 percent sufficient? I mean, is that okay?

22 A. Yeah, I always thought just as a general
23 principle, for some reason, like 60/40 felt
24 right. But I don't think there's a set
25 percentage every year. It could be different

1 next year based on the needs of the university.
2 I know we need the out-of-state tuition revenue
3 to continue to put downward pressure on in-state
4 tuition. But I don't know that there is a sweet
5 spot, so to speak. But, you know, again,
6 Senator, I think this is largely optics. Because
7 if you are a South Carolina student and you meet
8 the admission requirements, there's going to be a
9 seat for you at the University of South Carolina.

10 **Q. And I appreciate that. However, and look, I**
11 **don't think that the state contributions for**
12 **operations are where they should be. And I say**
13 **that, and I'm cheap. But having said that,**
14 **there's a lot of state money, state taxpayer**
15 **money, that goes to the University of South**
16 **Carolina and its satellite campuses. If half the**
17 **student body is non-resident, I think there's got**
18 **to be questions, concerns here in this body about**
19 **whether or how much state taxpayer dollars do we**
20 **put into something that is benefitting half of it**
21 **is for non-residents, right? I mean, I**
22 **understand the point that we're going to accept**
23 **any qualified South Carolina student. I get**
24 **that. But it does seem to me, especially for the**
25 **flagship. I mean, you know, we had on Monday, we**

1 were here, and we had nearly the entire Board
2 from Coastal Carolina. And we got on them pretty
3 good, because they're 60/40 non-resident. I view
4 USC a little bit differently, because it's the
5 flagship. And so I want to -- I get the point of
6 accepting all the South Carolina qualified
7 students. But I also wonder, you know, at some
8 point, it seems like the non-resident focus
9 becomes too much, considering the amount of
10 investment that taxpayers make to the university.
11 And it's not just to the undergraduate campus,
12 but what we've done for the medical school, and
13 what we've done for other things. I mean, I do
14 have concerns about that. And I would hope that
15 the Board would talk about that as well, that not
16 just we're going to admit every South Carolinian
17 who's qualified, but also, like, how many
18 non-residents is enough? And I understand the
19 financial pressures. And that's, you know, you
20 could always give that back right back to me and
21 say, well, if the legislature wants to invest
22 more money in it, we don't have to accept as many
23 non-resident students. And I -- fair point. But
24 that is a concern that I have, especially if the
25 new moniker is the University for South Carolina.

1 I think it ought to be for South Carolina, you
2 know. And I mean, you're -- I would be okay
3 with the -- just the general thought that you've
4 put out there, 60/40. You know, North Carolina
5 and Georgia, I mean, they're in the 80s by state
6 law. And, and maybe their state contributions
7 are higher than what South Carolina state
8 contributions are. But they're doing pretty well
9 with, with a higher in-state -- in-state
10 percentage.

11 A. Senator, I would add that system-wide, 61.4%
12 South Carolina residents. And then with some of
13 our sister campuses, South Carolina residents
14 represent as much as 94% of the student body.
15 But I understand your point and position.

16 Q. And that's what you expect, right? I mean, the,
17 the sister campuses are going to be more South
18 Carolina-based, I would expect. Aiken probably
19 gets a little bit more out of Georgia because of
20 tuition agreements with the state of Georgia. I
21 don't know if Lancaster has that same kind of
22 thing with North Carolina. But I -- I take that
23 point. Do you have any thoughts on the
24 university system-wide, its ability to graduate
25 students in a timely manner on a four-year or a

1 **six-year scale? Do you have any thoughts on**
2 **that?**

3 A. Well, I want students to graduate in four years.
4 And again, there is always --

5 **Q. Especially as a parent, right?**

6 A. Especially as a parent. I've got one graduating
7 senior from college now and a graduating senior
8 from high school who is actually, will be
9 attending the University of South Carolina in the
10 fall, which I'm very happy about. So yes, you
11 know, the --

12 **Q. You're having flashbacks to your father here,**
13 **aren't you?**

14 A. Sir?

15 **Q. You said you're having flashbacks to the**
16 **conversations that your father had with you.**

17 A. Exactly.

18 **Q. It's a fun story, but yeah, another time.**

19 A. So, yes, sir. So, you know, the four-year
20 graduation rate at the Columbia campus right now
21 is right at 70% and 79% for six years. I think
22 that's one of the reasons for this exploration to
23 the Commission for Higher Public Education is a
24 model that's a little more focused on student
25 outcomes and some pressure to graduate students

1 in four years.

2 **Q. Okay. I mean, it looks like, you know, from the**
3 **numbers that we have, the Columbia campus's**
4 **graduation numbers over six years are among the**
5 **highest in the state. Some of the satellites are**
6 **much lower than that, but I assume you have a lot**
7 **of transfers.**

8 A. A lot of transfers, and if you took, you know,
9 Aiken, for example, at 23.2%, you know, one could
10 think, well, that's a, you know, a 77% fail rate,
11 but I think it's a little more nuanced than that.
12 I think the students generally at the sister
13 campuses, it's just fundamentally different than
14 Columbia. A lot of these folks, if they're not
15 working part-time, they're working full-time.
16 They're not there to get their degree in four
17 years. They're there to get it when they can.
18 We have a number of students there will get their
19 core requirements and then transfer to another
20 school that has the major that they want. A
21 number of them will transfer -- just transfer to
22 other schools. Some of them will leave college
23 to go to the military. So I think there are a
24 number of reasons for that number being that low.
25 You know, some of them are raising children, some

1 are taking care of an elderly parent, but again,
2 absolutely room for improvement.

3 Q. Yeah, especially at the satellites. I think it's
4 important that we offer higher educational
5 opportunities that are going to keep our best and
6 brightest here. And USC has to be at the top of
7 that list because it is the flagship. It has the
8 state's name in there. You know, you're a little
9 bit ahead of me as far as where your children's
10 ages are, but I have been, I mentioned this
11 earlier, you may have been in here, but I have a
12 daughter who's a junior in high school and has
13 great opportunities where she is. We're very
14 fortunate with that, with the high school that
15 she attends. A public school, as you know, but
16 you know, she's looking at some in-state options
17 and some out-of-state options. And to have her
18 choose an in-state option would surely make me
19 feel better. But like you, I -- for my first
20 year, I went out of state and I've told you this
21 story before. But when I -- I was admonished by
22 your father for that because we have some fine
23 institutions in South Carolina and I think that's
24 important. And I hope that continues so that we
25 will continue to provide opportunities, higher

1 education opportunities, for our South Carolina
2 students. But you know, as we were talking about
3 with the South Carolina state representatives for
4 the C students, but also for the A's and B's, we
5 want to keep them all and provide them with
6 opportunities to be successful in life. I just
7 think that USC has got to be at the top of that
8 list, right? USC has to set that example to
9 ensure that it really is a place where South
10 Carolina students can pursue quality higher
11 education at a good cost and that they can get
12 out in a reasonable time and they can be
13 successful with that, but it is, it is South
14 Carolina's institution, so I appreciate that.
15 One other question I've got to ask you about
16 this. You're serving in an interim -- in a
17 position of an interim appointment, is that
18 right?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Can you tell me about what, what led to that?
21 Was that something where you approached the
22 Governor's office or you approached somebody
23 university or somebody approached you? How did
24 that come about?

25 A. So in May or June of 2023, the predecessor for

1 this seat, who was about 80 years old at the time
2 and had served for decades, contacted me and told
3 me that he was not going to run again and he knew
4 that I had long wanted to serve on this Board.
5 And I decided in the summer of 2023 that I was
6 going to run for this Board seat, not knowing
7 that it would be two and a half years later that
8 I would be going for screening. I called a
9 number of folks in the summer of 2023, to include
10 yourself, to let you know that I was interested
11 in running for the seat. And I called Governor
12 McMaster at the time, too, to let him know of my
13 interest and in my interest. And in -- my
14 interesting in running. And in -- on September
15 1st or 2nd of 2025, he contacted me and asked if
16 I would be willing to serve. And I, of course,
17 was honored.

18 **Q. Because your predecessor passed away?**

19 A. He passed away in April of 2024. His term would
20 have ended June 30th, 2024, so that seat has been
21 vacant for 17 months, I guess, since his death in
22 April of 2024.

23 MR. THURMOND - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

24 **Q. Mr. Thurmond, I want to follow up somewhat off of**
25 **that line of questioning. It goes back to my**

1 conversation about getting very large versus
2 staying small, and I see this throughout the
3 south. The University of Alabama has decided to
4 grow very large. Auburn University is staying
5 smaller. Clemson is somewhat staying smaller.
6 University of South Carolina is growing.
7 University of Georgia has decided to grow very
8 large. I understand the whys of getting large.
9 There's a there's a sweet point. You either got
10 to get real big or you got to stay kind of
11 compact where you are. But how many in-state
12 students were accepted again? You said about
13 11,000 and then you bridged a couple two or
14 three thousand after that?

15 A. Yes, Senator. Of the 15,000 South Carolina
16 residents who applied, 13,500 of them fell
17 into what is called this, you know, what I call a
18 90% opportunity rate. That's the 75% who were
19 directly admitted, and then the 15% who were
20 offered to bridge.

21 Q. And then out of that amount, how many accepted
22 and enrolled in the fall?

23 A. Of the -- let's say of the 11,250 who were
24 directly admitted, 4,121 matriculated.

25 Q. Would you agree with me in order -- and this is

1 why I'm asking this, in order for USC to grow, in
2 order for South Carolina to get bigger and
3 increase their numbers, you're letting in -- I'm
4 not -- you're letting in about every South
5 Carolinian who wants to attend the University of
6 South Carolina is getting that opportunity. I'm
7 not saying you're not. But what you're having to
8 do though in order to grow is you have to let
9 out-of-state kids in. You don't have a choice.
10 If you want to get big, if you want to get to 55,
11 60, 65, 70,000 students, you have to have those
12 out-of-state students. Not only do they pay
13 larger tuition, but you can't, you just don't
14 have the numbers. Because at 4,121, you have a
15 much smaller student body than not. I mean, do
16 you see that correlation?

17 A. Yes, sir. The total enrollment for that class
18 was 7,818.

19 Q. And that's what I'm trying to -- I'm not
20 criticizing any university for making the
21 decision to get larger. I've read lots of
22 articles on why it's important to get above about
23 50, 55,000 students or stay below about 28, 30.
24 I mean, they're two totally different models.
25 But by making the internal decision to get that

1 large, you really can't go 60/40. Because if you
2 try to get to 60/40 at the main campus at least,
3 you're going to have to get significantly
4 smaller. Would you agree? Either that or you're
5 going to have to take a whole lot of kids who are
6 going to Clemson or some other school and
7 convince them to show up here.

8 A. Yes, sir. That's a fair question.

9 Q. Then does the Board have conversations about what
10 it would take to get that 4,121 number to 5,500
11 or to 5,000 to increase -- to somehow convince
12 more young adults in South Carolina just to
13 attend the University of South Carolina versus
14 another school?

15 A. Senator, in the three Board meetings that I have
16 attended, I don't recall that coming up as a
17 topic.

18 Q. Well, no. And that's fair. That's a fair
19 answer. Mr. Thurmond, I appreciate your service.
20 Thank you for answering my questions.

21 A. Thank you, sir.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

23 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Make a motion.

24 MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion for a favorable report.

25 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Second.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: And a second. All those in favor,
2 raise your right hand.

3 (All hands are raised.)

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? Thank you, Mr.
5 Thurmond.

6 MR. THURMOND: Thank you, sir. Appreciate your time.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, next up we have Bernie Lee
8 Sims, Jr.

9 BERNIE LEE SIMS, JR.:

10 MR. SIMS: Good afternoon.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, sir. If you'll please
12 raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the
13 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

14 MR. SIMS: I do.

15 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. If you would like, you
16 may give an opening statement, and then we'll hand it over
17 to Ms. Webb for a few questions.

18 MR. SIMS: Yeah, so a little bit about me. I'm a
19 proud Aikenite, born and raised in Aiken. Third generation
20 Savannah River Site employee. So my grandfather moved down
21 from the upstate and helped with the construction of
22 Savannah River Site. My dad worked out there for 40 years.
23 I didn't think I would ever work out there. I thought I'd
24 move off and do something different. And my fate brought
25 me back to Aiken. And I've been working at Savannah River

1 Site for a little over 20 years. Currently the senior vice
2 president over plutonium operations and programs at
3 Savannah River Site. Proud alumni. I grew up a South
4 Carolina fan. My father went there for his master's. Both
5 my sisters went there. I went there in the late 90s, early
6 2000s. And it wasn't an easy road. I came in with a chip
7 on my shoulder. I went through high school without any
8 problems. Went into college and realized that I didn't
9 have the foundational study skills that I needed. And I
10 had some roadblocks along the way that I really had to
11 mature quickly in my junior year or so, sophomore, junior
12 year of college. And I think I'm a testament to what you
13 can overcome. I was on conduct probation at the
14 university. I was on academic probation at the university.
15 And from that I matured, grew up, got out into the
16 workforce. And to use Senator Massey's quote, I'm that C
17 person that has got out into the field and been successful
18 and built my career. So that's me in a nutshell.

19 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. Thank you, sir. Ms. Webb.

20 MR. SIMS - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

21 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Sims, can you**
22 **please state your current address?**

23 A. Yes, 196 Cubs Hamlet Court, Aiken, South
24 Carolina.

25 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**

1 **your 4% property tax?**

2 A. It is.

3 **Q. And is this address within the judicial circuit**
4 **to which you have applied?**

5 A. It is.

6 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
7 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

8 A. I do not.

9 **Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations**
10 **and responsibilities of serving on a public**
11 **institution's board of trustees?**

12 A. Yes.

13 **Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any**
14 **member of the General Assembly and formally ask**
15 **for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours**
16 **after the Commission's report has been released?**

17 A. Yes.

18 **Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to**
19 **contact members of the General Assembly on your**
20 **behalf? Or are you aware of anyone attempting to**
21 **intervene in this process on your behalf?**

22 A. No.

23 **Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing**
24 **obligation and duty to report to the Commission**
25 **any changes that might occur that would affect**

1 **your application and overall eligibility for**
2 **servng on a college Board?**

3 A. I understand.

4 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Sims. And Mr. Chairman, I have no**
5 **further questions.**

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose.

