



Full Board
January 18, 2024
FIU, Modesto A. Maidique Campus, Graham Center Ballrooms

MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Chair's Remarks

Board Chair Roger Tovar convened the meeting of the Florida International University Board of Trustees at 3:30 PM on Thursday, January 18, 2024.

General Counsel Carlos B. Castillo conducted roll call of the Florida International University Board of Trustees and verified a quorum. Present were Roger Tovar, *Board Chair*; Carlos A. Duarte, *Board Vice Chair (Zoom)*; Cesar L. Alvarez; Noël C. Barengo; Dean C. Colson; Alan Gonzalez (*Zoom*); Francis A. Hondal; Natasha Lowell; Yaffa Popack; Gene Prescott; Chanel T. Rowe (*Zoom*); and Alexander P. Sutton.

Trustee Marc D. Sarnoff was excused.

Board Chair Tovar welcomed all Trustees and members of the University administration. He also welcomed the University community.

Board Chair Tovar stated that Section 6.9 of the Board's Bylaws provide that the Board Chair may, in consultation with the University President, allow an item to be presented to the Full Board without prior consideration by a Board committee when circumstances warrant. Board Chair Tovar added that to proceed directly to a Full Board meeting without a prior committee meeting would provide the most expeditious and efficient means by which to review the agenda item.

Board Chair Tovar welcomed Mr. Benjamin León, Jr. and the members of the León family who were in attendance. He shared that Mr. León is a native of Oriente, Cuba, and is the Chairman and Founder of Leon Medical Centers. Board Chair Tovar commented that Mr. León has been a prominent voice in South Florida's Cuban exile community since the 1960s, when he and his father Benjamin León, Sr., established a legacy of caring for the exile community through medical centers that ultimately evolved into what is now Leon Medical Centers. Board Chair Tovar mentioned that Mr. León has been deeply committed to the South Florida community and has made generous gifts including support for FIU's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine Benjamin León Center for Geriatric Research and Education, the Miami Dade College Benjamin León School of Nursing, and La Liga Contra el Cancer, among others.

2. Public Appearances

There were no public appearances.

3. Action Item

BT1. Naming of Proposed Building to House FIU CasaCuba as the “Benjamin Leon, Jr. Building”

Board Chair Tovar commented that FIU CasaCuba is a first-of-its-kind destination for the world to experience Cuban history and culture. He commented that FIU CasaCuba is envisioned as a vibrant Cuban home that invites visitors to gather, exchange ideas, and find inspiration in the rich Cuban heritage. He added that FIU CasaCuba will offer unprecedented opportunities to support the work of Cuban scholars and policymakers across the globe while showcasing and preserving Cuban heritage.

University President Kenneth A. Jessell explained that in 2015, FIU announced plans to build CasaCuba, a multi-dimensional Cuban cultural, research, and education center, focusing on the creation and dissemination of knowledge about Cuba and the celebration of Cuban culture. He added that CasaCuba will be a gathering place for researchers, students, policymakers, community members, and visitors from around the world to learn about Cuba and the Cuban diaspora, exchange ideas and explore the rich Cuban heritage, and to facilitate the non-partisan discussion and study of Cuban affairs. President Jessell mentioned that the Cuban American story is a crucial factor in the development of Miami and the nation. He added that Cuban migration has played a significant role in shaping the community’s culture, politics, and economy. President Jessell commented that FIU is a global leader in the study of Cuba and the preservation of Cuban culture and CasaCuba complements the work that the University does in education, research, and civic engagement. He remarked that FIU’s Cuban Research Institute is the nation’s leading institute focused on teaching and research on Cuba. He pointed out that FIU offers a Cuban Studies Certificate and over 70 Cuba-related courses across 20 disciplines and has the Kimberly Green Latin America and Caribbean Center (LACC) which is designated a national resource center on Latin America by the U.S. Department of Education.

President Jessell noted that FIU’s Cuba collections include oral histories, genealogy materials and memorabilia, art, and the world’s largest collection of publicly available Cuban music. He stated that FIU has over 50 experts teaching 70 different courses on Cuba offering a comprehensive resource of expertise. President Jessell remarked that FIU and CasaCuba will tell the story of Cuban heritage, Cuban determination, and Cuban innovation. He pointed out that the new CasaCuba facility will be prominently located at the 107th Avenue entrance to the Modesto A. Maidique Campus and will leverage the latest technology, bringing the Cuban experience to life like never before. He indicated that the proposed \$40M, 43,000 square foot building will have an exhibition space that will showcase FIU’s Cuba-related collections and expertise and include classrooms, seminar rooms, event spaces and study rooms.

President Jessell stated that Mr. Benjamin León, Jr., a visionary in the healthcare profession and leader in the community, has pledged \$10M to FIU to support construction of the new building for FIU CasaCuba. President Jessell added that the León family is deeply connected to the University, having previously given \$10M to establish the Benjamin León, Jr. Family Center for Geriatric Research and Education and endowed a chair in geriatrics at FIU’s Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine. President Jessell noted that the gift to the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine is among the largest contributions ever made by a Cuban American family to a U.S. university.

President Jessell added that Mr. Albert Maury, Mr. León's son-in-law, is deeply committed to FIU as an alumnus and Chair Emeritus of the FIU Board of Trustees and has supported FIU through notable personal giving. President Jessell commented that Mr. León's gift to CasaCuba will provide the power to fuel dreams that resonate beyond the walls of academia, transcending borders and resonating globally. President Jessell recommended to the FIU Board of Trustees the naming of the proposed building to house FIU CasaCuba as the "Benjamin León, Jr. Building."

A motion was made and unanimously passed that the FIU Board of Trustees authorize and approve the naming of the proposed new building to house FIU CasaCuba as the "Benjamin León, Jr. Building", in accordance with the gift agreement related thereto and the University's and the FIU Foundation, Inc.'s Donative Naming Policy.

Mr. León remarked that FIU is a beacon of opportunity for so many and a source of pride for the community. He commented on the León family's unwavering commitment to the continued growth and development of FIU. He stated that the León family is honored to step forward with a gift for CasaCuba, assuring that the story of the Cuban community lives for generations to come.

Mr. Mario Murgado, Chair of the Board of Advisors for FIU CasaCuba, relayed his gratitude to Mr. León and the León family. Mr. Murgado shared a personal account regarding the exile of his family from Cuba. He shared that there are 18 pillars within the CasaCuba Board of Advisors who have donated over \$100,000, contributing to a collective \$26M that have been raised towards the endeavor of constructing the building to house FIU CasaCuba.

4. New Business

Board Chair Tovar reminded Trustees of the upcoming FIU Board of Trustees meetings scheduled for February 29, 2024. He also noted that June 5, 2024, is the new date for the June FIU Board of Trustees meetings.

President Jessell introduced FIU students, Guillermo Tomas, Anier Gonzales, and Gabriel Placido from the FIU Latin Jazz Ensemble for a musical performance.

Board Chair Tovar recognized Executive Director of FIU CasaCuba, Lydia "Lili" Betancourt Space. He thanked Mr. León and the León family for their commitment and dedication to FIU. Trustee Alexander P. Sutton shared that he has spoken with many Cuban American students who are grateful and excited for the opportunity to have a center where they can gather to celebrate their common culture.

5. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

With no other business, Board Chair Roger Tovar adjourned the meeting of the Florida International University Board of Trustees Full Board on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 3:58 PM.