

**NORTHWEST COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING**

January 21, 2021

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** President DR. MARK WURZEL; Vice President/Secretary DR. LARRY TODD; Treasurer Ms. CAROLYN DANKO; and Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MS. TARA KUIPERS, MR. BOB NEWSOME, and MR. DUSTY SPOMER.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**OTHERS PRESENT:** MS. LISA WATSON, Interim President; DR. GERRY GIRAUD, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. DEE HAVIG, Interim Vice President for Student Services; MS. JILL ANDERSON; MS. ADRIANA ARISMENDI; MS. DIEDRE ASAY, MS. SAMI ASHCRAFT; MR. ERIC ATKINSON; MR. DAVID AUSTIN; MR. ROBERT BECKER; MS. BOBBIE BELL; MS. HOLLY BERRYMAN; MS. LESLIE BIGHAM; MS. HARRIETTE BLOOM-WILSON; MR. BRAD BOWEN; MS. KAREN BOWEN, MR. DEAN BRUCE; MR. LOGAN BURNS; MS. JENNIFER CANNIZZARO; MS. ANNA CRAGOE; DR. MARNEÉ CRAWFORD; MS. VAL CROSS; DR. MICHAEL CUDDY; MS. JENNIFER DARE; MS. ELAINE DEBUHR; DR. RENEÉ DECHERT; DR. JAY DICKERSON; MR. DUSTIN DICKS; DR. VERN DOOLEY; MR. TRISTAN EGGENER; MS. AMANDA ENRIQUEZ; MR. BRIAN ERICKSON; MR. DAVE ERICKSON; MS. SANDY FEYHL; MS. DAVETTE FREY; MS. TRACY GASAWAY; MS. NANCY GILMORE; MR. TIMOTHY GLATZER; MS. CHRISTI GREAHAM; MR. MICHAEL GUNDLACH; MS. LAURA GWINN; DR. RACHEL HANAN; MS. LISA HARSH; MR. BART HASKELL; MS. JOANN HEIMER; MS. JESSICA HENY; MR. GREG HAROLD; MR. JASON HORTON; MS. BETH HRONEK; DR. JEANNIE HUNT; MS. MARY ELLEN IBARRA-ROBINSON; MS. DEB JACOBS; MR. WALT JATKOWSKI; MS. AMY JOHNSON; MR. JEREMY JOHNSTON; MS. DEB KELLY; MS. DENISE KELSAY; MR. JAMES KLESSENS; MR. GEORGE LAUGHLIN; MS. KIM LAWSON; MS. JENNIFER LITTERER-TREVIÑO; MS. CASSIE LOERA; MR. KEITH MCCALLISTER; DR. AMY MCKINNEY; MS. CAREY MILLER; MS. NANCY MILLER; MS. LARA MOLINE; MS. CONNIE MOORE; MS. WHITNEY MORGAN; MS. ASTRID NORTHRUP; MR. MATTHEW OSBORN; MR. CORY OSTERMILLER; MS. CHARLOTTE PATRICK; MR. DAVE PATTERSON; MR. DENNIS QUILLEN; MS. LAURA RILEY; MR. WILL ROSE; MS. KARA RYF; MS. JEN SCHNEIDER; DR. EMILY SCHULTZ; MR. MARV SHERWOOD; MS. LISA SMITH; DR. GREG SMITH; MS. KERRIE SPINNEY; MS. LINDA SPOMER; MR. MARTIN STENSING; MS. PAM THIEL; MR. GREG THOMAS; MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO; MS. KARA WARREN; MS. SHELBY WETZEL; MS. MARSHA WILSON; MR. RICHARD WILSON; MS. MARY ANN WURZEL; MR. KEVIN KILLOUGH, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Interim Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

**CALL TO ORDER:** The special meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees was called to order on Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 4:30 p.m.in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

**A APPROVE THE AGENDA:** **Board President Wurzel entertained a motion to amend the agenda to move New Business before Citizens' Open Forum. A motion was made by Trustee Spomer and seconded by Trustee Todd to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried.**

**A NEW BUSINESS:**

Resolution for Sustainable Funding

Board President Wurzel referred Board members to the Resolution for Sustainable Funding in the Board Book. The Resolution was developed by the Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees in cooperation with the Community College Presidents to communicate to Legislators the need for sustainable funding for the colleges. Once signed by all Wyoming Community College Trustees and approved by the Wyoming Community College Commission, the Resolution will be submitted to Governor Gordon and the

Joint Appropriations Committee for consideration.

**A motion was made by Trustee Danko and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to approve the Resolution. Motion carried.**

## **CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM**

The Citizens' Open Forum convened at 4:36 p.m. A number of requests to address the Board were submitted.