7 MR. SIMS - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

8 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, sir.**
9 **Let me ask, what made you want to run for the**
10 **Board? And what do you think the Board could do**
11 **better? What do you think they're doing well?**

12 A. I think for me, I've always been passionate about
13 my community. I've been on a number of 501(c)(3)
14 boards. And, you know, as I've matured, I've
15 realized, invest my time in what I'm really
16 passionate about. And this university is
17 something I'm passionate about. Education is
18 something I'm passionate about. And when I look
19 at what's going on at Savannah River site, for
20 instance, I see the growth. I see the technical
21 needs of the site. And I see how those gaps are
22 being filled. And I think there's a lot more
23 hiring that could come from the University of
24 South Carolina or local universities to go back,
25 fill those needs. So I see that and I'm like,

1 gosh, I want more Carolina guys and gals that are
2 taking the seat behind me as we look at
3 progressing the site.

4 **Q. Is there something -- so kind of building a**
5 **bridge with jobs or with the university,**
6 **something of that nature? I'm looking kind of**
7 **for like a platform, if you will.**

8 A. Yeah. So I would say, you don't have to look
9 far. I look at the executive orders of the
10 president as it pertains to investment into
11 nuclear energy, AI, data centers, small modular
12 reactors. You look at the technology sector and
13 the growth that's going to occur. And a lot of
14 that is going to happen in the South. I feel
15 like there's a big opportunity for the university
16 to get ahead of that. And I think there's a lot
17 of opportunity for the graduates coming out to
18 get into that arena and really get on the
19 forefront of the nuclear renaissance, if you want
20 to call it.

21 **Q. I'm going to preempt this question from Senator**
22 **Massey. Is 52% in-state students, is that enough**
23 **in your opinion? Is there a number that you**
24 **have?**

25 A. Yeah. You know, I hate to paraphrase the same

1 number. 60/40 feels right. You know, when I
2 graduated in 2002, I don't know what the
3 percentage was, but it felt very heavy from folks
4 from New Jersey, New York that were attending
5 college with me. If I look at the overall
6 attendance or enrollment when I graduated, it was
7 about 25,000 students or so at the Columbia
8 campus. And I didn't know how you would squeeze
9 one more student into the university at that
10 time. I mean, it felt very crunched at that
11 time. But there was still a sense of community,
12 a sense of identity, I guess, with the
13 university. So when I look at the expansion of
14 the university, back to Senator Johnson's
15 question to Thurmond, I think you can grow too
16 much to where you lose that identity and really
17 that community type feel of a university. And I
18 worry about that as an alumni.

19 **Q. All right, thank you. No further questions.**

20 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator Johnson.

22 MR. SIMS - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

23 **Q. Mr. Simms, thank you for being here today. You**
24 **referenced that. Again, this is more of a**
25 **philosophical question. I'm not sure there's a**

1 **wrong answer either way. Growth versus trying to**
2 **stay smaller. Do you believe that the University**
3 **of South Carolina should not attempt to grow the**
4 **student population and instead should condense**
5 **and be smaller?**

6 A. Yeah, I'm not going to tell you I know all the
7 financials for the university. So, you know, the
8 cost benefit of growth versus staying where we
9 are is something I don't know those details. But
10 what I'll tell you is South Carolina, the feeling
11 of being a South Carolinian is that community
12 aspect. And it just feels like our university,
13 every time I drive in it, I don't recognize where
14 I'm going. You know, I spent a lot of time here
15 and I turn a corner and there's a new building or
16 a new structure as part of what's going on in
17 Columbia. And so my gut answer would be we've
18 grown enough. It feels like the university is
19 the right size.

20 **Q. And what would -- as a board member, what are**
21 **your thoughts about increasing the amount of**
22 **in-state students? We know that about 11,250**
23 **were accepted. 4,121 showed up. What do you**
24 **think the university should be doing more to**
25 **bring that 4,121 number higher?**

1 A. Yeah, you know, I think the university does a
2 fairly good job of outreach, but I've got a
3 junior in high school. And so I'm getting into
4 that. Where is she going to go and what
5 university? Hopefully an in-state university.
6 I've gotten brochures to my daughter from a
7 variety of in-state universities, but not yet
8 from the University of South Carolina. So I'm
9 not saying that those aren't coming in the mail.
10 But, you know, it surprises me a little bit in
11 terms of that outreach. You know, I do think
12 that the advancement in the software and the
13 tools we use for recruiting trips and all that,
14 I'm at the age where my daughter's getting ready
15 to go to the university and all my friends have
16 kids that are attending the university. And
17 those that make it on campus and go through like
18 the tours and looking at the maps and going
19 through all that, I've heard nothing but positive
20 things through that. So I think the university
21 has done good things to try to attract the talent
22 if they get on campus and see what's available.

23 **Q. Thank you, sir.**

24 MR. SIMS - EXAMINATION BY MR. CHAIRMAN

25 **Q. Mr. Sims, are you familiar with the organization,**

1 **the Foundation for Individual Rights and**
2 **Expression? FIRE?**

3 A. I am not.

4 **Q. They are a group that deals a lot with free**
5 **speech free speech issues and they give ratings**
6 **to universities. One of the things they do is**
7 **they give ratings to universities. Would it**
8 **surprise you to hear that the University of South**
9 **Carolina, which is also my alma mater, was ranked**
10 **next to last in their ratings just a few years**
11 **ago for free speech? That would be surprising to**
12 **you?**

13 A. Yeah, it would surprise me. You know, when I was
14 at the university, I'm just going back in time
15 here, you know, there was a presidential election
16 and there were plenty of people that were, you
17 know, chalking up sidewalks and making their
18 opinions heard, both students and student body.
19 So when I was at the university, I felt like it
20 was a pretty open environment to voice, you know,
21 your thoughts and where your political standing
22 was, right, wrong or indifferent in anyone's
23 eyes. So it does surprise me.

24 **Q. So the good news of that, the rest of the story,**
25 **as Paul Harvey once said, would be that after the**

1 university was made aware of that, that they
2 contacted this group and provided them with some
3 additional information that the group evidently
4 did not have. Their rankings went up
5 significantly. But at the time they were ranked
6 below Harvard and Yale and those sorts of
7 institutions. And now they rank, they rank in
8 kind of red, yellow, green. And South Carolina
9 is in green now. But my bigger question is, the
10 world that we live in today, how, how does -- how
11 do you as a board member, ensure that the
12 university ensures free speech, and the
13 difficulty of free speech, which means that you
14 have to, unfortunately, listen to people that you
15 disagree with as well. But how do we, how do we
16 balance that with South Carolina's own culture
17 and our views, our cultural views? How do you
18 balance the two? And is it important for the
19 Board to get involved in that?

20 A. Yeah, it's a very complex question. I would say,
21 you know, this is not specific to institutions
22 here in South Carolina, but I think across the
23 U.S., you see a lot of guiding people down one
24 path or another, whether it's from faculty or
25 physicians in general. That concerns me a little

1 bit, holistically. I think, you know, the state
2 is very Republican. You know, and the thoughts
3 and processes of a Republican and the thoughts
4 and process of a Democrat both matter. And, you
5 know, I, you know, I tend to go Republican. But
6 my daughter is a lot more towards the liberal
7 side. And so, I personally, as a father, have
8 tried to make sure that I do not try to influence
9 her free thought and decision making, but make
10 sure that I am allowing her or affording her the
11 truth and understanding of why things are the way
12 they are in the world. So, I think it's a
13 balance, as a father, a balance as a university,
14 to make sure that we allow people to speak and we
15 educate them on fact and let them make decisions
16 on how they want to move forward. And if the
17 numbers truly are, you know, in the bottom, that
18 we're not truly doing a good thing from a free
19 speech perspective, then I do think the Board
20 should be involved in making changes to that.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: Favorable report, is there a motion for
22 a favorable report?

23 SENATOR MASSEY: So moved.

24 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Second.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor, say aye. Or raise

1 your hand. Or do both.

2 (All hands were raised.)

3 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those opposed. Thank you very
4 much. Next up, we have Richard Mark Bonnoitt.

5 RICHARD MARK BONNOITT:

6 MR. BONNOITT: Good afternoon.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, sir. If you will raise
8 your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole
9 truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

10 MR. BONNOITT: I do.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. Would you like to
12 provide us with an opening statement? And then we'll turn
13 it over to Ms. Webb for a few questions.

14 MR. BONNOITT: Okay, the University of South Carolina,
15 Fourth Judicial Circuit. As a 1979 graduate, I took the
16 skills and education gained at USC to start my own business
17 with my wife in the waste industry, creating jobs and
18 opportunities for my surrounding community. I sold my
19 company in 2022, and now I have the time to take my talents
20 and common sense learned from over 40 years in business to
21 help guide the university for South Carolina into the
22 future. Proud to say both my daughter and son are
23 graduates of USC. And my main focal points has been
24 discussed over here today, is to keep tuition affordable,
25 ensure that all South Carolina students have an opportunity

1 to attend one of our campuses, strive to keep rates, and I
2 had 60% wrote down, I just didn't write it down, South
3 Carolina versus out-of-state students. And making sure
4 that we are preparing and adapting to the workforce and the
5 needs of our state.

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Webb.

7 MR. BONNOITT - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

8 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Bonnoitt, can**
9 **you please state your current address?**

10 A. 138 Rivergate Drive, Florence, South Carolina,
11 but that is a Darlington County -- I am a
12 Darlington County resident and have been for 30
13 some odd years.

14 **Q. Thank you, and is this the address where you pay**
15 **your 4% property tax?**

16 A. Yes.

17 **Q. Thank you, and is this address within the**
18 **judicial circuit to which you have applied?**

19 A. Yes.

20 **Q. Thank you, and do you currently serve on any**
21 **local or state board, commission, committee, or**
22 **elected office?**

23 A. No.

24 **Q. And do you understand the obligations and**
25 **responsibilities of serving on a public**

1 institution's Board of trustees?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
4 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
5 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
6 after the Commission's report has been released?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
9 contact members of the General Assembly on your
10 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
11 intervene in this process on your behalf?

12 A. No.

13 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
14 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
15 any changes that might occur that would affect
16 your application and overall eligibility for
17 serving on a college Board?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Thank you, Mr. Bonnoitt, and Mr. Chairman, I have
20 no further questions.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. Mr. Bonnoitt,
22 thank you again for being here today. Before we get into
23 the questions from the Commission, you indicated on your
24 personal disclosure questionnaire that you have a
25 relationship with the Garnet Trust, which is the NIL arm

1 for the University of South Carolina. There are likely
2 going to be some questions about that from the Commission
3 members wanting to know if you would prefer, because of, I
4 know there's a lot going on with NIL these days, would you
5 prefer to do that in executive session, or are you okay to
6 do that in open session?

7 MR. BONNOITT: My answer to that is, if elected, I
8 would, you know, whatever I had to do to diverse the
9 interest or whatever that was satisfying.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: So you're okay answering any questions
11 that come up in open session?

12 MR. BONNOITT: Oh, yeah.

13 MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, great. With that, are there any
14 questions from the Commission? Senator.

15 MR. BONNOITT - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

16 **Q. Mr. Bonnoitt, good afternoon. Thank you for**
17 **being here. Let me just follow up on what the**
18 **chairman just talked about. The information that**
19 **we have from your written packet indicates that**
20 **you own 40% of the Garnet Trust. Is that**
21 **accurate?**

22 A. That's correct.

23 **Q. Tell me what that means.**

24 A. That means that Shane Beamer calls friends in
25 Florence and says he needs to raise some money.

1 And this was like three years ago, you know, when
2 NIL first started. So I stepped up to the plate,
3 me along with others, and put up the initial
4 money to get NIL, the Garnet Trust, started. And
5 I do serve on the Board.

6 **Q. Okay. And that's something you would be willing**
7 **to give up?**

8 A. That's correct.

9 **Q. To serve on the Board of Trustees?**

10 A. That's correct.

11 **Q. When -- and maybe this is just the word usage,**
12 **and I'm not saying this is even your word usage.**
13 **It might be just from the summaries that we've**
14 **received. But when I see that you own 40% or**
15 **that you have an interest of 40%, I'm trying to**
16 **understand what that means.**

17 A. That, if I'm correct, we tried to raise \$100,000
18 to get the corporation, LLC or whatever, started.
19 And I put up \$40,000.

20 **Q. Okay. Your contribution was 40% of that initial**
21 **money?**

22 A. That's correct.

23 **Q. Right. Do you receive any personal benefit from**
24 **that?**

25 A. No, none, zero.

1 **Q. All right. Do you receive any benefit for the**
2 **amount of money that you raised?**

3 A. None, zero, other than if there was some
4 correlation between your Garnet Trust
5 contribution and the Gamecock Club, they tried to
6 do that. I think that might have been an
7 incentive at one time. But I'm not even sure now
8 that, you know, if that's the case.

9 **Q. Do you receive any other benefit from the**
10 **contributions that you make to the Garnet Trust**
11 **or for money that you raise for the Garnet Trust?**

12 A. None.

13 **Q. Okay. If you're successful in your effort to be**
14 **a trustee and you divest from the Garnet Trust,**
15 **are you going to get your money back or is it**
16 **gone?**

17 A. I gave it as a contribution, and so, no, I don't
18 think I'll get that money back.

19 **Q. Okay. All right. Okay, that's all I've got on**
20 **that, Mr. Chairman.**

21 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

22 MR. BONNOITT - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

23 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Bonnoitt. So you really, I'll**
24 **follow back up on this Garnet Trust, you really**
25 **don't have an ownership of 40%. You put 40% of**

1 the initial funds. You have no equity in this
2 organization?

3 A. No. That's correct.

4 Q. So if you divest, you get nothing back because
5 you have no true ownership. You're a board
6 member. You may help direct fundraising, but you
7 don't make any money. No money ever moves from
8 that trust back to you. It moves from you to the
9 trust but not the other way.

10 A. That's right.

11 Q. All right. All right. I've asked this question
12 to everybody who's come up for the University of
13 South Carolina because it's a much larger
14 question. It's growth versus staying smaller.
15 I've seen you out in the crowd, so you've heard
16 me ask the question a couple times. Do you have
17 an opinion as to whether the university should
18 continue to grow or should it instead make a
19 decision to be smaller?

20 A. Well, my personal opinion is I think where we are
21 now is okay. I just think that's probably where
22 we need to be.

