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Stuart Bell, the sole finalist to be the University of Florida's 14th president, left, does the Gator chomp with Rahul Patel, vice chair of the University of Florida Board of Trustees, as he meets with students, faculty and staff to answer submitted questions on June 3 at Emerson Alumni Hall in Gainesville. ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/GAINESVILLE SUN

BELL STATES HIS CASE TO BE UF PRESIDENT

Finalist for post talks about past support for DEI, efforts to protect Jewish students

Chelsea Long
Gainesville Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

Stuart Bell, the lone finalist to be the University of Florida's next president, made his pitch to the campus community.

He answered questions from students, faculty and staff about how he would lead the 173-year-old institution during a forum at Emerson Alumni Hall on June 3, just days before his interview with the university's Board of Trustees.

Bell was joined by Presidential Search Committee Chair Rahul Patel, Student Body President Matthew Bravo and Faculty Senate Chair Luisa Amelia Dempere.

The Presidential Search Advisory Committee recommended Bell as the sole finalist to the Board of Trustees on May 18. Under state law, only finalists for university presidents may be publicly revealed; the identities of other applicants are shielded from disclosure.

He addressed concerns about his past support for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs, his commitment to protecting Jewish students on campus, his vision for the university's future and how he plans to support the UF community.

Drawing on his experience as former president of the University of Alabama and

prior leadership roles at Louisiana State University, Bell answered questions but offered few concrete plans for how he would approach serving as UF's 14th president.

He did, however, repeatedly emphasize his top priority: Preparing students for success through "merit, excellence, academic achievement" as he sought to defuse questions about his DEI record.

Some conservatives are skeptical that the Board of Governors, which oversees the state's public universities, will support Bell, who previously championed DEI during his tenure at Alabama.

DEI at UA and UF

In 2020, a University of Alabama DEI committee released a report outlining strategies to expand and coordinate the university's DEI efforts. The university later introduced anti-racism workshops and training, along with scholarship and mentorship programs for low-income and first-generation students and students of color.

Bell said that over time his views on those programs shifted, telling forum attendees they had become inconsistent with his values of merit and hard work.

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ANALYSIS

States vie to kick off voting in Democratic primaries

Decision will influence which presidential candidates get early momentum in 2028

Francesca Chambers
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Democrats are facing a familiar dilemma as they brace for a bruising 2028 presidential primary:

Which states' voters should have the first say in picking the party's nominee?

New Hampshire has history and tradition on its side. It has held the first-in-the-nation primary for more than a century, immediately after Iowa's caucuses.

But neither state is as racially, politically or geographically diverse as Democrats want for the contests at the top of their primary calendar. And they don't necessarily help the party win the swing states that determine the outcome of the general election.

Delaware says it has more to offer. But some of the Democrats tasked with making the decision worry that the state is too closely associated with former President Joe Biden. His late decision to quit the race and anoint former Vice President Kamala Harris as his successor two years ago remains a sore subject within the Democratic Party after her loss to President Donald Trump.

Deciding which states get to hold their nominating contests first, and in what order, during what's known as the early window – the primaries taking place before Super Tuesday – is one of the trickiest decisions facing national Democrats this year. The choice could have far-reaching consequences for a political party wrestling with its identity and looking to recapture the White House.

Members of the rulemaking panel say they hope to make a decision by August so they can vote on the slate at the next Democratic National Committee meeting. In 2022, they squabbled about the order until after the midterms.

Then, Biden ultimately dictated the voting order to members – ousting

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