Michael Gundlach addressed the Board regarding his appreciation that there were opportunities given for providing feedback related to the budget cuts, but he also felt the Board wasn't necessarily concerned with listening to the feedback. He expressed frustration that there was no response from Board members regarding comments made during the Citizen's Open Forum at the regular Board meeting on January 11<sup>th</sup> and that the Citizen's Open Forum began earlier than scheduled and adjourned at 5:00 p.m., possibly eliminating the opportunity for those to speak who expected it to begin later. While he was pleased the Powell Tribune published there would be an opportunity to submit comments online, the article appeared the day after the deadline for these submittals. While the Board invited feedback on the budget proposal, there is an implicit message they are not interested in hearing it. He also feels it's important for the Board to respond to issues raised and ask clarifying questions during the Citizens' Open Forum. Michael went on to commend Interim President Watson for her efforts in gathering feedback from the campus community by meeting with various groups. He appreciates her efforts and for leading the College during these difficult times.

Rachel Hanan suggested that while community comment forums solicit feedback, it's just optics if the College doesn't actually listen to and act on what the community is telling them. She went on to state that comments indicate a greater number of Big Horn Basin graduates are choosing other colleges over Northwest College. She feels word of mouth advertising and our reputation has suffered. The community's comments are dismissive of the potential name change as it's just "window dressing." The real concern in relation to reducing faculty is the cost of potentially losing standing with national accrediting bodies, losing national recognition from certain programs, and credibility as we lose teachers who touch student lives. She stated that studies show the number one reason rural students choose community colleges is the personal relationships that are built. Public comments indicate that the elimination of the Children's Learning and Care Center discounts community needs and diminishes community trust. To fully consider what the community has said, more time must be taken in making this decision. Keeping the mission and substance of our College in mind and not just keeping it open, is what should drive budget decisions.

Harriet Bloom-Wilson spoke as a former employee and an invested member of the community. While she acknowledges the challenges faced by leaders and is unaware of all intricacies involved in the decisions, she stated she has always been proud of the reputation of the institution for providing a stellar learning environment. That reputation was built on the interaction of dedicated faculty with their students. Northwest College has always provided a unique residential environment that fostered life skills and a sense of community not often found at other two-year colleges. While handbook policies have been considered in developing the proposal, she feels there is a lack of consideration of how the proposed cuts prepare Northwest College for the rebuilding of the institution while retaining the characteristics that set the College apart from other

institutions. She went on to state that she feels the Board should delay this important decision until more thought and consideration can be given.

Sandy Feyhl spoke on behalf of the Education department. She stated the Education major is a bedrock curriculum at Northwest College and has been ranked among the top of two-year schools in the Mountain West, with the students being highly desired at Universities with which we articulate. After a failed search to replace a faculty member, Sandy took on the entire department and served 85 students. She taught many face-to-face and online classes as well as continuing relationships with local teachers and principals of which her students were in practicums, which required constant collaboration. In addition, she advised all of these students in their efforts to transfer to universities all over the country, which involves planning, agreements being drawn up, staying current on changing coursework, etc. Maintaining a strong student enrollment means being able to meet the coursework needs of the education majors. Sandy stated she feels these demands are too much for one faculty member and cuts to Education faculty positions should be reconsidered.

Jeremy Johnston stated that the College has benefitted from Wyoming's mineral taxes in the past and has grown beyond the means of the current budget situation. He would like the Board to consider the ratio of staffing and how it has changed through the boom and bust economy. While many areas on campus have been built up in times of a booming economy, he feels faculty are the quickest shrinking group during times of economic hardship. Jeremy asks the Board to look at how the other employee groups have changed over time and to consider where faculty numbers will be after the recommended cuts. He feels all areas need to bear the brunt of these cuts and not just one group.

Jennifer Dare stated that while there are not a lot of English majors at the College, the department teaches every single student. While she would like to advocate for every faculty position to be maintained, she is making a special plea to keep the position in the English program. Composition classes are hands on and essentially a tutoring session and to increase cap sizes in these classes becomes exponentially more difficult to manage the hands-on grading required for such a class. She considers the recommended cuts to faculty positions to be self-cannibalization and is deeply concerned about the future of Northwest College.

Mary Ellen Ibarra Robinson questions how Northwest College is going to distinguish itself from other schools without complete programs and services such as a complete foreign language program, newspaper, Childcare Center, or advanced program offerings. She feels there will only be basic courses left for students to choose from. What will attract students to come when they can choose more exciting offerings, a variety of activities and other options elsewhere.