23 Q. All right. Knowing that and knowing the amount
24 of South Carolina residents who make a decision
25 to attend the University of South Carolina, what

1 **are your thoughts and how would you go about it**
2 **as a board member to increase the amount of South**
3 **Carolina students who want to attend the**
4 **university? It's not getting in. Getting in is**
5 **not the problem. The problem is making you**
6 **choose the University of South Carolina over**
7 **another school.**

8 A. Yeah, and I was really impressed with the numbers
9 as far as the 11,000 acceptance rate. And then I
10 said, well, no, then you had admission rate.
11 But, yeah, that's the issue, and that would take
12 some deeper thought. But I see exactly where
13 you're coming from, and maybe, you know, we might
14 not be promoting as much within the state as we
15 think we are. Obviously, there's a 3,000 or
16 4,000 student difference there that's getting
17 accepted, but usually not to come.

18 **Q. Well, there's about 45,000. If 60,000 students**
19 **applied and 45,000 were from out-of-state,**
20 **there's a whole lot of out-of-state interest in**
21 **the University of South Carolina.**

22 A. And, you know, in my thought process earlier, you
23 were talking, you know -- I mean this state is
24 growing unbelievably. And, you know, in the
25 whole state, and we're getting a lot of influx in

1 -- and, you know, that might cause us to have to
2 grow a little bit. But I'm just thinking that
3 with the new people moving into the state, that
4 that number that we're talking about would
5 possibly increase some.

6 **Q. Well, I guess one of the concerns that I think**
7 **this group we've had all week when we've met with**
8 **candidates is that our concern of the amount of**
9 **out-of-state students. And as I look at it, the**
10 **University of South Carolina is going to grow,**
11 **and it's going to keep its numbers as large as**
12 **they are today, the only way you're going to do**
13 **that is either drastically increase the amount of**
14 **in-state students who want to attend the**
15 **University of South Carolina, or continue to draw**
16 **a large out-of-state pool. So I'm extremely**
17 **interested in the university coming up with ways**
18 **to attract more of that in-state -- of the**
19 **children who are admitted in-state getting a**
20 **larger percentage of those to make a decision to**
21 **attend the university.**

22 **A. And I agree totally. And, I mean, that's -- you**
23 **know. But one of the thoughts I did have in**
24 **reading my notes and stuff is, yeah, we're**
25 **getting a lot of -- and I did, I had 60 percent,**

1 and that's been in my notes for a while. But
2 with the influx of out-of-state applications, we
3 might can go up on their price a little bit.

4 SENATOR JOHNSON: Motion for a favorable report.

5 SENATOR MASSEY: Second.

6 MR. CHAIRMAN:: All those in favor, raise your right
7 hand.

8 (All hands are raised.)

9 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks, sir.

10 MR. BONNOITT: Thank you very much.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. J. Colin Hungerpiller --
12 Hungerpiller?

13 J. COLIN HUNGERPILLER:

14 MR. HUNGERPILLER: Yes.

15 MR. CHAIRMAN: Or just J. Colin, I'm not sure.

16 MR. HUNGERPILLER: Colin Hungerpiller.

17 MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry about that.

18 MR. HUNGERPILLER: What a beautiful afternoon in
19 South Carolina.

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: Glad you're here. If you'll do me a
21 favor, please, sir, raise your right hand. Let me swear
22 you in. Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth,
23 and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

24 MR. HUNGERPILLER: I do.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, sir. If you'd like to give

1 us an opening statement, and then we'll do some initial
2 questions.

3 MR. HUNGERPILLER: Yes. I'm from the Fourth Judicial
4 Circuit, the great city of Hartsville, South Carolina. My
5 aim is to convey my constituents, alumni, from that
6 judicial circuit to the University of South Carolina so
7 that I can help the university succeed. I'm a 1975
8 graduate of USC, third generation. My son is a fourth
9 generation. He's a pharmacist, and we need to give a
10 shout-out to the pharmacy department. They just received
11 some of the highest grades on qualifications for the
12 university pharmacy department. I have nothing else.

13 MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Webb.

14 MR. HUNGERPILLER - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

15 **Q. Thank you. And, Mr. Hungerpiller, can you please**
16 **state your current address?**

17 A. 900 Prestwood Drive, Hartsville, South Carolina
18 29550.

19 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address you pay your**
20 **4% property tax?**

21 A. Yes, ma'am.

22 **Q. All right. And is this address within the**
23 **judicial circuit to which you have applied?**

24 A. Yes.

25 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**

1 **board, commission, committee, or elected office?**

2 A. Local.

3 **Q. And which office is that?**

4 A. The museum, Hartsville Museum Board and
5 Foundation.

6 **Q. And the Hartsville Museum Commission, the Board?**

7 A. Right.

8 **Q. Okay. So, based off of some previous attorney**
9 **general opinions that I have pulled, it shows**
10 **that positions generally of that nature can be**
11 **considered a public office and, therefore, if you**
12 **were elected to the university Board, a dual**
13 **office. So, if you are elected to the**
14 **institution's board of trustees to which you have**
15 **applied, you, at the time of being officially**
16 **elected to the Board, will no longer be eligible**
17 **to serve in your initial position with the other**
18 **entity. Based on prior Attorney General**
19 **opinions, the public office you currently hold**
20 **will be vacated upon you being elected to the new**
21 **public office.**

22 A. Question.

23 **Q. Yes, sir.**

24 A. Would that be for the Board or would that be for
25 the Foundation?

1 Q. So, it would not be for the Foundation. The
2 Foundation would be private. It would be for the
3 Board specifically.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. So, do you understand that for specifically the
6 Board, not the foundation?

7 A. Yes, I understand.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you. And do you understand the
9 obligations and responsibilities of serving on a
10 public institution's board of trustees?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
13 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
14 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
15 after the Commission's report has been released?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
18 contact members of the General Assembly on your
19 behalf or are you aware of anyone attempting to
20 intervene in this process on your behalf?

21 A. No.

22 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
23 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
24 any changes that might occur that would affect
25 your application and overall eligibility for

1 **servicing on a college board?**

2 A. Yes.

3 **Q. All right. Thank you, Mr. Hungerpiller. Mr.**
4 **Chairman, I have no further questions.**

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Macey. Any questions?
6 Senator from York.

7 MR. HUNGERPILLER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

8 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Hungerpiller, thank**
9 **you for being here today and thank you for your**
10 **willingness to serve. I've asked the same**
11 **question to every member they've come up for USC.**
12 **I'm going to ask you, basically, give your**
13 **opinion. Is the University of South Carolina,**
14 **from an enrollment standpoint, do you believe**
15 **that they should continue to attempt to stay as**
16 **large as they are or potentially grow or do you**
17 **think they should be smaller? And if you believe**
18 **they should stay where they are, what can be done**
19 **to get the percentage of in-state students to**
20 **accept and enroll at the University of South**
21 **Carolina?**

22 A. Thank you for that question, sir. That's a
23 rather difficult question. I have my opinions.
24 I would like to know what the opinion of the
25 Board of Trustees of the University of South

1 Carolina is. What are their one-year plans?
2 What is their three-year plan? What is their
3 five-year plan? Now, personally, once I know
4 their plan, then I know where we need to be. We
5 need to grow or we need to stay small. I think
6 we have to grow. We have a problem there. We're
7 the University of South Carolina. We're in the
8 state of South Carolina. We're at the bottom
9 most of the time. We have to incentivize our
10 students to come to the University of South
11 Carolina. That's going to take money, whether
12 it's USC scholarships, whatever it may be. To
13 get more, we have a limited customer base. So we
14 have to incentivize them to come to the
15 University of South Carolina. I think that's
16 going to be through scholarships, financial aid,
17 and what we offer in academia. What we offer in
18 mentoring. That's my answer, sir.

19 **Q. Thank you, sir.**

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose?

21 MR. HUNGERPILLER - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

22 **Q. I'm really struggling with that answer. Because**
23 **South Carolina, I mean, it's extremely difficult**
24 **to get into the University of South Carolina**
25 **because there is such a high demand. I mean, I**

1 said this earlier. I had someone reach out to
2 me, a constituent who's a friend, and he was
3 saying that his neighbor's daughter, who is a
4 very accomplished student and a tennis player at
5 a very nice high school around here, had been
6 crying for a couple weeks because she had been
7 accepted to Wofford and accepted to Clemson, but
8 wait-listed at the University of South Carolina.
9 So, I mean, I don't know about incentivizing. I
10 would like to look at admitting more students,
11 but the University of South Carolina is extremely
12 in high demand right now, and there is a lot of
13 people that are wanting to go there. And so I
14 just wanted to say that.

15 A. Representative Rose, I understand your position.
16 However, of that number that is applying and
17 those that are coming, we need to get the
18 difference between those that are coming and
19 those that are applying. We need more students
20 from the state of South Carolina to help us build
21 this state.

22 Q. But I would just say that, as I understand it,
23 with the numbers of the amount of people that are
24 admitted at the university, we have an extremely
25 high number that end up accepting, much farther

1 give us an opening statement, you're welcome to, and then
2 we'll move into some initial questions from Ms. Webb.

3 MS. STREATER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of
4 the committee. I'm Caroline Streater. I'm honored to be
5 here today to answer any questions that the committee may
6 have for me regarding my candidacy for the Fourth Judicial
7 Circuit seat on the University of South Carolina Board of
8 Trustees. I am a resident, along with my husband, in
9 Cheraw, South Carolina, which is in the Fourth Circuit.
10 I'm a graduate of the Joseph F. Rice Law School right here
11 in Columbia and the mother of a soon-to-be graduate from
12 the Arnold School of Public Health. These experiences,
13 along with my varied professional experiences, have led me
14 to seek this seat. I believe this is a pivotal time for
15 the university, whether we are discussing the integration
16 of AI or the navigation of the NIL agreements. Board
17 members are required to be diligent in reviewing materials
18 and understanding the issues presented to the Board, as
19 well as their ramifications. This is much like the work
20 that you do here in the General Assembly on behalf of your
21 constituents. Excuse me I am so cold, in the state of
22 South Carolina. And I believe that my professional
23 training and my experiences have placed me in a position to
24 do this in such a way that I can serve our state's flagship
25 university.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you. Ms. Webb.

2 MS. STREATER - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

3 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Ms. Streater, can
4 you please state your current address?

5 A. 314 3rd Street, Cheraw, South Carolina.

6 Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay
7 your 4% property tax?

8 A. I do.

9 Q. And is this address within the judicial circuit
10 to which you have applied?

11 A. It is.

12 Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state
13 board, commission, committee, or other elected
14 office?

15 A. As we have discussed, I serve as an assistant
16 solicitor part-time in the 4th Judicial Circuit
17 over in Marlborough County. It is a position I'm
18 willing to give up should I be successful in my
19 service.

20 Q. All right. Thank you, Ms. Streater. If you are
21 elected to the University of South Carolina Board
22 of Trustees to which you have applied, you, at
23 the time of being officially elected to the
24 board, will no longer be eligible to serve in
25 that initial solicitor position, as we have

1 **discussed --**

2 A. That's fine.

3 Q. -- based on prior AG opinions. Yes. Thank you.
4 **The public office to which you currently hold**
5 **will be vacated upon you being elected to the new**
6 **public office. Do you understand that?**

7 A. Yes, ma'am.

8 Q. Thank you. And do you understand the obligations
9 **and responsibilities of serving on a public**
10 **institution's board of trustees?**

11 A. Yes, ma'am.

12 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
13 **member of the General Assembly and formally ask**
14 **for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours**
15 **after the Commission's report has been released?**

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
18 **contact members of the General Assembly on your**
19 **behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to**
20 **intervene in this process on your behalf?**

21 A. I have not, and I am not.

22 Q. Thank you. And are you aware that you have an
23 **ongoing obligation and duty to report to the**
24 **Commission any changes that might occur, that**
25 **would affect your application and overall**

1 eligibility for serving on a college Board?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Yes. All right. Thank you. Thank you, Ms.
4 Streater. Mr. Chairman, I have no further
5 questions.

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. All right. Any
7 questions for Ms. Streater?

8 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

9 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator from York.

10 MS. STREATER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON

11 Q. Ms. Streater, I feel bad that I keep asking the
12 same question. I'm banging away on this. And my
13 purpose is this. The University of South
14 Carolina has made a conscious decision to grow
15 and to maintain enrollment north of 55,000,
16 60,000 students. I am concerned that that
17 decision has created a situation in which the
18 university, unless it can drastically increase
19 the amount of students who accept the offer to
20 attend the university, that the university must
21 now always hover in this 52, 48, 51, 49 area.
22 that it's going to be extremely difficult to
23 branch out of that, because you just can't get
24 the sheer numbers of students that are necessary
25 to make the university run. So my question to

1 **you, what are your thoughts and how would you go**
2 **about increasing the amount of students that the**
3 **University of South Carolina is able to enroll in**
4 **the university, who are from our state?**

5 A. Well, I've got a couple of ideas on that. Number
6 one, it's certainly always a nice opportunity to
7 talk about the Palmetto Scholars and the Life
8 Scholars opportunities for our students and how
9 they stand with the relationship to tuition and
10 their encouragement of our in-state students to
11 attend in-state colleges. So that's always
12 something that can be looked at. Secondly, I
13 don't know if you're aware, but USC runs a great
14 program in the summer called the USC Summer
15 Scholars Program, which I teach in, and love
16 teaching in it. And it reaches out to the high
17 flyers in the high schools throughout the state
18 of South Carolina and outside of the state of
19 South Carolina and offers them a one-week camp
20 experience where they are exposed to the college
21 of their interests. So there is a nursing
22 program, there's a forensic science program,
23 there's an engineering program. I teach at the
24 law program and love it. I take them to look at
25 our law school, I take them to watch preliminary

1 hearings in Richland County. Last year I took
2 them to watch a one-day trial that Judge Newman
3 was able to organize with me so that the students
4 could watch it from start to finish. They loved
5 it. I know for a fact at least three of those
6 students became full-time students at the
7 University of South Carolina, in part because of
8 that program and their participation. So those
9 kinds of things can be grown. I also know USC
10 additionally is the top 10% of every high school,
11 regardless rural or urban. And then there are
12 some more targeted approaches to high school
13 based on colleges, specifically the STEM
14 colleges, that are reaching out to the high
15 schools. And I think those personal connections,
16 if you know somebody that's going there, if you
17 know a professor. The head of the exercise
18 science program reached out to my son when he was
19 a junior in high school and had a FaceTime video
20 with him to discuss that program. Sold him from
21 the beginning, and that's not why I'm driving to
22 -- and that's why I'm not driving to Alabama in
23 May. I'm very happy to be just coming to
24 Columbia. So there are things that we can do
25 that are low cost, no cost, and then some that

1 are associated with cost that I think we can do
2 to grab our South Carolina students and keep them
3 here.

