

## **Q&A Transcript, All-Hands Meeting, Fall 2020**

### **Has there been any discussion of when the out-of-state travel ban will be lifted? (31:15 Slide 25)**

No. We have been wickedly focused ensuring move smartly around the state of Nebraska in a safe way. Since March, our travel policy continues to evolve. Current guidance is for formal work-related trips follow the mindset of staying closer to home rather than travelling. We understand this is a problem for some and know many of our professional scientific societies or learned societies have moved to virtual platforms, panels. The NSF, the NIH, and USDA all moved virtually so we know the world is evolving with us.

### **How will the randomized COVID testing of UNL staff work? How many will be tested a week? (32:25 Slide 25)**

The University of Nebraska is using Test Nebraska as our test platform. The data on the UNL's COVID Dashboard comes from Test Nebraska. Early on, two testing locations, one over in the garage by the police department and another by the student health center, were opened. 2,000 tests a week that can be processed which was up from a 1,000 doubling the number of tests. You can show up and be tested if you think you have symptoms, or you can show up and be tested if you just are curious. The Chancellor has been very clear that testing is voluntary although encourages students, faculty, and staff to be tested. I also know that athletics is doubling down in their testing protocols. The news reported that to compete, student athletes and student organizations adopted more rigorous testing protocols. If you are tested through Bryan Medical system or CVS for example, those tests do not come back into our tracking and our monitoring. We have created a cadre of UNL staff, contact tracers, who actively contact people with positive COVID-19 tests and then follow through with contact tracing. It is a robust contact tracing effort going on behind the scenes.

### **Off-campus versus on-campus, the randomized testing focused only on our on-campus community. Does it apply to REEC establishments and county extension-based faculty? (34:55 Slide 25)**

Our testing is available to anyone who has a NU ID card. If you are interested in being tested, you can go to Lincoln and engage in testing. UNL's website numbers are driven in partnership with Lancaster County Health Department. There are 26 county-based and regional-based health districts across Nebraska. Their COVID testing and medical directives are managed at the local level through those health districts. If you are in greater Nebraska, Scottsbluff/Gering, your numbers would roll into that county/regional based tracking not in Lincoln/Lancaster numbers. We really need to look county by county, community by community, region by region to develop local response plans, local health measures keeping local communities safe. Ron Yoder and Hector are working with leaders across our system flowing PPE that is organized nicely but testing is handled through the local health districts.

Local extension professionals should pursue issues relative to COVID with their local health department and follow their guidance. The local health departments throughout the state have been extremely helpful navigating the COVID situation.

### **Do we have a financial breakdown of the pandemic's effect relative to UNL and IANR? (38:00 Slide 25)**

Financial impacts across the platform are tracked and, in fact, when I get to the budget, I will talk a little about that, but will keep that at a high level.

Community Question: **“Who and how was the decision made to not follow the federal government and allow employees to defer our social security taxes? Our current President of the United States has said: ‘If I’m victorious on November 3rd, I plan to forgive these taxes and make permanent cuts to the payroll tax,’ Trump said.**

**Whoever made this decision is gambling with over \$1,500 of my money that I earned, and that is only one employee. With all the technology available, how about a simple vote of the employees next time?”**

So long as the employer approved, it that would allow employees to defer, and I really want to underscore the word defer, our social security taxes. The idea was to meet people tightening their belt and employers had the option to defer taking out social security taxes from our paychecks. The intention, and still the expectation, is on January 1 anything deferred needs to be repaid. The State of Nebraska that funds us, made the decision this deferral option was not in the long-term interest of Nebraska’s citizens. The State of Nebraska essentially assumed COVID was going to go on and it made no sense to double burden individuals in January. As the largest employer in Nebraska and the largest state agency, we followed suit.

There has been some declaration by President Trump, if in fact he is re-elected, about making forgiving the deferment. If in fact the President or Congress makes a decision to actually switch, in hindsight the rules of the game, from a deferment to actually forgiving it, then in hindsight the State of Nebraska and the University of Nebraska will be guilty of not having taken advantage of another tool to ease the burden for our employees.

**You mentioned several action steps that IANR is embarking on. A related question - have any policy changes been implemented regarding these conversations? For example, do we review applicants without names being associated or other policies that are in process? (48:25 Slide 31)**

We certainly have made procedural changes in how we advertise positions and elevate inclusive excellence to the top of position descriptions. IANR is an active participant and, in some ways, providing best practices. As far as policies, Chancellor Green has commissioned a team of faculty and staff guiding us on our journey related to systemic racism. There are four or five action-oriented outcomes the Chancellor is pursuing and some of these do include changes to our policy. I appreciate question and thank you to the person for holding us accountable and pressing the envelope.

**I want to address the previous question: Do we have a financial breakdown of the pandemic’s effect relative to UNL and IANR? (50:25 Slide 32)**

Yes, tracking budget implications are being tracked. Almost immediately, it became clear there were going to be significant budget impacts. During the last financial quarter (April 1<sup>st</sup> thru June 30<sup>th</sup>), the University of Nebraska lost nearly 50 million dollars in revenue due to the campus unable to hold certain events, not engaging in meaningful ways in addition to a 1% state aided budget reduction. That was approximately a million dollars that we pulled aside and put into a safe place. Since that time, the President and Chancellors have identified a \$43 million gap and we needed to figure out how to handle this revenue loss.

