

**THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
OF THE COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
RETREAT MINUTES
Conducted Remotely**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2021

Chair Tuor Convened the Board Retreat at 9:02 a.m.

Setting the Stage for a Rural Colorado Initiative

Top priorities, threats and opportunities to rural Colorado from the perspective of:

Chancellor Frank set the context for the retreat with the Board of Governors' areas of strategic priorities, one of which is rural Colorado. He introduced newly re-appointed Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to provide some framing comments. Secretary Vilsack discussed consolidation of land ownership and the impact on rural communities. He explained the need for a strategy of attracting small manufacturers which has been eroded, and communities haven't made the adjustments to adapt to the next economy. He noted that rural economies have tremendous opportunity with agriculture and to bring manufacturing back – including conversion of agricultural waste, adaptation to changing environmental needs, and growing local and regional food system. He added that this means branching out beyond traditional commodity-based approach to American agriculture and partnering with land-grant universities around improved use of technology and diversifying workforce. He explained that CSU's work with Together We Grow is a critical component to this noting a challenge will be to prioritize and fund these efforts. He stated that Land grant universities are efficient with their resources, so need to work collaboratively to further efforts and avoid duplication and noted that biosecurity and biodefense are part of this. The Pandemic has raised additional questions about infrastructure and no matter what happens post-COVID, there will be a need to make investments in broadband and water systems. Chancellor Frank thanked Secretary Vilsack for his exceptional service and leadership.

He then introduced Kathay Rennels, special advisor to the chancellor for rural-urban initiatives.

Ms. Rennels discussed the impetus for this discussion and the culture shifts that are happening as people are more able to move to and work from a world of communities which creates significant opportunities for Extension and county leadership. She introduced the guest presenters.

Club 20

Club 20 Board Chair Merrit Linke discussed some of the challenges of the urban-rural divide and producer-consumer divide, including questions related to water. He noted the need to get producers engaged in solutions. Phil Vaughan, Chair of the Club 20 Business Affairs Committee highlighted several areas for CSU to focus on including education; helping people understand differences in living in rural areas (right to farm). They discussed issues related to retaining teachers, and went on to say that students from rural communities no longer feeling the same attraction to/connection with CSU, even though they grow up in 4-H. They asked how do we make them feel more at home and connect them more with recent CSU alums. They also said that they feel Extension agents are spread thin and need a bigger presence in their area. The needs of 4-H and producers are different – industry has grown more quickly than Extension can respond so it is now more useful for hobby farmers. Discussed potential to get more CSU students off campus and out into Colorado.

Chair Tuor called for a break at 10:20 a.m. and the meeting resumed at 10:30 a.m.

Pro 15

Cathy Shull, Executive Director of Pro 15 and Lea Ann Laybourn, Washington County Commissioner, District 3 provided insight into issues affecting the region Pro 15 represents, which is Northeastern Colorado. They discussed changing regional demographics and impacts to the community, including changing community dynamics. Costs of doing business increasing because of dynamics of urbanites moving next door to producers because they want “best” of rural life but not willing to do any adapting. Improving broadband leading to more people from urban areas moving into rural areas and working from home. They also discussed the need to continue to improve broadband access because without it virtual learning doesn’t happen and mental health access is also reliant on it.

They noted increasing suicide rates among school-age kids which is linked to the isolation brought on by COVID. Unemployment fraud and theft from outlying rural farms and ranches that are isolated from law enforcement were also up. They acknowledged that the rural areas they represent were not prepared for the pandemic, particularly in counties with very limited medical care and food banks. At the beginning of the pandemic many businesses didn’t have websites or Facebook pages and the health requirements seriously impacted social services and businesses and the county does not have the capacity to cover those costs. They shared their concerns regarding highway infrastructure in the State.