4 **Q. I appreciate that answer. I'll also say I've**
5 **been practicing law a long time now, I guess 30**
6 **years this year. And you're more excited about**
7 **the law than I am at this point, so I'm excited**
8 **for that.**

9 A. You go teach that class and you'll get excited
10 all over again because they are so excited.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: I thought you were going to say,
12 Senator, that you've been practicing law for 30 years and
13 you've still not seen a trial from start to finish.
14 Senator from Richland.

15 MS. STREATER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR DEVINE:

16 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ms. Streater,**
17 **for your application. I was looking at your**
18 **questionnaire and you talked about the biggest**
19 **strength being student success and the nationally**
20 **recognized programs. I'm thinking you're talking**
21 **about the student enrollment. The infrastructure**
22 **might be the challenge, but I wasn't clear. So**
23 **what do you identify as the biggest challenge for**
24 **the university and what are some solutions that**
25 **you think a board member could add?**

1 A. Well, I think the board members can always add by
2 asking questions. How are you handling this
3 situation? How are you dealing with this? For
4 example, South Carolina University, South
5 Carolina now has a majority-minority population.
6 There are 60% women in our student body, and that
7 is a different dynamic. A female student, there
8 are needs that have to be taken care of
9 differently, safety concerns that are out there.
10 So I think that it is always something you want
11 to look at. When you have those numbers of
12 students moving through a university, you want to
13 have the infrastructure. Parking is an issue.
14 Anybody that has ever lived in Columbia knows
15 that's an issue. Safety is an issue. I heard
16 someone talking about crossing the assembly
17 street. That's a huge issue. I navigated that
18 just this morning when I took my son to
19 breakfast. So I think there are all things that
20 have to stay top of mind to make sure the
21 infrastructure is in place to support those kids.
22 The dorms, the teachers, the classrooms, all of
23 those things. You want the student first because
24 the money comes with the student, but you've got
25 to have the infrastructure around to support the

1 student.

2 **Q. So to that extent of the infrastructure, and you**
3 **were in the other room listening, a huge thing**
4 **with Columbia, and I know you lived in Columbia**
5 **for a while, so you see the university and the**
6 **growth. What are your thoughts regarding the**
7 **expansion of the university's footprint,**
8 **particularly as it tends to encroach upon other**
9 **areas that make it sometimes challenging to be**
10 **livable and pedestrian and biker-friendly?**

11 **A.** I think that we have to be friendly neighbors.
12 We have to have relationships and discussions
13 with our neighbors and our communities. I am a
14 trained mediator, and there are not many
15 disagreements that cannot come to some resolution
16 if you put everybody down and you're able to
17 identify their interest. The neighbors have very
18 valid concerns. The university has to grow in
19 certain aspects. And so I was very pleased to
20 see that the nursing school is going to be out in
21 Lexington and that the neuroscience center is
22 going to be out in Orangeburg County, so I'm sure
23 that's a much-needed relief for the Columbia
24 campus.

25 **Q. Thank you.**

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose.

2 MS. STREATER - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

3 Q. Hey, good afternoon, Ms. Streater. Question,
4 what are the platforms, if you will? What are
5 some things that you think the Board is doing
6 well, what are some things you think the Board is
7 going to improve upon, and what is something that
8 you'd like to focus on if you were elected?

9 A. I think coming from the Fourth Circuit and
10 actually born into the First Circuit -- I'm from
11 Holly Hill, many of you may not have even heard
12 of it, but I think it's really important not to
13 forget our rural kids. When I went, my undergrad
14 experience started at the College of Charleston,
15 and my roommate came from Jacksonville. She had
16 all the AP classes. I didn't even know what an AP
17 class was. I can remember the English professor
18 asking me to write a four-page paper on a
19 three-page short story. I didn't understand how
20 you did that, so I had to learn that in college.
21 So I think there are things that we can do to
22 advocate for our rural students to make sure that
23 they have the opportunities to get the things
24 like the greater than 4.0 GPA that our kids who
25 grew up in Columbia, for example, know that they

1 need to have. And they have the AP teachers and
2 the guidance counselors there to support them.
3 So making those connections and making sure those
4 opportunities are clear in our smaller rural
5 schools, make sure there's a pathway there for
6 them.

7 MS. STREATER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

8 **Q. Hi, Ms. Streater. How long have you lived in**
9 **Chesterfield County?**

10 A. Since '21. We sold our house in Forest Acres in
11 2021. And my husband is originally from Cheraw,
12 and he had come back and started working, and we
13 waited until our youngest of three graduated from
14 high school, and I moved.

15 **Q. Okay, I noticed that you served as a magistrate**
16 **for Richland County.**

17 A. I did.

18 **Q. 2005 to 2019. You were a Richland County**
19 **resident when you served in that position?**

20 A. I was, and I handled many USC MIPP cases, and
21 landlord/tenant issues, and ---

22 **Q. Okay. So your husband is originally from**
23 **Chesterfield County?**

24 A. He is.

25 **Q. Right, and I was looking through the information.**

1 **Do I understand he is currently serving as the**
2 **sheriff?**

3 A. He is.

4 **Q. All right.**

5 A. He hasn't arrested me.

6 **Q. Well, the day isn't over yet.**

7 A. That is true.

8 **Q. I'm curious about your thoughts of what is the**
9 **university's obligation to provide courses of**
10 **study or majors that are responsive to industry**
11 **demands in South Carolina?**

12 A. I think it's paramount. I think that's a huge
13 issue. It's interesting that I was trying to
14 think of majors that were there when I first went
15 to college that are no longer viable, but it's
16 easier for me to think of things that are there
17 now that weren't there. My son is exercise
18 science. Athletic training now requires a
19 graduate degree. That's a whole school. It's a
20 whole program now. And I can tell you all about
21 how South Carolina stands in comparison to many
22 other colleges in the southeastern United States.
23 So I think it's important. We have a higher pass
24 rate for the certification exam, I think, than
25 any of the ones. He interviewed and was accepted

1 at Alabama, LSU, Miami, and TCU and ultimately
2 chose to go to LSU. So I will be traveling now.
3 But we had a great -- we had the highest pass
4 rate.

5 **Q. That's good to hear.**

6 A. Yeah.

7 **Q. How familiar are you with the satellite campuses?**

8 A. I know that we have them, and I know that they
9 serve, generally speaking, a little bit different
10 population. It's not -- with some exceptions,
11 it's not the typical college experience going
12 off, you know, going out of town. Although USC
13 Aiken, for example, has a great residency program
14 there, so.

15 **Q. Yeah, that's true. It's interesting to me, and I**
16 **think this is a good thing, that the university**
17 **kind of has its fingerprints, its tentacles, all**
18 **over the state in different areas. You just**
19 **identified in earlier comments about how the**
20 **nursing school is going to go to Lexington and**
21 **then a neuroscience program in Orangeburg. Is**
22 **that beneficial, or should everything be more**
23 **centralized with the main campus?**

24 A. I think it presents challenges. Because you have
25 students that come from away and then want to go

1 into those programs. And it's an infrastructure
2 challenge, as I mentioned earlier, with the
3 growth. We'll have to address it, you have to
4 address that issue.

5 **Q. It seems to me like you can live in Columbia and**
6 **get to the nursing school in Lexington pretty**
7 **easily.**

8 A. That depends on the time of day.

9 **Q. That's where I was going with that. It's a**
10 **little bit of a longer drive to Orangeburg,**
11 **however. Do you see that presenting challenges?**

12 A. I do. But I think, I would hope, and I would
13 have the strong thought that the Board has
14 already considered those issues and how they're
15 planning on handling that.

16 **Q. I noticed in one of your written responses in**
17 **response to a question about tuition and the cost**
18 **of attendance, you indicated a concern, I**
19 **believe, about the cost of attendance, or at**
20 **least the tuition, as a percentage of the average**
21 **family income in South Carolina.**

22 A. Yes.

23 **Q. Is that right? And that concern, it seemed to me**
24 **in your response, was focusing on the tuition.**
25 **Of course, the cost of attendance, as you know,**

1 as a parent, the cost of attendance is higher
2 than just the tuition itself. In fact, the
3 tuition is probably a minority share of the total
4 cost of attendance, isn't it?

5 A. It depends on where they live.

6 Q. Sure. All right. Do you have any thoughts on
7 that, and whether the board of trustees needs to
8 be concerned about that, or are we where we ought
9 to be with cost of attendance for in-state
10 students? And I don't really care about the
11 non-residents, but for the in-state students, is
12 the university where it needs to be? Is it too
13 low? Is it too high? What are your thoughts
14 there?

15 A. I think we're around the bubble, and you and I
16 both know the cost will not go down. So the
17 revenue of the families, hopefully, will go up in
18 South Carolina. But that division, that basic
19 division, I think, needs to stay where it's
20 doable for these kids and their families. So I
21 think it's something that has to stay top of mind
22 for the Board.

23 Q. And I would just say that if you are successful
24 in this pursuit, I would hope that as a board
25 member that you would also really question and

1 **scrutinize a number of the spending decisions**
2 **that are made. There is -- you know, we heard**
3 **from one candidate earlier that coming onto the**
4 **campus, if you haven't been there in a couple**
5 **years, you might need some directions because**
6 **there's a lot of new construction going on. Now,**
7 **that's not unique just to Carolina. That's going**
8 **on in some other places, too. But I do hope that**
9 **the Board would consider whether its construction**
10 **efforts are sufficient or maybe too much because**
11 **those things are factoring into what the cost of**
12 **attendance is as well.**

13 A. I agree, and I think that you have to ask the
14 questions. I think it's a fiduciary
15 responsibility of each and every board member to
16 be well-versed on whatever is being presented to
17 them by the experts from the different
18 departments and to ask those questions. I
19 attended a hearing over the Senate last week
20 where you discussed the FOIA exception for the
21 NIL. And I was so impressed with the homework
22 that the members did, the senators did, and the
23 questions that were asked on that. And I think
24 that the athletic directors did an excellent job
25 responding to the questions, and so I would hope

1 and expect that every department would have
2 someone like that that can answer those
3 questions.

4 **Q. Yes, ma'am. Thank you very much.**

5 SENATOR DEVINE: I'd make a motion.

6 SENATOR JOHNSON: Second.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor raise your right
8 hand.

9 (All hands are raised.)

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anybody opposed? Thank you, ma'am.
11 We'll move you on. Good luck. All right.

12 SENATOR DEVINE: I wanted to just apologize to the
13 rest of the candidates. I have to be in Manning by 7:00
14 o'clock, so I'm going to have to step out, but please don't
15 take my not being here as lack of interest in your
16 screening, but I have to go. But thank you. Thank you all
17 so much.

18 MR. CHAIRMAN: And, folks, that wraps up the
19 candidates for the Second Judicial Circuit. I think that's
20 probably a good place for a quick break.

21 OFF THE RECORD

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, we're back at it. Moving to
23 the 12th Judicial Circuit, Coleman Floyd Buckhouse.

24 COLEMAN FLOYD BUCKHOUSE:

25 MS. BUCKHOUSE: Good afternoon.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon, Ms. Buckhouse. If
2 you'll please raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell
3 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so
4 help you God?

5 MS. BUCKHOUSE: I do.

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you. We'll allow you to
7 make an opening statement and then we'll move into some
8 initial questions.

9 MS. BUCKHOUSE: As you know, I'm Coleman Buckhouse
10 from Florence. I am a 1981 graduate of the University of
11 South Carolina. My husband is a University of South
12 Carolina graduate, as well as both of my parents, my
13 grandfather, my great-grandfather, and all three of my
14 children. So to say that Gamecock doesn't run in my blood,
15 it runs in my blood. Didn't have much of a choice, I
16 guess. I am currently a current board member on the
17 University of South Carolina Board. I was appointed by
18 Governor McMaster in October of 2024, when my father became
19 ill and he appointed me to replace him, to finish his term.
20 I have spent the last 15 months learning a lot about the
21 university and learning that I love it even more than what
22 it does for the state of South Carolina. There's a lot
23 going on at the university. It's growing, as all of you
24 all were talking about earlier, and I think we're doing
25 good things for the state to educate the students of South

1 Carolina.

2 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great.

3 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

4 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Buckhouse, can you
5 please state your current address?

6 A. 409 Woodvale Drive, Florence, South Carolina
7 29501.

8 Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay
9 your 4% property tax?

10 A. Yes, it is.

11 Q. And is this address within the judicial circuit
12 to which you have applied?

13 A. Yes, it is.

14 Q. It's been a long day.

15 A. Yeah, it has.

16 Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state
17 board, commission, committee, or elected office
18 other than the University of South Carolina
19 Board?

20 A. No.

21 Q. And do you understand the obligations and
22 responsibilities of serving on a public
23 institution's board of trustees?

24 A. Yes, I do.

25 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any

1 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
2 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
3 after the Commission's report has been released?

4 A. I do.

5 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
6 contact members of the General Assembly on your
7 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
8 intervene in this process on your behalf?

9 A. I have not.

10 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
11 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
12 any changes that might occur that would affect
13 your application and overall eligibility for
14 serving on a college board?

15 A. I do.

16 Q. Thank you, Ms. Buckhouse. Mr. Chairman, I have
17 no further questions.

18 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you. Any questions?

19 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator from York.

21 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

22 Q. I know this question is going to surprise you,
23 but I continue to be interested in -- the goal is
24 to have as many in-state students attend the
25 flagship of our state, flagship university. By

1 growing larger, we've said well that's more
2 difficult. We either have to get more in-state
3 students who apply and are accepted to attend,
4 and that's hard, right? Because there are, as
5 we've talked about, there are 32 universities in
6 this state, and there's a whole lot of options
7 for these young adults to go to. So I'm curious,
8 your PDQ, you said that you believe that the
9 biggest weakness is the number of students due to
10 problems like parking, housing, and space, but
11 you also see size as a strength. So I'm
12 interested in your thoughts on the current policy
13 of remaining large and how you would better
14 attract our in-state students to attend the
15 University of South Carolina.

16 A. Well, we make it better attract the in-state
17 students if we win more football games, but you
18 know. Other than that.

