

Interim President Roper's May 2020 Board of Governors Meeting Remarks May 20, 2020

Thank you, Chair Ramsey, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the entire UNC System team, I congratulate you, Chair Ramsey, Vice Chair Murphy, and Secretary Burris-Floyd, on your re-election as UNC Board of Governors officers.

We thank you for your service and leadership, and we are grateful to the entire Board for extending this period of stability. Now, more than ever, it is important that we stay focused on doing our work together for the people of North Carolina.

I would also like to recognize Chancellor Dubois. Today is his final meeting with the Board as chancellor. Phil, thank you for your many years of service to UNC Charlotte and to our System.

On April 30, the Niner community was certainly in our thoughts as we all paused to remember last year's tragic event and honor the many displays of heroism that saved lives.

When Dr. Sharon Gaber assumes her role as the new chancellor on July 1, she will find a university community that is resilient and committed to one another, to Charlotte, and to the state. We look forward to working with her.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family of former Elizabeth City State University Chancellor Thomas E.H. Conway Jr., who passed away Friday evening. The UNC System remembers and honors the contributions he made to the university and to northeastern North Carolina through his years of service and leadership.

We also congratulate ECSU Chancellor Karrie Dixon, who just last week was one of thirty women appointed to the newly-formed federal Women in Aviation Advisory Board. This news reflects the extraordinary momentum ECSU is experiencing. Dr. Dixon's appointment speaks volumes about her leadership and the university's growing reputation as an innovator in aviation education.

I want personally to thank Professor David Green for the many contributions he has made as chair of the Faculty Assembly. Working with him has meant a great deal to me.

As I turn to describe how the UNC System is meeting the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, I want to begin by calling out the tremendous work that the faculty and staff across all the institutions have done – with amazing dedication and can-do spirit – to move courses and instruction to online format. I want to give a particular shout out to the IT staff who facilitated the move to remote working conditions.

We owe all of them a huge debt of gratitude.

Since I reported to you at the April Board meeting, we have continued our contingency planning efforts – for the System as a whole and for each of the institutions as we prepare to welcome students back to campus in the fall.

Governors, please know that we understand that each of you is engaged in these same sorts of efforts as you work to reopen your businesses and return your lives to “normal,” as rapidly and as effectively as possible. You are deeply concerned with restoring operations while maintaining the health and safety of everyone involved.

I want you do know that we, throughout the UNC System, are all working flat out to achieve these same goals.

I know you are sick and tired of these Zoom meetings. I empathize. The leadership team and at the UNC System are spending many hours of our days on zoom. One of the side effects are the headaches they cause. Believe me ... I’ve suffered through some.

But the bigger problems related to the loss of in-person meetings relate to the inability to read faces or to understand feelings involved. We lose the capacity to have side conversations and interact personally.

I say all this to give you an impression of the challenges we face and all that we are doing to get the work of this UNC System done. Please don’t think that we are taking this situation lightly.

These days, the question I hear most frequently is, “What will be the UNC System’s mode of operations for the fall?”

We are optimistic, leaning in and expecting our students, faculty, and staff to return to classrooms, labs, and libraries this fall.

Crucially, our planning is focused on ensuring that appropriate safeguards for health and safety will be in place.

And we will be ready for any set of circumstances that may prevail. In that light, we are working through a series of possible scenarios for operations for the Fall 2020 term.

While we have been doing this important planning work, our faculty, students, and staff have been hard at work completing the semester, after transitioning quickly to online instruction several weeks ago.

It goes without saying that we have depended on the cooperation and insight of our chancellors throughout this work. Over the past several weeks we have been continually engaged with all of the UNC System institutions.

Through a full round of 17 lengthy virtual conferences, the senior leadership team and I were able meet with all of the chancellors and their teams to discuss their plans for what lies ahead. Then a second round of detailed video conference discussions focused specifically on the areas where institutions will most depend on the UNC System Office for guidance and support.

We have developed draft guidance in five critical workstreams:

- Academic & Student Affairs
- Health & Safety
- Workplace, Faculty, and Staff HR Issues and Policy
- Finance and Budget
- Communications

Currently, we are in the process of sharing and revising the strategies in concert with the chancellors and their teams.

Our goal is to have this work completed by the end of May for institutions to use as they undertake their detailed planning.

As we move ahead, we are closely following what other universities and university systems are doing and saying, and we are in continuous communication with the leaders of our state, including Dr. Mandy Cohen, the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

This very intensive preparation is critical. It will ensure that our education, research, and service can continue, undiminished.

Of course a constant priority is dealing with revenue losses we now face as a result of COVID-19. Much of our discussion revolves around how we can continue to serving North Carolina while spending less.

Recent legislative action reflects the State's historic and ongoing investment in our mission, which serves residents in every corner of North Carolina.

The Legislature met three weeks ago and appropriated \$44.4 million to reimburse our institutions for the costs associated with our move to online education, increased sanitization, and other expenses related to our COVID response.

We appreciate the Legislature's steadfast support, which has provided funding of our non-recurring request.

In addition, a number of our policy requests were approved, including providing some limited liability protections for our institutions that have responded to the pandemic by creating PPE for first responders, local medical centers, and the military.

The Legislature returned on Monday for the short session. As you can imagine, the lean State revenue outlook will undoubtedly impact the UNC System. Thanks once again to the Board for your support of our revised budget request at our April meeting. We will need that strong support to continue as the Legislature puts together a budget of individual bills throughout the session.

As we work with the State's representatives and leaders, Pete Brunstetter is on point as the UNC System's Chief Operating Officer. He brings experience to this position, having served as long-time co-chair of the Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee, playing an important role helping North Carolina recover during the Great Recession.

Later today, the Board will vote to approve how we allocate the State's COVID- relief emergency funds. In your deliberation, you will consider directing a portion of these funds to a digital learning accelerator package. This project is a vivid example of our forward-thinking approach to the challenges we face.

- The digital learning accelerator will support the development of digital course libraries for 10 high-demand courses and expand access to student success coaching and virtual tutoring for remote learners.
- This investment will also support several key building blocks necessary to enhance the quality of our online teaching, including faculty development, online proctoring, and virtual labs.

This work that Dr. Kimberly van Noort and Dr. Andrew Kelly and their teams at the System Office have put together reflects what we can accomplish when we collaborate *as* a System, even in the midst of a crisis.

The State's many investments in these efforts will help us leverage our System-wide expertise and creativity, so that students receive cutting-edge education, no matter where their classes meet in the fall.

Before I conclude, I want to add this point – all the chancellors and their teams at our UNC System institutions have undertaken a tremendous amount of work with dedication and seriousness.

In all of our deliberations, no one has expressed exasperation or frustration. They have committed to these activities with unparalleled focus on those whom we are privileged to serve – the students, faculty, staff, families, communities and citizens of our great state.

The coming months will present many complex challenges. But, I am confident that—with our robust leadership, shared commitment, and strong fiscal discipline—the UNC System and this great State are both well-positioned to succeed and lead during these unprecedented circumstances.

Thank you all for your leadership and your help.