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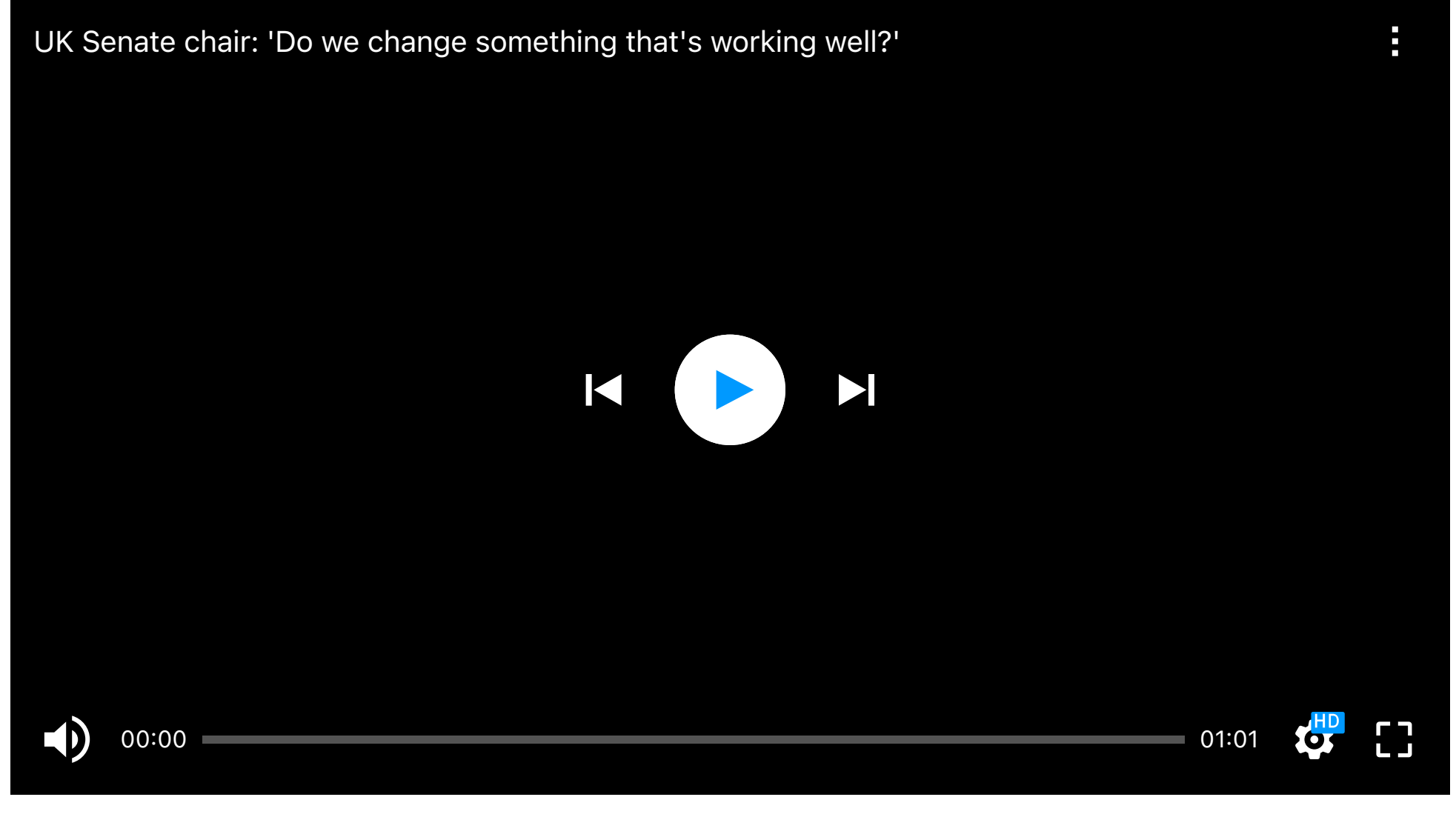
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EDUCATION

UK Senate Council has 'profound concerns' about proposed changes to its responsibilities

BY MONICA KAST
UPDATED FEBRUARY 27, 2024 5:20 PM



DeShana Collett, chair of the University Senate Council at the University of Kentucky, reacts to a new report released Feb. 23, 2024, that proposes changing the faculty senate's role on campus. The report, presented at a university Board of Trustees meeting at the Gatton Student Center, could change the senate's authority to create policy. BY RYAN C. HERMENS

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The University of Kentucky Senate Council passed a resolution Monday expressing "profound concerns" over potential changes to the university's governance structure and asked to be included in the process.

On Friday, the board of trustees [approved a resolution](#) directing UK President Eli Capilouto to "formulate recommended changes" to the university's governing regulations, to be presented at the April board meeting. The resolution came after a presentation earlier in the day addressing the board's charge to review university governance structures and regulations.