19 **Q. I've never heard anything.**

20 A. No. I think that as a Board member, part of that
21 is recruiting and promoting our own university
22 and tooting our own horn, for that matter. The
23 jobs that it brings to our communities and how we
24 reach out to our communities as board members, as
25 alumni, and those kind of issues as far as

1 bringing more of those accepted students to
2 actually attend the University of South Carolina.
3 I think that there's also a point about our
4 out-of-state students is that, yes, where our
5 numbers may be 48, it does help the tuition for
6 our in-state students, and a large number of
7 those students actually end up becoming residents
8 of South Carolina and staying. I think we saw
9 the number somewhere about 20% end up becoming
10 long-term residents, including my husband, who's
11 from Chicago, who came from here and has lived
12 here since he was in college. So I'm not sure
13 that there's one particular thing to increase
14 those numbers that want to stay. I think there's
15 lots of different ways we can approach that. The
16 opportunity for the majors that we offer, where
17 they can get a job, the education in nursing and
18 engineering and offering those educational
19 opportunities where they'll want to stay here and
20 get their education here.

21 **Q. Thank you, ma'am.**

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative McGinnis:

23 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS:

24 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your**
25 **willingness to serve.**

1 A. Thank you.

2 Q. I haven't been asking a lot of questions because
3 these guys are doing a good job of asking all the
4 questions. But because you're an incumbent, one
5 thing that we talked about earlier was graduation
6 rates. Well, I understand here in the Columbia
7 campus, it's not a problem, but the satellite
8 campuses, it may be. I guess this is for any of
9 the other trustees, too, just to be aware of them
10 putting this out there. I know, and I can't
11 remember the number, but Macey, maybe you were in
12 one of those meetings with me when we were
13 talking about the number of students who have
14 some college but no degree. To me, that's
15 low-hanging fruit when you're trying to improve
16 graduation rates, is reaching out to those
17 students and trying to get them back in. In your
18 time as a trustee, have there been much
19 discussion on re-engaging people who had dropped
20 out of college?

21 A. I think that it has been mentioned about those
22 that drop out for reasons that other people have
23 mentioned, finances, personal, and keeping that
24 door open that, yes, come back or come talk to
25 us. You know, let's work this out when you get

1 ready -- when you do leave. I know that they
2 have talked a lot about, in some of these
3 campuses where those issues happen, that they
4 almost have exit interviews. Why are you
5 leaving? What is the issues? How can we help
6 you with those kind of things in the future when
7 you're ready to come back? So I know that that
8 is being done.

9 **Q. Yeah, I know. Keeping them in until they**
10 **graduate is goal number one, but I think goal**
11 **number two should be those who had to leave for**
12 **reasons that were not nefarious should have a**
13 **relatively easy pathway back. I do remember the**
14 **number now. I think it's around a half million.**
15 **A half million South Carolinians have a lot of**
16 **college but don't have that degree. To me,**
17 **that's low-hanging fruit out there. Again, thank**
18 **you for your willingness to serve.**

19 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY CHAIRMAN BENNETT:

20 **Q. Thank you, ma'am. I'd like to shift a little bit**
21 **just to internal board discussions. So I think**
22 **you may have been in the audience earlier when I**
23 **talked about it. Do you know how many -- do you**
24 **know how many state colleges and universities we**
25 **operate in South Carolina?**

1 A. Thirty-two.

2 Q. Thirty-two. That's just the state ones. It
3 doesn't talk about the private ones. One of the
4 challenges that I have a lot of times is South
5 Carolina State earlier today kind of took it on
6 the chin for their graduation rates. I
7 understand that the satellites have their own
8 issues and challenges. I think Mr. Thurmond was
9 pretty articulate in saying the different
10 challenges of student types. We can't let
11 everybody off the hook. I mean USC Beaufort is
12 at 37% graduation rate. Aiken was 41%. That's a
13 six-year rate. I have this issue that we
14 duplicate many programs across the state. It
15 seems like, I'm speaking inside the family here,
16 USC never met a building they didn't like, right?
17 Clemson never met a building they didn't like. A
18 lot of universities, colleges are growing
19 programs. The overlap seems to be there. Have
20 you been, in your 15 months on the Board, have
21 you had any conversations, have you witnessed any
22 conversations, discussing propping up new
23 programs, new buildings? I mean, obviously you
24 were probably there for the Brain Center. What
25 kind of discussions go on at the Board level to

1 **really kind of question and make sure that any**
2 **expansion of programs is legitimate and viable?**

3 A. On the 15 months I've been there, I've sat where
4 they talked about some of the programs that they
5 actually eliminated because there were no --
6 degrees weren't being awarded. They didn't have
7 people in these programs. The programs that they
8 have added, of course, are the newer ones. The
9 AI, I think we've just recently added an AI
10 degree. The things that keep growing, like
11 nursing. Even though there's overlapping over
12 all of the state, there's such a need that those
13 keep trying to grow those programs where there
14 are needs, meet the needs of the state for those.
15 So I think those are always looked at continually
16 by the provost and then brought to the Board as
17 far as with the recommendation of the deans of
18 the colleges, this is no longer a program that is
19 useful or we have any interest in. So they do
20 eliminate programs.

21 **Q. Well, that's good to hear. Have you been in any**
22 **discussions when there are expansions? I mean, I**
23 **know you used nursing as an example. I mean, do**
24 **we need three medical schools in a state of five**
25 **and a half million people?**

1 A. Yes.

2 **Q. Do we need whatever, four or five engineering**
3 **programs in a state of five and a half million**
4 **people? I mean, are those conversations that are**
5 **ever talked about?**

6 A. I haven't really heard about comparing to the
7 other engineering programs, but having three -- I
8 think our degrees, if they're getting jobs, if
9 they're getting out and getting work with those,
10 are we filling the needs? Then there is enough.
11 As far as your questions in medical school, yes,
12 I'm a health care provider, and we do need more
13 physicians. We do need more nurses. I mean, the
14 health -- our aging population is growing, and
15 therefore the medical needs are more. This brain
16 health hospital and the clinics that the
17 university is opening across the state,
18 Orangeburg was mentioned, and there are other
19 ones in the state, meeting those needs. So those
20 programs are servicing needs that we see in the
21 state.

22 **Q. I was -- The reason for the questions for you is**
23 **that you're the only incumbent left that we have,**
24 **so I'm trying to get a feel for somebody that**
25 **might have had some of these conversations. So I**

1 was talking with a parent just last week of what
2 will be an incoming freshman in the fall, and
3 they were voicing some frustration. Of course,
4 everybody thinks their kid's the greatest, so
5 we'll give them a little bit of grace on that.

6 A. Everybody's top of their class.

7 Q. Right. From what they described, this student
8 was in the top tier of their class of what they
9 described as a competitive high school and was
10 denied entry, or at least hasn't won entry in the
11 honors college. And they kind of felt as though
12 it was one of those, well, if somebody that is in
13 the top -- I don't know what the requirement is
14 because I wasn't even allowed to walk by the
15 honors college, much less take classes in the
16 honors college. But I don't know what the
17 qualifications or what the qualifications are,
18 top 10% of your graduate class or something.
19 Their argument was, you know, do the schools
20 evaluate the high schools, right? If I'm in the
21 top 10 of a underperforming high school or a
22 lower-performing high school versus I'm in the
23 top 15 of a very high-performing high school, do
24 you know if the university takes those things
25 into consideration?

1 A. I'm not -- that would be probably more directed
2 towards admissions, but I will tell you I hear a
3 lot of the same things. And now that SATs are
4 not required, it's very hard, I think, for anyone
5 to say, well, you know, especially in the state
6 of South Carolina, well, this is a good high
7 school and this is not a bad -- this is not a
8 good high school. I think that comes very hard
9 to compare those things within the state from an
10 admissions department. That's me, that's not so
11 much the board. I think that it's very hard from
12 a very small rural community and be the top 10 of
13 your class and be the top 10 of a big, big
14 competitive high school and yet say, well, they
15 don't -- they can't get the education. So how do
16 you compare those? And so, and as far as the
17 Honors College goes, there is a limited number,
18 and those qualifications, I think, change every
19 year depending upon the applicants they have. So
20 it's certainly very high. It's hard to get into
21 our Honors College. It's hard to stay in it. I
22 couldn't get in it either at the time, but it is
23 every year those qualifications, I think, change
24 depending on the application pool.

25 **Q. Same parent shared a little frustration with the**

1 fact that the university -- and I don't know if
2 the University of South Carolina is any different
3 than any other larger university, but it's the
4 first I've heard of it, is that there's no
5 guarantee of housing in the second year, right?
6 Just pretty much figure it out. And their
7 argument was that's a hard thing to do. It's
8 almost like you have to start on day one of your
9 freshman year, starting to find somebody that you
10 can, you know, build a relationship with and
11 maybe find a place to live together. What kind
12 of conversations are held at the Board level at
13 those types of facilities?

14 A. I'll tell you, last spring we had a wonderful
15 Board meeting with students, with a group of
16 students, and from kind of all different
17 directions of students. They were student
18 leaders. They were just plain old students. And
19 one of the things, the number one issue came up
20 was housing. And the board is very well aware of
21 it. We don't have the space as everybody was, --
22 you know, it's been mentioned numerous times. We
23 would love to have housing. Every one of those
24 students in that room, and there were probably
25 20, 25 of them, said that if they had the

1 opportunity to stay on campus all four years,
2 they would. We don't have it. When I was at
3 Carolina, you know, in your senior year, you
4 opted to move off campus. But we were there all
5 -- and it was a great community. It's just not
6 there. I know that they're looking for answers,
7 public/private partnerships to try to build dorm
8 rooms and things like that close. The other
9 thing that we heard was that students are
10 sometimes being taken advantage of for the very
11 same thing you said, that they've got to sign a
12 lease right now or you can't do that, some
13 predatory things that go on. So they're well
14 aware of those things and try to address those as
15 much as we can at this point.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Senator.

17 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

18 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know you've been
19 listening to a number of our questions already,
20 but I'll tell you that the housing issue seems to
21 me to be somewhat of a consequence of so much of
22 a focus on non-resident students, that if we
23 didn't have that many non-resident students, if
24 the population were down some, then there would
25 be housing availability for the residents. I

1 know you've been on there a little bit longer.
2 This is kind of weird, but you're our
3 longest-tenured incumbent at any of the
4 universities. I would hope that that is
5 something that the Board would consider in
6 looking at what the total population should be,
7 and what the breakdown of resident versus
8 non-residents should be, especially at the
9 flagship. I think you've got a higher
10 responsibility than what we might see from some
11 other universities. I would hope that you all
12 would think about that, because I would like to
13 see those numbers move. I would like to see a
14 bigger delta between residents and non-residents.
15 I understand from listening to Senator Johnson's
16 questions that that may be difficult for the
17 university to achieve. But I do think that's a
18 concern, and I would hope that would be part of
19 the considerations that the Board would think
20 about as well. Also, because I've asked some of
21 the others this, do I understand correctly that
22 you're serving on the Board by virtue of an
23 interim appointment from the Governor? Can you
24 tell me how that came about? How was it that you
25 received an interim appointment?

1 A. I was asked by the Governor. My father served on
2 the University of South Carolina Board of
3 Trustees for a very long time, and he became ill.
4 I had always mentioned to him and to anybody else
5 that when he decided to retire that I wanted to
6 run for it, probably for the last 10 or 15 years.
7 I told him that's what I wanted to do.

8 **Q. He wouldn't give it up.**

9 A. He wouldn't give it up. But I think, no, that's
10 -- you know, but he did, when he became ill, and
11 like I said, I had made it known to the Governor
12 in the past that, you know. I don't think my
13 father asked him. I don't think anybody asked
14 him. I think I had made it known that I was
15 going to run for that seat, for this seat when
16 the time came.

17 **Q. Okay. Thank you.**

18 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose.

19 MS. BUCKHOUSE - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

20 **Q. Hello.**

21 A. Hello.

22 **Q. Good afternoon. Just a comment. I hope that --**
23 **let me ask you this. How important do you think**
24 **it is that the university continue to look at**
25 **pedestrian safety? For me, living in downtown**

1 Columbia, having the campus at USC, and I know
2 there's a study that's probably taking place, but
3 I really hope that you use your voice on the
4 Board to look at that. When I look at Assembly
5 Street, for example, and I know this is something
6 you're -- this is not earth-shattering like you
7 guys are aware, but Assembly Street, I'm always
8 walking there. We have the Greek Village, which
9 is nice. You've got Lincoln 650 for the
10 athletics at the Columbia Center. There's so
11 many kids that are walking across Assembly
12 Street, and they're not using the pedestrian
13 bridge. I know it's there, but for whatever
14 reason, they're not there. And so going across
15 this major thoroughfare. There has been terrible
16 things that have occurred. And I'm always just
17 cringing as I see these kids walking, and then
18 you see them late at night. I guess, obviously,
19 and it's also a win/win for Columbia. If the
20 university is going to be pedestrian-friendly and
21 enhance that, it's going to be good for our
22 capital city. But I just encourage for there
23 really to continue to be conversations about that
24 for our students.

25 A. Totally agree. When I was at Carolina, Greene

1 Street was open.

2 Q. And also, the General Assembly has given close to
3 \$50,000,000 for the Assembly Street Railroad
4 Project. And Congressman Clyburn was able to get
5 an earmark of \$200,000,000. So we're on the cusp
6 of being able to fulfill that project, and one of
7 the three things that could be done with it would
8 be able to get rid of the rail line that runs
9 when you're on Rosewood, turning left onto
10 Assembly Street to do that wraparound. I guess
11 the fairgrounds is on your right. That rail line
12 right there, one of the things that's proposed is
13 to take that away because it wouldn't be needed
14 anymore if we were able to do the fix. And being
15 able to connect that, maybe in a greenway
16 capacity to the university to kind of help draw.
17 A lot of universities have their football stadium
18 on campus. Ours isn't, but we've done a good
19 job. We've kind of grown towards it, but also
20 with the DOT and other things, the engineers did
21 a good job of making the stadium feel like it's
22 there. But a greenway connecting the stadium, we
23 already have a lot of students that like to walk
24 around the football stadium when it's not under
25 construction, of course. But there's so much

1 opportunity there to transform our university for
2 safety, pedestrian-friendly, and help our capital
3 city in the process. So I hope the Board
4 continues to really look at that. That's all I
5 want to say. It's not a question. Just a
6 comment.

7 A. Right, I understand, and I know that those things
8 have been discussed, even on the short time I've
9 been there. The passageway to Williams-Brice,
10 downtown, all those kind of things.

11 **Q. Thank you.**

12 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. If there are no more
13 questions, I'll entertain a motion.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ROSE: Motion.

