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FEATURED

Utah Tech faculty votes 'no confidence' in university leadership amid lawsuit allegations

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Photo by Haven Scott, St. George News

The Utah Tech University campus is shown in St. George, Utah, July 14, 2023.



The faculty senate of Utah Tech University passed a resolution of “no confidence” in the administrative leadership of the university in the wake of the federal lawsuit accusing former President Richard “Biff” Williams and others of misconduct, harassment and retaliation.

The resolution was introduced Wednesday and passed with a majority the next day, according to the Salt Lake Tribune.

The resolution calls for an independent review of the allegations made against the Williams in the lawsuit and the university's response in order to “ensure accountability and transparency and that those named in the lawsuit not be allowed to select the independent body for this review.”

The lawsuit calls the investigation into complaints made by Rebecca Broadbent against Williams a “sham.” Broadbent, Jared Rasband and Hazel Sainsbury, who serve as Utah Tech's general counsel, senior associate general counsel, and the equity compliance director and title XI coordinate respectively, allege they are being targeted and undermined in their duties at the university.



Utah Tech President Richard “Biff” Williams speaks in front of students, St. George, Utah, date not specified.

Photo courtesy of Jyl Hall, Utah Tech University

The resolution goes on to demand an apology from interim university President Courtney White concerning the lawsuit and the negative effects staff said it has had on students and faculty, as well as the negative attention brought “to the good name and reputation of Utah Tech University.”

White is one of the members of Utah Tech's administration named in the lawsuit and was included in the “no confidence” resolution, along with five others. In the lawsuit, several administrators are accused of failing to report incidents of Williams' misconduct and later misleading investigators.

The resolution also notes that, while Williams publicly apologized regarding allegations in the lawsuit, no apology has been directly to Utah Tech.



Utah Tech University's enrollment increased by 4.77% over last year, with 13,167 students enrolled in the Fall 2024 semester, St. George, Utah, date not specified.

Photo courtesy of Utah Tech University

"We call for immediate decisive action to restore trust and integrity at Utah Tech University," the resolution states.

The resolution is largely symbolic, yet allows the faculty senate to send a message to the university's leadership about faculty and student concerns, and regarding issues raised by the federal lawsuit.

When asked about the "no confidence" resolution by St George News, Utah Tech University responded with the

following statement:

"The university remains committed to providing a supportive and productive space of learning and working for all. We appreciate the university community's dedication to helping the university provide our students dynamic active learning experiences as we continue to work diligently to address all concerns."

Williams served as the president of Utah Tech University, formerly Dixie State University, from mid-2014 to January 2024. He has since taken the role as the president of Missouri State University. That school's faculty senate passed a similar "no confidence" resolution against Williams on Thursday.

At Missouri State University



Pictured is the view from Heritage Cove, looking south toward the clocktower on the Utah Tech Campus, St. George, Utah, Oct. 20, 2024.

A day after MSU's faculty senate
passed a "no confidence" resolution

Photo by Nick Fiala, St. George News

against Williams, the university's board of governors reaffirmed its support for the former Utah Tech president. He will remain at the university amid concerns of harassment and misconduct raised in the lawsuit filed earlier this month.

Williams was inaugurated as the 12th president of Missouri State University in October.

"After careful consideration, we believe President Williams continues to be the right person to lead Missouri State. We have voted unanimously to support and continue his employment as president of the university," the board wrote in an email to the MSU campus on Friday, according to the Springfield News-Leader.



Dixie State University President Richard "Biff" Williams at the 2019 Presidential Awards Ceremony held at DSU, April 18, 2019, St. George, Utah.

Photo courtesy of Dixie State University

The board's choice to support Williams follows Thursday's vote of "no confidence" made by MSU's faculty senate.

As reported by the Springfield News-Leader, the final resolution by the groups reads: "Whereas, the conduct of President Williams at Utah Tech is not in line with Missouri State University's commitments to ethical leadership and inclusive excellence; and whereas, the high-profile nature of his breach in ethical leadership and

inclusive excellence could negatively affect MSU's current search for a new provost, development of a strategic plan, and the university's ability to recruit and retain students, staff, and faculty; Therefore be it resolved, that the senate expresses no confidence in the leadership of President Williams."

Some university faculty members told the Springfield News-Leader that the vote was largely a symbolic measure, as Williams' fate was in the hands of the board of governors. One faculty senate member said the "no confidence" vote was, as they

understood it, a general declaration from the faculty to Williams similar to “we cannot work with you.”

The lawsuit

The lawsuit was filed on Nov. 7 and alleges that in November 2023, Williams left the names of Broadbent, Rasband and Sainsbury on a note without their knowledge or consent as a part of a vulgar prank. Along with two eggplants and an elongated zucchini in the pattern of male genitalia on a colleague's porch, Williams left behind the note wishing that colleague well, as he was recovering from a vasectomy. Williams hoped the coworker would enjoy the “zuweenie” gift.

Broadbent, Rasband and Sainsbury detailed in their lawsuit that they felt humiliated and harassed once they learned about the prank. They said it was one example of the hostile work environment and retaliation they each endured from Williams and others at the university since 2021.

Broadbent in particular has been unable to fulfill her duties at the university due to being put on administrative leave and hasn't been able to return to her job.

Meanwhile, Williams as given a favorable separation agreement as a part of his leaving Utah Tech in January. This included a \$357,000 salary plus benefits through January 2025.

“I initiated what I intended to be a humorous gesture toward a member of our staff,” Williams wrote in an apology to MSU following a Salt Lake Tribune story. “I have since come to realize that the prank was not appropriate. This was a mistake. I regret my lapse in judgment, and I accept this as a learning moment.”



This image shows the "zuweenie" display and accompanying note left on the doorstep of a Utah Tech vice president as a gag gift by former Utah Tech President Richard "Biff" Williams, location and date not specified.

Image from court documents

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