This revenue loss goes well beyond whether we play sports, although Bill Moos talked about 100 million-dollar hole if we do not play football. That big number includes everything from sales of trademark

registered merchandise to the Big 10 rights to televise games. We are one of the very few schools in the country where athletics net gives the university resources to operate. For example, \$15 million a year comes from athletics back to the academic enterprise. Five million of that is used directly for student scholarships. If we are not playing football and we are not generating revenue, athletics cannot flow those resources which creates a gap to fill somewhere else.

The complexities of global dynamics on our abroad students wickedly complicated enrollment declines. Additionally, the declining number of traditional college age students due to population and demographic shifts adds yet another dimension. In summary, President Carter and his team have spent and continue to spend a great deal of time looking at this.

**With the Nebraska Promise we are basically open enrollment. Is there any budget allocation for extra staff and faculty resources necessary to support these students that may not be as college ready?**

(1:10:22 Slide 39)

One of the strong suits of the University of Nebraska is we are open enrollment assuming students graduate successfully from an accredited high school program. The provost's office has allocated additional resources to support students who may not be college ready. I believe \$850,000 have been allocated to the five campuses: \$200,00 each to the four large campuses and \$50,000 to the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture. This resource allows academic officers to work with faculty and support structures to develop, implement or enhance programs designed to help students succeed in the class. It also provides resources to navigate mental well-being and health dynamics. Additionally, there has been a plus up in the Big Red Resilience and Well-Being Program. I think Nebraska Promise is outstanding. If we are not systemically paying attention to helping students who come to us to succeed, then we have a problem. There are active conversations regarding the RBB (Responsibility Based Budgeting), the incentive-based budgeting model, what that is going to look like, and how we incorporate ongoing funding to focus on student success.

**The NU Five Year Strategic Plan states our commitment to "no new state aided non-faculty FTEs until faculty search salaries reach their peer averages." Please comment regarding this strategy and its impact in IANR. (1:12:35 Slide 39)**

I encourage you to look at the NU Strategic Five-Year Plan (<https://nebraska.edu/five-year-strategy>). It was shared with the Board of Regents and at President Carter's investiture. It was put together by a group of faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders – approximately 40 individuals worked with the president to develop this plan. I think it is a great plan and it sits right on top of the N2025 Plan. It allows for the strategies and things that we care about in IANR to flow freely. It also serves as a bridge to connect us with the Blueprint Nebraska Plan published couple of years ago. I think you will find President Carter identified risk areas are right on top – food security, water security, rural community, rural prosperity, infectious disease. These are all things we do well and there is no alignment problem.

President Carter and one of his pillars highlights the fact that lack of competitiveness for our 10-year tenure track faculty salaries relative to our aspirant peer group is a systemic long-term, chronic issue chronic to address. The plan statement that "no new staff on state aided dollars will be hired without having this problem fixed." President Carter and the Chancellors identified a 20 million-dollar bolus of resources that will flow to our campuses aggressively addressing this issue starting in FY22, finishing in FY23. It is more than rhetoric; he identified a workable solution with the resources to accomplish it. In

response to the concerns I was hearing, I talked President Carter and said, “I think I understand what you were trying to say, but the magic in this is ‘no net new’.” This means we can refill critical staff positions across IANR funded with state-aided dollars.

We can fill positions, however any faculty or staff position funded with state-aided dollars, is going through an extreme series of reviews. Bottom line, there is not a staff or faculty position that gets filled in IANR without the department, the center, or the unit making a cogent case. It must pass muster with the appropriate mission dean; pass muster with Ron Yoder and Mike Boehm; and pass muster with Ronnie Green before arriving to President Carter. The impact on IANR’s hiring using state aided dollars is we have transitioned to a “methodical, mission critical, refill” mode. The good news – staff or faculty hired on non-state aided dollars move fairly well through the process. The extra scrutiny and the due diligence on the financial state aided side of the house has really slowed our ability to recharge. I am pleased in the last 30 days we have been able to jar loose some critical faculty and staff positions funded with state-aided dollars.

**I am concerned with what is ahead and if in fact we will be looking at additional budget reduction scenarios and planning for our upcoming fiscal year. (Slide 39 1:17:54)**

I am wired optimist. Of course, we don’t know what the economy of the state looks like, the complexities and the depth of the conversation and the action required related to systemic racism, systemic privilege, and the COVID induced impact on this the economy of the world. We need to really see what happens with the economy of the state of Nebraska. If in fact the assumptions that President Carter and the Chancellors have put on the table hold, and that the forecasting board and Nebraska’s economy hold and six months from now we’re in a positive place, I’m quite confident we will be able to move forward with the proposed plan. I suppose if Nebraska’s economy tanks and Nebraska is forced to make difficult budget decisions then I think the \$20 million to use for strategy may lead to deep conversations about how much strategy can we afford to implement and how much do we need to use those resources to backstop critical functions.

I want you to keep focusing on the great work you are doing. My 37 years in higher education and 21 years of military service has taught me that units and organizations who keep a forward-leaning, optimistic view of the world; that dig deep and roll up their sleeves; who care for one another and walk the talk; who ask the tough questions about the essence of the organization; and, at all costs, ensure that the organization is protected and funded, actually grow. The growth mindset is critical. I’m calling on all of you, as I did three and one-half years ago during a budget reduction, to keep your focus on the good work and the outcomes you are driving in our teaching, research, extension, and outreach mission areas. We will get through this and I am confident we will get through this ending nimbler and more innovative.