15 Motion from Representative Rose.

16 REPRESENTATIVE MCGINNIS: Second.

17 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor, raise your right
18 hand.

19 (All hands are raised.)

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? Thank you, ma'am.

21 MS. BUCKHOUSE: Thank you.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, next is Frederick Schipman
23 Johnston.

24 FREDERICK SCHIPMAN JOHNSTON:

25 MR. JOHNSTON: Thank you, sir.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, Mr. Johnston, if you'll raise
2 your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole
3 truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

4 MR. JOHNSTON: Yes, sir.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, if you'd like to make an opening
6 statement, and then we can go into a few questions.

7 MR. JOHNSTON: Sure. My name is Frederick Schipman
8 Johnston. I go by Schipp Johnston, originally from
9 Florence. Came to the university in '82, finished in 86.
10 Moved to Charlotte and worked for a company called Coopers
11 & Liebrand, which is now Price Waterhouse Coopers. Got my
12 CPA certificate. Worked on their audit team for five and a
13 half years, then moved back to Florence. Went to work for
14 a gentleman who gave me an opportunity. 2006, was able to
15 buy his company. Merged with another guy in my same
16 industry in 2018. And since then, we've acquired other
17 businesses that are similar to ours, and we now have ten
18 branches, six in South Carolina, Myrtle Beach, Florence,
19 Charleston, Orangeburg, Columbia, and Greenville, and then
20 four in Georgia, right at 1,000 employees. And I feel like
21 that my accounting and financial background, as well as my
22 business background, would be a benefit to the Board, and
23 this being a vacant seat, I'm not replacing anyone. So,
24 that's me. Thank you.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Webb.

1 MR. JOHNSTON - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

2 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Johnston, can
3 you please state your current address?

4 A. 2447 Sailfish Drive, Murrells Inlet 29576.

5 Q. Okay, thank you. And is this the address that
6 you pay your 4% property tax?

7 A. Yes, ma'am.

8 Q. And is this address within the judicial circuit
9 to which you have applied?

10 A. Yes, ma'am.

11 Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state
12 board, commission, committee, or elected office?

13 A. Nothing elected. Two local long-term board
14 services in Florence. One is Synovus Bank. It's
15 not elected. And the other one is a small board
16 at the MUSC. It used to be Carolinas Hospital
17 Systems. When MUSC bought that, they kept those
18 local Boards in place, and so that's just my
19 involvement as a community person. But you and I
20 have spoke about that, and if those are
21 conflicts, it's not an issue to -- I don't live
22 there anymore, so it's not an issue to resign
23 from those.

24 Q. Yes, and please note for the record that upon
25 doing research, there is no conflict that I could

1 find for you continuing in those positions.

2 A. Thank you.

3 Q. All right. And then, do you understand the
4 obligations and responsibilities of serving on a
5 public institution's board of trustees?

6 A. Yes, ma'am.

7 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
8 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
9 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
10 after the Commission's report has been released?

11 A. Yes, ma'am.

12 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
13 contact members of the General Assembly on your
14 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
15 intervene in this process on your behalf?

16 A. No, ma'am.

17 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
18 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
19 any changes that might occur that would affect
20 your application and overall eligibility for
21 serving on a college board?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. All right. Thank you, Mr. Johnston. And, Mr.
24 Chairman, I have no further questions.

25 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. Thank you, Mr.

1 Johnston. Same issue. There will likely be some
2 questions, but those are under the Garnet Trust. Would you
3 prefer to do that in open session or executive session?

4 MR. JOHNSTON: No, I mean, my answer is going to be
5 similar to Mr. Bonnoitt's. I mean, so --

6 MR. CHAIRMAN: Very good, very good.

7 MR. JOHNSTON: I just have less to give away.

8 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Any questions? Go ahead.

9 MR. JOHNSTON - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

10 **Q. Okay. Mr. Johnston, let me ask you some**
11 **questions about that then, about the Garnet**
12 **Trust. Can you tell me what has been your**
13 **involvement with Garnet Trust?**

14 A. I participate, or I listen, to a quarterly call,
15 but nothing on day-to-day, nothing involved in
16 any individual contracts or anything like that.

17 **Q. Your Statement of Economic Interest indicates**
18 **that you receive ordinary business income from**
19 **the Garnet Trust.**

20 A. Yes.

21 **Q. And what do you receive?**

22 A. A K-1. There's no cash. And it's my
23 understanding -- you're going to say you're a CPA
24 so you should understand that. When that entity
25 was started, it was deemed an LLC for some

1 reason. I'm not sure who made that decision as
2 to what it is. It's now reverted to a C-Corp.
3 So there's no longer going to be K-1s delivered
4 to the people who donated money to that. And
5 that income, my understanding is the remaining
6 cash as of 12/31. It's not an income per se. It
7 is -- if they raised \$300,000 and they only gave
8 away \$200,000, well, at the end of that year,
9 there's going to be \$100,000 revenue left, which
10 in the IRS's world is going to be deemed as
11 income to those people. And so --

12 **Q. Is any of that money distributed to the people?**

13 A. No. No, sir.

14 **Q. All right. So you don't receive any income
15 yourself, personally, from the Garnet Trust?**

16 A. That is correct.

17 **Q. Do you receive any non-income benefit from the
18 Garnet Trust?**

19 A. No, sir.

20 **Q. All right. Do you receive any type of income or
21 non-income benefit from raising money for the
22 university or the Garnet Trust?**

23 A. No, sir.

24 **Q. Okay.**

25 A. And as Mr. Bonnoitt said, I mean, if I were

1 successful, there's zero issue with me divesting
2 of that. And I said, you know, sarcastically, I
3 have less to give up than he did. I only gave
4 \$5,000.

5 **Q. I also understand that from your private employer**
6 **perspective, that your employer is a distributor**
7 **of alcohol and beverages to the university.**

8 A. Correct.

9 **Q. Is that right?**

10 A. Yes.

11 **Q. It does. And just so we're clear on this**
12 **process, is that because -- does the university**
13 **have a choice in the entity that distributes the**
14 **alcohol to it? Can they pick another**
15 **distributor?**

16 A. Not to buy Anheuser-Busch products.

17 **Q. Right. Correct. There is a territorial --**

18 A. Yeah, not to be, you know, vague in any of my
19 responses, full disclosure. Myself and a
20 gentleman named Will Dorminy own Southern Crown
21 Partners. And our branch in Columbia, which is
22 the KW branch, right across from the stadium, we
23 sell beer products to the venues inside the
24 university. Now, most of those are done through
25 a third-party agency. The university doesn't

1 normally handle the concessions.

2 **Q. Yeah, you don't sell to the university directly.**

3 A. That's correct.

4 **Q. They hire somebody to do their services, and they**
5 **have to purchase.**

6 A. That's correct.

7 **Q. If they're going to sell alcohol. But they**
8 **are--by virtue of state law, they're going to be -**
9 **- because of where they are geographically,**
10 **they're going to have to buy that from a -- not**
11 **just from a distributor, but it's got to be from**
12 **you. Is that right?**

13 A. This Columbia location? Yes, sir. And, you
14 know, as you well know in state law, they can't
15 go buy that from a retailer.

16 **Q. That's right.**

17 A. Because they are deemed a retailer.

18 **Q. Right.**

19 A. In the three-tier system, we are the middle
20 wholesaler from manufacturer, wholesaler to
21 retailer.

22 **Q. So what I really wanted to get at is this is not**
23 **a situation where, as a member of the Board, you**
24 **could solicit business through your private**
25 **company because there's no choice from where they**

1 **have --**

2 A. That is correct. And in the state of South
3 Carolina, as it relates to beer, every account
4 has to have the opportunity to buy it at the same
5 price.

6 **Q. Right.**

7 A. So now, yes, we can do quantity discounts for a
8 Walmart. But we can't give a Walmart a \$10 price
9 and the mom-and-pop store down the street a \$15
10 price. That's illegal.

11 **Q. As a member of the Board of Trustees, you**
12 **wouldn't have the ability to give the university**
13 **or whoever it hires -- you couldn't give them a**
14 **lower price.**

15 A. Correct.

16 **Q. You couldn't give them a higher price.**

17 A. It would have to be what the convenience store
18 down the street bought it for.

19 **Q. Okay.**

20 MR. JOHNSTON - EXAMINATION BY CHAIRMAN BENNETT:

21 **Q. For the record, I think it should be made clear**
22 **that it was the Clemson graduate that's been**
23 **probing on the Carolina Garnet Trust NIL**
24 **consortium.**

25 A. I watched a little bit of its hearing the other

1 day. I expected it.

2 MR. JOHNSTON - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

3 Q. I don't know the answer to this question, but I'm
4 going to ask it for this race, since we have four
5 people that are running the Board. And I hope
6 the answer is yes, but I'm curious. Are you a
7 member of the Gamecock Club?

8 A. Yes, 34 years.

9 Q. Very good. Thank you.

10 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Senator from York.

12 MR. JOHNSTON - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

13 Q. To follow up on Senator Edgefield's question,
14 you've received a K-1 every year for how many
15 years?

16 A. From the Garnet Trust?

17 Q. From the Garnet Trust.

18 A. Two.

19 Q. Two years.

20 A. There's '23 and '24 are the two that I've
21 received. I sent you the '24 one yesterday.
22 Yes, sir.

23 Q. So you received this K-1. Does the Garnet -- or
24 did the Garnet Trust in the past ever do a --
25 since this was an LLC, a member tax distribution

1 to cover the taxes? Because you're paying taxes
2 off of that K-1.

3 A. That is correct.

4 Q. So that's just another donation you're giving to
5 the cause?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. That's fair enough. I wanted to make sure I
8 understood that. In your PDQ, your answer, one
9 of your answers is, the Board needs to attract
10 new students and expand enrollment. My question
11 -- so you've been sitting here, you've heard my
12 whole, if you're going to be big -- how do you
13 expand, how do you make the university bigger
14 without keeping a very large amount of actually
15 probably going over the 50% mark of out-of-state
16 students?

17 A. Yes, sir. I've heard that question numerous
18 times. I think, first of all, we need to
19 understand why in-state students are not choosing
20 to come here. And I'm not aware of what that
21 package, when they get their acceptance letter
22 back, if they opt not to go to the university,
23 what are those steps? What do they, is it a
24 reason? Is it the housing issue? Because you
25 only have a housing guarantee for one year?

1 Well, some parents don't want to deal with that.
2 You know, I know that the \$12,000 of tuition is
3 relatively in line. The room and board's another
4 \$15,000, so you're getting really close to that
5 \$30,000 number. The life scholarships and all
6 the other opportunities for scholarship help
7 offset the \$12,000. But I think we clearly need
8 to understand why the people who are accepted
9 South Carolina residents choose not to go here,
10 especially if they choose to go to one of the
11 other 32 schools. If we know that, then I think
12 we can figure out a solution to at least navigate
13 a path to get those kids to come here. If we
14 don't know that, we're always guessing as to how
15 can we get them here.

16 **Q. Certainly. You also wrote that you believe the**
17 **university should align its plans with the**
18 **migration of people moving into the state. What**
19 **do you mean by that? I was curious.**

20 A. All of y'all have done a tremendous job to make
21 the state a very business-friendly state.
22 Cutting taxes, making it easy -- not easy per se,
23 but making it a really good place for people to
24 come and live. So we're having Myrtle Beach, one
25 of the fastest-growing counties in the state. We

1 have a tremendous thing in South Carolina that
2 people want to be here. There's a lot of stuff
3 going on up north that people are probably going
4 to choose to leave from. We're probably one of
5 the states that they're going to navigate to. So
6 I think we're going to have an influx of people.
7 And while they're coming down, it gets back to
8 the pedestrian issue. It gets back to the
9 building issue. Everything you've got going on,
10 you need to have a plan to be able to attract
11 more students because I do believe our 5.5
12 million residents will continue to grow. And the
13 university, the flagship, should be the
14 number-one choice of anyone in this state. Now,
15 how do we get there? I'm not exactly sure what
16 the other ones are offering and/or why these
17 students may or may not choose to come to the
18 university and go to another one. But that would
19 be my number-one thing to dig into is we have to
20 know why they're making that choice. Once we
21 understand that, then we start navigating how do
22 we build the proper buildings? Because I had --
23 I graduated here. Both my parents graduated
24 here, my brother and my sister. My wife attended
25 here, finished at Francis Marion. My oldest

1 started at Wofford, finished here, got her MBA at
2 The Citadel. My youngest is at Midlands Tech.
3 And so I've experienced a lot of issues in
4 schools and stuff. And this one, it blows my
5 mind that it's not the choice. This is such a
6 cool place. I mean, no disrespect to the Clemson
7 guys, but it's such a cool spot. And we got to
8 make sure we understand why they're choosing not
9 to be here.

10 **Q. One last question, and this is just a**
11 **clarification question. If you were appointed to**
12 **the Board at Winthrop, your company could never**
13 **get the contract to sell Budweiser products at**
14 **Winthrop because Winthrop is in Big Bridges,**
15 **right? At B&B. And he's the exclusive supplier**
16 **of Budweiser products.**

17 A. That is correct.

18 **Q. So the only -- and so I want to make sure that's**
19 **very clear to anyone who ever asked about it that**
20 **the reason that University of South Carolina buys**
21 **these products from your company is because you**
22 **are the exclusive wholesaler of that product.**

23 A. Yes. I mean, Anheuser-Busch has what we refer
24 to as an equity agreement. And it has to be two
25 approved individuals. Will and myself are those

1 two approved individuals for our equity
2 agreement. We have one equity agreement for all
3 10 of our branches. And our branch in Columbia
4 and our branch in Greenville will provide all of
5 Clemson's. But the Miller Coors Network here is
6 going to -- Bev South is going to be selling it
7 to the stadium. They don't only buy our beer.
8 They buy everything else. And then same thing in
9 Clemson. I mean, it's just the way the franchise
10 agreements were written, the repeal of
11 prohibition, the setup of the three-tier system.
12 It's just how it has evolved over time. And Will
13 and I started out in -- I started in Florence.
14 He started in Georgia, but he bought Mr.
15 Perlstein's business in Charleston. Then when we
16 merged, we did acquisitions that allowed us to
17 have the branches we have today in the state.
18 But every acquisition does not change the
19 existing footprint that Anheuser-Busch issued to
20 it many, many years ago. We can't co-mingle
21 lines even inside our own company.

22 **Q. Thank you.**

23 MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we'll close with a motion.

24 SENATOR JOHNSON: So moved.

25 SENATOR MASSEY: Second.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: And a second. All those in favor,
2 raise your right hand. And the proxy for Devine.