Action 22

Sara Blackhurst, President & CEO, Mike Patterson, Chairman, and Brian McCain, COO, discussed Action 22’s vision of being a regional organization that saves southern Colorado. Doing “regional rapid restart” to remove economic borders. They discussed challenges to higher education in southern Colorado as well as opportunities with veterans. President Mottet asked what CSU Pueblo could do to help these counties and some of the ideas included: pivot to credentialing to update an individual's education opportunities, particularly veterans; intimate learning experience that CSU Pueblo is able to offer is appealing to rural students; and partnering with community colleges for 2 + 2 programs to help mitigate mobility obstacles some students may face.

Colorado Counties, Inc (CCI)

John Swartout, Executive Director; Byron Pelton, VP for the Eastern Counties, discussed the lack of resources, particularly with serious regional drug problems (methamphetamine and opioids) in many counties. They highlighted the serious need for improved behavioral health problems. They would welcome stronger collaborative programs with CSU that will educate students and keep them in the community. They discussed the challenges brought on from people moving from the Front Range with a lack of respect or appreciation for agriculture. They shared concern that agriculture was becoming less a part of the mission of Extension and 4-H. They noted the Urban-Rural split is a perception, because all urban counties have rural areas within them. They noted that the changing energy landscape will have huge impact on rural Colorado. The discussion noted that Romer administration efforts had an impact, working with Rick Knight at CSU. Need to define what we’re for, not what we’re against, and make it clear we’re one state. They indicated CSU could help in the role of convening and sharing data noting that people are estranged from each other. They suggested some potential connections with CSU and incentives/challenges for retaining skilled workers and discussed the potential for cultural competency education.

Chair Tuor paused the meeting for lunch at 12:03 p.m. The meeting resumed at 12:31 p.m.

El Pomar Foundation

Matt Carpenter, Executive VP and COO, and Maureen Lawrence, Senior VP/General Counsel and Director of Community Programs, discussed the work of El Pomar and opportunities to support community needs related to education and suicide prevention and how to better make parents aware of opportunities that exist. They discussed leveraging local expertise to “give them the gas they need” to go forward, noting Extension offices can be key in this area.

Boettcher Foundation

Katie Kramer, President and CEO, shared Boettcher's goals and approach to its statewide work. She noted that their focus on rural communities has yielded several take-aways: the importance of trust and local buy-in; leaders don't always have formal titles in rural areas; and building a culture of leadership across an entire community is important. The Boettcher Foundation have developed a white paper with findings of their research. They are working to match resources to Colorado's greatest needs and invest in human capital.

CU Rural Medicine

Mark Deutchman MD, Director, Rural Track, CU School of Medicine, discussed the impact of pandemic on rural communities and experiences that led to paper on a pathway for rural health. He noted that Rural supply lines are very fragile; and that remote schooling created workforce stress, which particularly impacts women. He referenced the Rural-Urban divide and culture clash growth over political, economic and social differences, even while urban to rural migration is increasing. He discussed how to produce rural healthcare workers, but noted that few academic health centers care enough about that approach. He explained that CU's Rural Track program focuses on preparing students for serving in rural areas and emphasized the importance of remote education, "grow your own programs," programs to improve communication across difference, and rural tracks in all types of professional areas.

Reeves Brown

Reeves Brown discussed boom and bust nature of western Colorado's economy, current urban-rural migration boom, and noted that "broadband is the economic asphalt of the 21st century." Communities will either blend and adapt or continue to divide and live in conflict. He expressed the need to prevent economic chasms from growing further. In his opinion, the CSU and the CSU System can help communities adapt to the change that is inevitable.

Chair Tuor called for a break at 2:35 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 2:45 p.m.

Wrap Up Discussion

Chair Tuor noted we are at our infancy in looking at rural initiatives. Board members shared observations including: a need to improve our presence and awareness in the agricultural community; strengthening our alumni network; supporting existing employers in adding new jobs rather than recruiting new employers; move nursing and mental health programs into rural communities; and supporting cultural competency training. They also discussed how students with conservative views increasingly feel unwelcome, some of which has to do with the growth of Fort Collins as much as with the campus.

Chancellor Frank noted that it was a good set of discussions and lots of opportunities for all three campuses to plug into needs and noted he was looking forward to working with the board on next steps.

ADJOURN

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:23 p.m.