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‘Town Hall’ addresses spending controversy

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

In a lively and candid town hall meeting, Interim President Dwayne Smith, Interim Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Kelvin Reutledge, Vice President for Finance & Administration and Chief Financial Officer Lillian Wanjagi found themselves in the hot seat on March 24.

Hosted by Student Government Association (SGA) and held in Room 217 of the Adanti Student Center, the event gave students the opportunity to ask hard-hitting questions on key issues, including Smith’s spending on the audit, changes to DEI initiatives, the university’s finances and the shifting landscape of federal funding.

“It’s important for scholars and SGA to hear firsthand from the leadership at Southern,” Smith said. “I’m hoping that we can answer questions and dispel any rumors.”

Smith explained that none of the transactions that were on the university p-card were for personal use.

“The key charge for the cleaning was the cleaning of President Joe’s former regalia,” Smith said. “It was also cited that I used the card for car washes, implying that the car washes were for my personal car and it was actually for Southern’s state car.”



Interim President Dwayne Smith on the second floor of the Adanti Student Center on March 24.

Smith also said he purchased a ticket for a Yale basketball game, because the cause was to raise money for scholarships.

“I’m not making any excuses. What I’m saying is that this explains it. So, you look at the issue that I believe, why I went to the top, is that I had missing receipts for gas and one full receipt and I admit that,” Smith said.

Regarding the missing receipts that the press highlighted, Smith said that some receipts were “held over” until he got new staff.

Additionally, Smith

acknowledged that he had unknowingly violated certain guidelines regarding the use of the p-card.

Smith said the first strike was when he was traveling to Boston for a meeting and decided to buy a super-sized meal from Wendy’s.

“I remember I went through the line, and I used the p-card and I think it was maybe \$14,” Smith said. “They said that I broke the rule, because you’re not supposed to use the card to buy food when you travel. I didn’t know that and now I don’t do it.”

Smith said other

violations included purchasing name tags for student workers without confirming the package as well as purchasing refreshments and supplies.

Although Smith explained the charges on the p-card many students are outraged at the misuse of funds from staff, including CSCU Chancellor, Terrence Cheng. Computer science major Gerryiki Williams, a sophomore, spoke out at the town hall meeting, calling out Smith and Cheng for their role in the controversy.

“While we’re being nickel-and-dimed, Dr.

Dwayne Smith and Chancellor Cheng are spending our money like it’s their personal expense account,” Williams said. “Their reckless spending is why the state is less likely to fund us and tuition will increase because of it.”

Williams said that he is one of thousands of students who are struggling financially to pay for their tuition.

“Your spending habits are going to ruin students’ lives,” Williams said. “Even with four jobs I am barely making tuition.”

Williams further expressed his frustration with the university’s

financial priorities as well.

“We are constantly told that budgets are tight. That funding is limited. That we need to go through ridiculous red tape just to access money for clubs and organizations that we pay for,” Williams said.

Overall, Williams urged for a change that would better serve the needs of students and their future as well.

“This isn’t just about money—this is about our education, our future, and our financial stability,” Williams said. “We deserve answers. And we deserve change.”

Smith also added that even though the press claims he is “taking money out of the hands of well-deserved scholars,” he has raised an overwhelming amount of money for students.

“Since the time I’ve been here, I’ve raised, personally, raised a million dollars for scholarships,” Smith said. “My point is this, that I don’t need to use a p-card to pay for cleaning. I understand my commitment, my responsibility as a president of this great institution.”

Ultimately, Smith said he hopes that after this event the university can take a step in the next direction.

“The goal is to move forward as an institution,” Smith said. “One that provides optimal service to scholars who really deserve it.

Empowering students of color through networking

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

At a time when diversity and inclusion are at risk in many areas of society, the fourth annual “Connecting Students and Professionals of Color” event hosted by the SCSU Innovation Hub, offers a platform for students to connect with industry leaders and mentors.

The event creates a space where students from underrepresented backgrounds can engage in meaningful conversations about overcoming barriers, pursuing career goals and making a lasting impact in their fields.

“It’s not a career fair, it’s you come, you meet people, you have conversations,” Peter Dimoulas, grant program administrator of research and innovation, said. “We talk about issues pertaining to inclusion, but we also are building, helping students build their relationships, connect with mentors and our hope is that through that, they will be more successful.”

Through these interactions, students are equipped not only with professional connections but also with the confidence to navigate challenges.

At the heart of this event is the commitment to ensuring that students not only find opportunities but are also supported throughout their career journeys.

Dimoulas said it is important that students are not just placed into industries where people of color are underrepresented.

“We want our students to have a network so that as they go on and if they choose to go and work at a stem company, they are connected with those already in STEM who can, who can work with them,” Dimoulas said.

Peter said that the Black community at Pfizer and an affinity group at Boehringer Ingelheim collaborated to create a series of focus groups for students.

Insightful moderators: Legairre Radden II, a Research Scientist III at Boehringer Ingelheim and Chaka Felder-McEntire, the Executive Director for Higher Heights sparked thought-provoking discussions.

The panel also featured a diverse group of experts, including Angelique Khalifa, a principal scientist at Boehringer Ingelheim, Miraj Jara, a computer science student at the university, Sarai Lara-Boykin, an associate scientist at Pfizer and Colette Ruden, a senior engineer in technology and innovation at the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT).

Together, these leaders shared their insights on advancing in their careers and the importance of diversity and inclusion

in creating a stronger workforce.

Not only did these leaders allow support and guidance to participants, but they also served as models to who students could become.

“Seeing people that look like us out there helps to remind us that we’re in it together and there are people who made it through,” clinical master of social work program, Brianna Fowler said.

Business major Tiera Miller, a freshman, said that this event is a step in the right direction.

She explained that with many students of color being first-generation college students, events like this provide guidance and support, especially when they may feel uncertain or isolated in their academic journey.

“It shows that even going to a PWI, that there is still a community looking out for you,” Miller said. “And that community is also out there once you graduate.”

Especially in a time where DEI programs are under threat, Dimoulas said that creating these spaces is more important than ever.

He emphasized that the need for representation, diversity and inclusion is still alive.

“The room that we had, the people, the energy, it’s a living, breathing entity,” Dimoulas said. “You can’t say, it’s going away. It’s alive. Today it was here.”



PHOTOS| CARLY RUSSELL

Rocio Perez leads breakout room about her journey from El Salvador to Boehringer Ingelheim.



Attendees at the “Connecting Students and Professionals of Color” event in the Adanti Student Ballroom on March 26.