3 (All hands are raised.)

4 MR. CHAIRMAN: We've got a unanimous affirmative vote
5 and the Devine vote as well. Thank you, sir.

6 MR. JOHNSTON: Yes, sir. Thank you.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Next up is Michelle
8 Kerscher Plyler.

9 MICHELLE KERSCHER PLYLER:

10 MS. PLYLER: Good afternoon.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. How are you? If you
12 would raise your right hand for me. Do you swear to tell
13 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so
14 help you God?

15 MS. PLYLER: I do.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you. Please feel free to
17 give us an opening statement, and we'll move into some
18 initial questions.

19 MS. PLYLER: I am Michelle Kerscher Plyler. I do use
20 my maiden name because there is another Michelle Plyler in
21 the Myrtle Beach area, so there's some confusion sometimes.
22 I'm originally from West Columbia. Grew up about four
23 miles from the university in Springdale, South Carolina and
24 I've been a fan my entire life. I enrolled in the fall of
25 1998. It was the best experience of my life. Have loved

1 the university. And we have been a Gamecock Club member,
2 my uncle and my husband and I, for as long as I can
3 remember. So we have supported the university in multiple
4 ways through financial giving and showing up. I was a
5 student when we were one and 21, so there's dedication. I
6 was at every game. I moved to Myrtle Beach permanently in
7 2012. Where I, with my husband, manage and operate his
8 historic retail gift shop, Downtown Myrtle Beach, as well
9 as 40 rental properties and a small hotel we bought for
10 staff housing as a necessity for the area. I've been on
11 the Board of Visitors for the University of South Carolina
12 since 2020. My term expires in May of 2026, this year.
13 But it has allowed me an education about the university to
14 renew my interest. We are basically a marketing arm. We
15 don't get financial information, but we do hear from heads
16 of departments, deans, and are able to know more about the
17 direction the university is going. It has renewed my
18 interest in that, and I believe that my 24 years of finance
19 and accounting and being able to really drill down into
20 businesses and streamline sources of revenue, as well as
21 expenses, is what would be valuable to the Board of
22 Trustees of the university.

23 MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Webb.

24 MS. PLYLER - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

25 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Plyler, can you

1 **please state your current address?**

2 A. 916 North Ocean Boulevard, Myrtle Beach, South
3 Carolina 29577.

4 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**
5 **your 4% property tax?**

6 A. So it's in a business, so we are not allowed to
7 pay 4% property tax. But we do own another home
8 in Murrells Inlet where we do pay 4% property
9 tax.

10 **Q. Yes. Thank you. And is this address, as well as**
11 **your other address where you do pay your 4%**
12 **property tax, are both of those addresses within**
13 **the judicial circuit to which you have applied?**

14 A. Yes. One is in Horry County. One is in
15 Georgetown County.

16 **Q. Thank you. And do you currently serve on any**
17 **local or state board, commission, committee, or**
18 **elected office?**

19 A. Not that it's elected. I am on the local Board
20 of the American Red Cross, as well as the Myrtle
21 Beach Downtown Alliance, which is a local Board
22 of business owners, but nothing is elected.

23 **Q. Yes. And just please note for the record that**
24 **there are no conflicts with those. And do you**
25 **understand the obligations and responsibilities**

1 of serving on a public institution's board of
2 trustees?

3 A. I do.

4 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
5 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
6 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
7 after the Commission's report has been released?

8 A. I am.

9 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
10 contact members of the General Assembly on your
11 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
12 intervene in this process on your behalf?

13 A. I am not.

14 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
15 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
16 any changes that might occur, though it would
17 affect your application and overall eligibility
18 for serving on a college board?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Thank you, Ms. Plyler. Mr. Chairman, I have no
21 further questions.

22 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. Any questions to
23 start off with? Senator from York.

24 MS. PLYLER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

25 Q. Thank you, Ms. Plyler, for being here today. In

1 your PDQ, you state that in the upcoming years,
2 increasing admissions will be critical due to the
3 lack of population of future generations coming
4 in. And I understand that there is a decreasing
5 pool of applicants. Therefore, in order to do
6 it, you're going to need more students to come
7 in. That gets back to kind of the question that
8 I keep asking. How are you going to do that? If
9 we know that out of the eleven odd thousand
10 students who are admitted, in-state students who
11 are admitted to the University of South Carolina,
12 only about 40% choose the University of South
13 Carolina. How are you going to do what you're
14 saying, increase admissions, without actually
15 drastically increasing the amount of out-of-state
16 students who want to come in?

17 A. By increasing admissions, I mean it's going to be
18 more difficult to fight for that admissions pool
19 because of the declining birth rate across the
20 U.S. South Carolina is uniquely positioned
21 because we are a quickly fast-growing state.
22 Myrtle Beach was the fastest-growing DMA for
23 years until last year. Pigeon Forge is another
24 one. So we are uniquely positioned to have more
25 people in this state to pull from instead of

1 fighting for the declining birth rates across the
2 U.S. However, I think that this current
3 administration, I was -- since 2020, I've been on
4 the Board of Visitors. So I was here for the
5 previous president and as the new administration
6 came in. And I would say that there is a
7 dedication to prioritizing South Carolina
8 students, not only in undergraduate schools, but
9 grad schools. Especially, we've heard from every
10 dean and it's part of their interview process to
11 see if their plan on staying in the South
12 Carolina area after they graduate, which I think
13 is important. But I think that we need to get
14 back out into the high schools as we did prior to
15 COVID. You know, it's been six years, but we're
16 still recovering in a lot of areas because we
17 need to educate the students. Now that we have
18 the 10% of high schools that are automatically
19 guaranteed admission, as well as the USC
20 Commitment Grant, that if their parents make
21 under \$80,000, their tuition and fees would be
22 covered. So I think we need to educate,
23 especially the rural communities, about that
24 ability. And that will help us be better
25 positioned to fight for those South Carolina

1 residents as undergraduates at the university.

2 Q. Thank you.

3 MS. PLYLER - EXAMINATION BY CHAIRMAN BENNETT:

4 Q. Ma'am, are you familiar with the FIRE
5 organization that we spoke on? I don't know if
6 you were in the room earlier. The organization,
7 FIRE.

8 A. I am not. I was in the next room since 2:00
9 o'clock, but I must have missed that one.

10 Q. FIRE is a free speech organization.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And one of the things that they do is rate
13 university campuses for free speech. And were
14 you aware that a few years ago, FIRE had us rated
15 an F at the University of South Carolina, rated
16 an F?

17 A. I was not aware until I heard that comment
18 earlier today.

19 Q. Okay, so you know that after the university was
20 made aware of that and they reached out to that
21 organization and provided them some more
22 information, that that grade was improved. It's
23 not great, but it's improved. It's moved into
24 the green category, as they call it. My question
25 to you is, how do we ensure, how does the Board

1 **ensure, and to what extent does the Board engage**
2 **to ensure that there's free speech on the campus**
3 **and that students are challenged, but yet**
4 **maintain the culture of South Carolina and not**
5 **the culture of some other part of the country?**

6 A. Absolutely. I think that, you know, cancel
7 culture was such a huge thing for so long and
8 people were afraid to speak out on either side
9 because you never knew what the effect of that
10 was going to be. I think the important thing to
11 go back to is the Carolinian Creed. It says that
12 we need to respect all people. That needs to be
13 focused on the University 101 classes, that this
14 is a university. I think the Board is
15 responsible at the end of the day for creating an
16 environment that allows people to grow, hear
17 different perspectives. You don't know what you
18 don't know. And you need to be able to listen to
19 other people respectfully, and so I think that we
20 need to focus more on that. It's easy to say,
21 just as they do in Myrtle Beach, we want to go
22 back to the days of the 80s where, you know,
23 everything was fabulous, but we didn't have
24 social media. We didn't have the changing
25 society that we have today. So I think we need

1 to refocus on that creed of respect to others and
2 make sure that this university fosters that and
3 find a way to deal with situations where we had a
4 speaker that was coming to the university that
5 was very controversial a few years ago, and I
6 think the university handled it admirably at the
7 end. But they needed a better plan in the
8 beginning. Handling the public relations fallout
9 of that, because bad news travels fast. The good
10 news that follows is much less viral, so I think
11 that we need to create a public relations
12 strategy also to deal with when those situations
13 happen because we need to be a community that
14 fosters all ideas.

15 **Q. Should parents be concerned that if they send**
16 **their children to the University of South**
17 **Carolina -- any of the campuses should be worried**
18 **that their child will be indoctrinated, whichever**
19 **side you think the indoctrination may occur? Do**
20 **you think they should worry about that?**

21 A. I don't think they should, and I think that we
22 should definitely educate parents that the
23 university doesn't need to feed into that. We
24 shouldn't have professors that are teaching
25 sides. We need to be sure that we are auditing

1 classes, that we are making sure that we are
2 fairly presenting the evidence, and every
3 political side, and make sure that those students
4 can hear all sides and decide for themselves. We
5 need more individuals and less mob mentality in
6 some universities across the country.

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

8 SENATOR MASSEY: I'd make a motion.

9 SENATOR JOHNSON: Second.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion for favorable report,
11 and a second. All those in favor, raise your right hand.

12 (All hands are raised.)

13 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? Thank you, ma'am.

14 MS. PLYLER: Thank you.

15 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Anthony Holland Pope. Good
16 afternoon, Mr. Pope.

17 ANTHONY HOLLAND POPE:

18 MR. POPE: Good afternoon, and thank you for the
19 opportunity, and thank you all for your service to our
20 state as well. I'm jumping ahead.

21 MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me swear you in real quick, and
22 then you can get into that. If you'll raise your right
23 hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
24 nothing but the truth, so help you God?

25 MR. POPE: I do.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. Now feel free to provide us
2 with an opening statement, and then we'll move into some
3 initial comments.

4 MR. POPE: As you said, I'm Anthony Holland Pope. I
5 go by Tony Pope, and I grew up in Georgetown. I attended
6 the University of South Carolina, graduated in 1986. I was
7 the first member of my family to have the opportunity to go
8 to college, and obviously the first to graduate. Since
9 then my sister, her brother -- I'm sorry, her husband, her
10 daughter, her son have all graduated from the university.
11 Lifelong fan, to address Representative Rose's question
12 earlier, 42-year member of the Gamecock Club, 25 years at a
13 higher level, 42 combined. I'm a member of the Garnet
14 Society, Horseshoe Society, higher level at the Legends
15 level of Garnet Society. So I've given back to the
16 university financially over time, and I want to utilize the
17 skills I've learned in my work life to help the university.
18 I've been really involved in boards, chambers of commerce
19 boards, economic development, things like that, nonprofit
20 boards. I've held leadership positions in those boards.
21 So I think I've got a well-rounded background from that
22 perspective. I've also got knowledge from the business
23 owner perspective of starting a State Farm agency when I
24 was 26 years old, now building it to one of the largest in
25 South Carolina and serves South Carolina, Georgia, and

1 North Carolina. And we have three locations. The only
2 agent that has three locations in our state. So I've had
3 success there. I've had some success in commercial real
4 estate, 30-some tenants there that we handle property
5 management for. I've got infrastructure-type experience in
6 renovating buildings, bringing older buildings back to
7 life, re-purposing those things. So I think there's a lot
8 of things that I could bring to the table as a board
9 member.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. Ms. Webb.

11 MR. POPE - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

12 **Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Pope, can you**
13 **please state your current address?**

14 A. Yes, 224 Cannon Street, Georgetown 29440.

15 **Q. Thank you. And is this the address where you pay**
16 **your 4% property tax?**

17 A. Yes.

18 **Q. And is this address within the judicial circuit**
19 **to which you have applied?**

20 A. Yes.

21 **Q. And do you currently serve on any local or state**
22 **board, commission, committee, or other elected**
23 **office?**

24 A. Yes. And we've disclosed those and had
25 conversations with you that there shouldn't be a

1 conflict, but I'm happy to list those if you'd
2 like me to.

3 Q. No, you don't have to. Just for the record, I
4 will note that you do serve on the Dorchester
5 County Economic Development Board. Is that
6 correct?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. And according to research that I have conducted,
9 according to previous AG's opinions, that is
10 actually not a public office, just for the
11 record.

12 A. Thank you.

13 Q. All right. And do you understand the obligations
14 and responsibilities of serving on a public
15 institution's board of trustees?

16 A. Yes, I do.

17 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
18 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
19 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours
20 after the Commission's report has been released?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
23 contact members of the General Assembly on your
24 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
25 intervene in this process on your behalf?

1 A. No.

2 Q. All right. And are you aware that you have an
3 ongoing obligation and duty to report to the
4 Commission any changes that might occur that
5 would affect your application and overall
6 eligibility for serving on a college board?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. All right. Thank you, Mr. Pope. Mr. Chairman, I
9 have no further questions.

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. Are there any
11 questions for Mr. Pope?

12 SENATOR JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman.

13 MR. POPE - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

14 Q. I keep trying to think of a different way to
15 phrase it. So I'll just say this. Do you
16 believe that the university needs to keep its
17 out-of-state enrollment as high as it currently
18 is and possibly higher in order to maintain its
19 current level of student attendance?

20 A. I don't. I think we need to find a way to
21 recruit more students from our state to attend
22 our flagship university.

23 Q. Why aren't they?

24 A. What's that?

25 Q. Why aren't they?

1 A. I don't know yet. We'll figure that out. But my
2 hope would be that I could bring some perspective
3 to the board. If it's increasing awareness of
4 the university, marketing it to more high school
5 students, opportunities that we have, I think we
6 can't -- I've always said in business, you have
7 to grow. If you can't stay still, you've got to
8 go backwards. So I think we do need to look for
9 ways to be aggressive and grow the student
10 population, primarily from within the state as
11 much as we can. And whether I have all those
12 answers right now or not, I don't know. I'm
13 brand new to the board, but I certainly feel my
14 experience would be helpful. I didn't just
15 really get into the chamber of commerce things
16 I've done. I've been a Board chairman twice, and
17 I've learned a good bit about workforce
18 development, things like that, and the economic
19 development Board that I'm on as well. So I know
20 there's a problem just finishing high school, not
21 necessarily keeping our kids here to go to
22 college. There's a significant amount of
23 children that start high school and never finish.
24 It was staggering when I heard the number. I'm
25 all for doing all that we can to make the

1 university stronger internally from our state,
2 bringing more kids, young adults, to our program.