Administrators said the move would streamline the decision-making and policy-setting processes, while giving equal governance to student and staff groups on campus. But some faculty members worry such changes would ultimately take their power away.

The senate council, which is the executive arm of the university senate, also included in Monday's resolution a request to be "equal partners in this process" as Capilouto formulates recommendations for the next board meeting.

"We urge the President and Board of Trustees to uphold the existing, clearly delineated role and responsibility of the Senate in matters concerning educational policy, recognizing the Senate's indispensable contribution to the maintenance of academic excellence, institutional integrity and accreditation," the resolution said.

Senators said there may be room for streamlining their rules and regulations — which are 305 pages, while other universities have an average rule book of 35 pages, according to the presentation from Friday — but Friday's resolution is "a manufactured emergency," said Jennifer Cramer, a linguistics professor.

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UK's senate, which was first established in 1917, serves an advisory role, but also holds policy-making power. For example, the senate approves academic programs and sets admissions standards at UK.

In the process of reviewing the university senate, the working group found UK's senate operates differently from 26 other institutions reviewed.

Senators said they hope to work with administrators when looking at changes and want to be consulted before recommendations are taken to the board in April.

"We desperately need our administrators," said Doug Michaels, a law professor and senate council member. "There are no sides. We're all on the same side of this, and (administrators) are important to the faculty. ... If we all work together, we'll get what we need."

DeShana Collett, chair of the University Senate Council at the University of Kentucky, speaks following a university Board of Trustees meeting at the Gatton Student Center on the UK campus in Lexington, Ky., on Friday, Feb. 23, 2024. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com

Senators raised concerns about what potential changes could mean for academic standards and programs at UK, and said professors are the best people to make those decisions because they are the subject matter experts and the ones who work with students directly.

UK Spokesperson Jay Blanton said the directive from the board is about "fewer rules and regulations and more voices and people in our community at the table sharing in the governance of our institution."

"Right now, our faculty and colleges, our students and our staff don't equally share in the governance of our community," Blanton said. "It's not equitable. We have an opportunity to engage with each other about what a more open, responsive and inclusive shared governance structure can look like at UK, while maintaining the primary role faculty have in our curriculum. That's exciting. We are looking forward to the conversation and making the changes our board has directed."

Part of Friday's resolution said changes should recognize "the Board's primacy as the institution's policymaking body." It also said faculty members would have responsibility over "educational practice," instead of "educational policy," which critics of the resolution said weakens faculty input.

"What this likely means is taking (authority) out of the hands of experts, those who teach the classes, those who have their hands on the pulse ... instead it's going to put the authority on unelected administrators who don't have that same connection to the content creation," Cramer said.

On Monday, senators expressed concern about the data presented in Friday's meeting, after a representative from Deloitte said their process for gathering data and interviews "was not intended to be scientific." DeShana Collett, senate council president, said neither she nor her office had been contacted through that process for an interview or information about the senate.

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New faculty trustee Hubie Ballard (this is his first meeting as trustee) said he does not view this report as a loss of shared governance, but a way to maintain shared governance. Says "a large body of faculty do not view this as a loss of our voice."

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Swanson asks about the interview process and if there's data about if UK's policy-making process is slower than other schools. Deloitte rep. says their interview "process was not intended to be scientific," which gets laughs from faculty in the audience.
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FRIDAY'S BOARD MEETING

Around 50 faculty and staff members showed up to Friday morning board meetings to express their concern and disagreement with the resolution. Later that day, the resolution passed with one dissenting vote — Hollie Swanson, one of two faculty trustees. Hubie Ballard, whose first board meeting as faculty trustee was Friday, voted in favor of the resolution, saying he viewed the report as a way to strengthen shared governance and "a large body of faculty do not view this as a loss of our voice."

When asked about the timeline for receiving the resolution from the board of trustees, Swanson said the board received some information last Tuesday, and she was asked to meet with Capilouto the next day. The resolution the board approved was not distributed until lunch on Friday, and was voted on at the 1:30 p.m. meeting.



"The way it was explained to me was that we are under a lot of criticism from the legislative bodies and that we have to tell our story, and we have to make sure that we are responsive to the needs of the Commonwealth," Swanson said.

Capilouto was invited to attend a meeting next week with the senate to discuss the resolution, but Collett said he will be unable to attend. He plans to attend a meeting later in March, she said.

University of Kentucky Board of Trustees faculty trustee Hollie Swanson speaks to the board on Friday, February 23, 2024. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com

This story was originally published February 27, 2024, 11:56 AM.

CORRECTION: This story has been updated to correct a quote from Jennifer Cramer.
CORRECTED FEB 27, 2024

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