3 Q. Thank you, sir.

4 MR. POPE - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR MASSEY:

5 Q. Thank you. Hi, Mr. Pope. I'm looking at the
6 list of boards and commissions that you've served
7 on. Do I understand correctly that you currently
8 serve on the Dorchester County Economic
9 Development Board?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Do you currently serve on the Charleston Regional
12 Development Alliance?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Do you currently serve on the Charleston Southern
15 Board of Visitors?

16 A. I do.

17 Q. Do you currently serve on the Trident Technical
18 College Foundation Board?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. You -- and according to the written information
21 that you provided, you have resided at your
22 address in Georgetown for 18 years?

23 A. I've owned the home as a residence for 18 years.

24 Q. I'm curious how you reside in Georgetown, but
25 your community involvement seems to be in the

1 **Dorchester County, Charleston area, Berkley**
2 **County area quite a bit. Can you explain that to**
3 **me?**

4 A. Yes, sir. My businesses are in the Charleston
5 metro area. I've got an office in Mount
6 Pleasant, Summerville, and North Charleston.
7 With the opening of the Mount Pleasant office,
8 with the declining age of my parents, the need to
9 be closer to them than Georgetown, I've spent a
10 lot more time in Georgetown. My primary
11 residence has not been that Cannon Street home
12 the entire 18 years that I've owned it, but it's
13 never been a rental home. It's always been a
14 home. But this year, yeah, this last year has
15 been different.

16 **Q. How long has the Georgetown residence been your**
17 **primary residence?**

18 A. Just the middle of last year.

19 **Q. Okay. Where was your primary residence before**
20 **that?**

21 A. Dorchester County, Summerville.

22 **Q. How long were you a resident of Summerville?**

23 A. Since I left college. I moved to Summerville in
24 1986 and stayed there a brief time in Berkley
25 County when I was in my early 20s, but home

1 ownership has been in the Summerville area. My
2 job has changed. My responsibilities are
3 different with different locations. So it allows
4 the flexibility to stay in Georgetown, drive to
5 Mount Pleasant, not be caught up in all the I-26
6 congestion every day trying to get there, so.

7 **Q. Do you still maintain the home in Summerville?**

8 A. Yes.

9 **Q. Okay. That's all I've got, Mr. Chairman.**

10 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Is there a motion
11 to approve the report?

12 SENATOR JOHNSON: Move to approve the report.

13 SENATOR MASSEY: Second.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor say aye, or raise
15 your right hand.

16 (All hands are raised except Senator
Bennett who abstained.)

17 MR. CHAIRMAN: Any opposed? No. Devine votes aye.
18 For the record, I will abstain for this. Mr. Pope has
19 actually donated to me in the past, and I think it's
20 appropriate that I abstain. Very good. Thank you. All
21 right. Kellah Fortson Webster.

22 KELLAH FORTSON WEBSTER:

23 MS. WEBSTER: The very last one.

24 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Good afternoon.

25 MS. WEBSTER: Good afternoon.

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: If you'll raise your right hand and let
2 me swear you in. Do you promise to tell the truth, the
3 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

4 MS. WEBSTER: I do.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: Great. You're welcome to give us an
6 opening statement, and then we'll get into some initial
7 questions.

8 MS. WEBSTER: Thank you very much. I'm Kellah Fortson
9 Webster. I am from Conway, South Carolina. I've lived in
10 Conway since I was about five years old. I still can't say
11 that you're from Conway. In Conway, unless you were born
12 in Conway, you can't be from Conway. But I have been in
13 Conway for about 50 years. I come from a long line of
14 Carolina graduates. My grandfather played football at
15 Carolina from '31 to '34. He was one of the founders of
16 the Bam Club, which became the Gamecock Club. He and my
17 grandmother met at Carolina. My parents met at Carolina.
18 My whole entire family graduated from Carolina. I'm a
19 third-generation graduate. My son was a fourth-generation
20 graduate, and he met his wife, who was a Sparty. They met
21 at Darla Moore, and she was doing her graduate work. She
22 did the dual international JVIMBA program at Carolina. So
23 we have a rich history. I currently serve on the Board of
24 Governors for the Alumni Association. I've done that since
25 2017. I currently serve as the secretary of the Board. I

1 am very proud to say that we, when I got on the Board, we
2 were \$21,000,000 in debt for the Pastides Alumni Center.
3 We had a building to pay for. And last year, we burned the
4 mortgage. We were able to pay off the debt, and I was able
5 to secure the last million-dollar donation. We got a donor
6 who wrote us a check for a million dollars, and we were
7 able to pay it off. So I've done a lot of work for the
8 university. I was -- I have been the president of the
9 Horry County Gamecock Club since -- well, it's been about
10 12 years that I've been president. I have been on the
11 Board since 1998, which is kind of sad. I don't want to
12 say that I've been doing anything that long. I shouldn't
13 be that old, but I am. We have, in Conway, we have a
14 family business, Environmental Systems Testing Services.
15 It's been around since 1980. My mom started it, and my
16 brother and I took it over in 1998. And we run it now. So
17 we've been in Horry County. We've been established there
18 for a while. So I'm really excited about the prospect of
19 serving on Board of trustees. I have a lot of blood,
20 sweat, and equity that I have already invested into the
21 university, and I want to see her around for a long time to
22 come. We are really invested in the university. I was
23 raised by a family that taught us at a very early age that
24 we owe her a debt of gratitude, and it's our responsibility
25 to give back to her. And we take that responsibility

1 really seriously around our house. And I look forward to
2 answering your questions.

3 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Ms. Webb.

4 MS. WEBSTER - EXAMINATION BY MS. WEBB:

5 Q. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Ms. Webster, can
6 you please state your current address?

7 A. 1102 9th Avenue, Conway, South Carolina.

8 Q. And is this the address where you pay your 4%
9 property tax?

10 A. It is.

11 Q. Thank you. And is this address within the
12 judicial circuit to which you have applied?

13 A. It is.

14 Q. All right. And do you currently serve on any
15 local or state board, commission, committee, or
16 elected office?

17 A. Not that would conflict, just what we've talked
18 about.

19 Q. Yes. Thank you. And do you understand the
20 obligations and responsibilities of serving on a
21 public institution's board of trustees?

22 A. I do.

23 Q. And are you aware that you cannot contact any
24 member of the General Assembly and formally ask
25 for a vote commitment or pledge until 48 hours

1 after the Commission's report has been released?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And have you currently asked any third parties to
4 contact members of the General Assembly on your
5 behalf, or are you aware of anyone attempting to
6 intervene in this process on your behalf?

7 A. No.

8 Q. And are you aware that you have an ongoing
9 obligation and duty to report to the Commission
10 any changes that might occur that would affect
11 your application and overall eligibility for
12 serving on a college board?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. All right. Thank you, Ms. Webster. And, Mr.
15 Chairman, I have no further questions.

16 MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Webb. Are there any
17 questions for Ms. Webster?

18 MS. WEBSTER - EXAMINATION BY SENATOR JOHNSON:

19 Q. Ms. Webster, I don't want to leave you out. I've
20 asked everybody else, so I might as well ask you.
21 You know the question. If you want to just go
22 ahead and answer it, I won't phrase it even.

23 A. Well, I truly think that as far as out-of-state
24 students go and growth, it's one of those things
25 where we're going to have to embrace it because I

1 don't think we really have a choice in that with
2 the new brain hospital and all the things that
3 are coming our way with, as people have mentioned
4 before, the matriculation from the north, people
5 coming our way, people, they want to come. And
6 so it's an issue that we're going to have to
7 address. I don't know that we really have a
8 choice. We had over 40,000 students this year
9 for the first time ever. We finally broke that
10 40,000 mark, and it's an issue that we're going
11 to have to deal with. I have been one of those
12 people, Representative Rose, when you were
13 talking about earlier your friend with a child at
14 Wofford. I have a friend with a child that was
15 going to Wofford, that got a call about Wofford.
16 Her child got wait-listed. She ended up at
17 Wofford. She had a scholarship offer from
18 Wofford and got wait-listed at South Carolina. I
19 think one of the reasons that those kids are
20 getting wait-listed is a direct effect from the
21 10 percent deal that we've done, allowing the top
22 10 percent of the kids in high school, those kids
23 that are graduating in the top 10 percent of
24 their classes, we've given them an automatic
25 opportunity to come should they choose to take

1 it. One of the problems that we're seeing, A, we
2 don't have to take SAT scores anymore. That came
3 from COVID. It was a direct result of kids not
4 taking the SAT during COVID. There's not that
5 line of matriculation anymore. There's a lot of
6 kids that have a 3.9 or a 4.0, so you don't have
7 that to separate them. And so a lot of these
8 kids are getting wait-listed. And then we have a
9 problem that South Carolina is sending the kids.
10 We're about two weeks behind with our acceptance
11 letters. A lot of the other colleges send their
12 acceptance letters about two weeks, three weeks
13 before we do. And these kids kind of panic.
14 They're like, you know, I've got to go somewhere.
15 It just happened to my niece. And so she went
16 ahead and accepted at Ole Miss instead of waiting
17 around for South Carolina because she got wait-
18 listed. A lot of these kids are going to end up
19 getting accepted, but they hold these spots open
20 to see if these kids that were going to be given,
21 that were offered these spots, to see if they're
22 going to take them or not. It's something we've
23 got to look at. I think that once we kind of
24 work out and see how -- we've only done this
25 program with a 10% for two years, and we're

1 learning it. Those kinks have got to be worked
2 out, and we're missing kids. We're losing. We
3 don't offer enough scholarships. How a child can
4 get a scholarship and be accepted at Wofford, and
5 we're not accepting them. I don't understand how
6 that happens either, and it's stuff we've got to
7 look at. I would love to have the opportunity to
8 do that.

9 MR. CHAIRMAN: Representative Rose.

10 MS. WEBSTER - EXAMINATION BY REPRESENTATIVE ROSE:

11 **Q. Is it too late to talk your niece out of going to**
12 **Ole Miss.**

13 A. It is. She's a sophomore. But her sister is a
14 junior here.

15 MS. WEBSTER - EXAMINATION BY CHAIRMAN BENNETT:

16 **Q. What's the role of the Board?**

17 A. I'm sorry?

18 **Q. What's the role of a board member? I mean do you**
19 **think it is to take the information that the**
20 **leadership of the university provides and just**
21 **okay it? Or do you think it is to challenge the**
22 **leadership? How would you envision conversations**
23 **around that board table?**

24 A. That's kind of a tricky question sometimes. I
25 think you have to navigate the waters. Sometimes

1 you've got to be the bad guy. Sometimes you have
2 to be the support system. You know, it depends
3 on what's called for in the situation. There's
4 going to be decisions that are going to be made
5 that are not going to be popular. Sometimes what
6 the popular thing to do is not what needs to be
7 done. Sometimes it's going to be a difficult
8 call, but it's going to be the right thing. I
9 think that you have to do what is the best thing
10 for the university all the time, the best thing
11 for the students. It's not always going to be
12 necessarily politically popular. It may not be
13 what everybody, you know, wants to see done. But
14 you have to do what's the best thing for the
15 university.

16 **Q. How do you challenge -- how do you -- What's the**
17 **best way to ask this question? This university**
18 **sits just yards away from this campus. Politics**
19 **are always in the middle of the activities of the**
20 **university. There are plenty of people in this**
21 **building and buildings across the way that would**
22 **love to govern from here what the university does**
23 **and does not do. How do you handle those**
24 **pressures?**

25 **A. Well, I'll tell you. When all of the backlash**

1 was happening a couple years ago with all the
2 discussion of restructuring the board, one of the
3 options on the table was taking away the seat for
4 the Alumni Association. My stance at the time
5 was, why would you take away the one seat that
6 wasn't a political position? Every other seat,
7 you have to get all of you to support it, except
8 for the Alumni Association. Which is the sole
9 thing that the Alumni Association seat does, you
10 are literally working for the graduates, and
11 you're not beholden to anybody. I don't know why
12 you would want to take that one away, because
13 it's hard. You're encouraging people to do quid
14 pro quo, to me, the way that this process works.

15 **Q. There are at least 32 public colleges and**
16 **universities in South Carolina, each with their**
17 **own board. Other states use a board of regents**
18 **system, where there is one board to deal with the**
19 **affairs of all public universities in that state.**
20 **North Carolina does that. There's a great deal**
21 **of overlap in programs amongst a lot of our**
22 **universities. We've talked a lot about building**
23 **costs, and the fact that USC never met a building**
24 **it didn't like. But they're not the only ones.**
25 **If there were significant discussions, you**

1 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, is there a motion to exit
2 executive session?

3 SENATOR MASSEY: Yes, sir.

4 SENATOR JOHNSON: Second.

5 MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favor say aye.

6 (Ayes are heard.)

7 MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, we are back in public
8 session. Good, all right.

9 SENATOR MASSEY: Mr. Chairman, I move for a favorable
10 report.

11 MR. CHAIRMAN: There's motion for a favorable report.
12 Is there a second?

13 SENATOR JOHNSON: Second.

14 MR. CHAIRMAN: And a second. All those in favor,
15 raise your right hand.

16 (All hands are raised.)

17 MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone opposed? And Devine is in
18 favor. Thank you very much.

19 MS. WEBSTER: Thank you.

20 MR. CHAIRMAN: Folks, I appreciate your time. And
21 Macey, thank you for all of your work. We are adjourned.
22 (There being nothing further, the proceeding concluded at
23 6:13 p.m.)
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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

I, JENNIFER NOTTLE, COURT REPORTER AND NOTARY PUBLIC
IN AND FOR THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA AT LARGE, HEREBY
CERTIFY THAT I REPORTED THIS PROCEEDING, ON THURSDAY, THE
5TH DAY OF MARCH, 2026, AND THAT THE FOREGOING 219 PAGES
CONSTITUTE A TRUE AND CORRECT TRANSCRIPTION OF MY STENOMASK
REPORT OF SAID PROCEEDING.

I FURTHER CERTIFY THAT I AM NEITHER ATTORNEY NOR
COUNSEL FOR, NOR RELATED TO OR EMPLOYED BY ANY OF THE
PARTIES CONNECTED WITH THIS ACTION, NOR AM I FINANCIALLY
INTERESTED IN SAID CAUSE.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I HAVE SET MY HAND AND SEAL THIS
23RD DAY OF MARCH, 2026.


JENNIFER NOTTLE, COURT REPORTER

MY COMMISSION EXPIRES JULY 19, 2033

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