Amy McKinney would like to recognize the time and effort that was taken in preparing this proposal. In looking at the comments being made at the meeting as well as the public forum comments, she feels there is more work to be done and that the Board needs to show the community they are listening and are taking the concerns into account. Community members appear to be concerned about the direction of the college and losing faculty members. Students come to Northwest College because of a certain program and we are able to retain them because of the connections being made in the classroom. Amy feels the loss of the faculty talent and connections students feel will further drive down enrollment. She stated that in order to preserve the integrity of Northwest

College, the Board needs to further evaluate the community's feedback. The Social Sciences and Education Division is set to lose two positions and they are the only Division that has seen an increase in enrollment within the last two years. Amy echoes what has already been stated in that she requests the Board wait and take more time to consider the comments made by the community before acting on the budget recommendation.

Trustee Todd made a point of order in that participants are not to name specific individuals in their discussion.

Laura Riley stated that considering the Sustainable Funding Resolution that was passed earlier in the meeting, she feels the budget reduction decision should be held off if there is still hope the funding concerns can be remedied. Laura stated she feels the community support is dwindling and they are questioning why money is being spent on a company to rebrand the college, but positions are being cut. She also feels the decisions are lacking transparency for the community and Northwest College needs the community's support to continue.

## **A UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

### **Budget Reduction Recommendations**

At Board President Wurzel's invitation, Trustee Danko stated the Budget Reduction Recommendations and Reduction in Force document is very comprehensive and has many numbered sections and recommendations. The Board Finance Committee has spent many hours meeting and discussing the document and considering the comments received related to each recommendation. In order to step through all of these items, she is recommending there be two motions. The first motion will address all items in the memo related to budget cuts that are unrelated to a formal reduction in force. The second motion would relate to the reduction in force and operations affected by RIF.

**A motion was made by the Board Finance Committee to approve all budget recommendations related to: Item 1, non-personnel operating budgets; Item 2, soft dollar scholarships; Item 3, athletics, sanctioned teams, activities and clubs; Item 5, Elimination of other positions-attrition and retirements; Item 8, increase in Employee's share of retirement contribution, but strike the third paragraph related to increased pay for A and B bands; Item 9, Foundation; Item 11, Librarian; Item 13, part-time Cody Center; Item 14, Reduction in Pavilion support; and Item 15, adjunct and other academic costs.**

Trustee Housel stated that during the Board's retreat last fall, the Board spent considerable time discussing the anticipated budget reductions. He would like to reiterate that these decisions are a result of the mandate issued by Governor Gordon for all colleges and other state agencies to reduce their budgets by 14.7% for fiscal year 2022. Trustee Housel went on to state that during the initial conversations regarding the budget cuts, all programs were to be considered. The comments, both written and those made during the Citizens' Open Forum convey a message of concern about the budget process. Trustee Housel shares those concerns and feels that everything needs to be considered when doing the analysis. He stated he is unable to support the motion in which he feels adequate analysis wasn't completed. He understands the Board Finance Committee is privy to additional information that he does not have; however, he suggests postponing the decision until the Board as a whole can meet and discuss the feedback received.

At Board President Wurzel's invitation, Interim President Watson summarized

the work done to date and the process by which the recommendations were prepared. She stated College officials began monitoring the budgetary recommendations by the Governor in late spring 2020 when he called for possibly 30% budget cuts and then started with 10% for fiscal year 2021. The discussion continued as it was known that more cuts were coming. Budget Managers and members of campus and support services were asked for input on ideas for budget reductions. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee met and discussed those ideas. Vice President Giraud met with the Academic Affairs Council and discussed ideas related to academic programs. Once the 14.7% reduction from the Governor was known, Interim President Watson met with various groups on campus to share the feedback and discuss different options regarding elimination of academic programs, service programs, activity eliminations, etc. Everything was looked at and talked about so as “no rock was unturned.” There were then many conversations with Vice Presidents to go through and analyze all of the recommendations that had been brought forth. The budget memo was written to explain the thought behind the decisions.

Board President Wurzel stated that while the comment period was short, the process as a whole has been very long. The reason for moving forward with the decision now, is to provide a better timeline for those being affected to move on and find alternative employment.

Interim President Watson explained that time is also needed to transition program and class scheduling to accommodate changes. In an effort to avoid program eliminations, the focus has been on course eliminations and increasing class sizes.

In response to a question regarding budgeting deadlines from Trustee Todd, Interim President Watson stated that a preliminary budget is prepared and presented to the Board in May, a draft budget in June, and once local levies are known, state statutes dictate the budget is to be finalized by a certain date in July.

In response to a question to the Finance Committee from Trustee Kuipers regarding the notion of “no stone unturned”, Trustee Spomer stated the Finance Committee met numerous times, asked many questions, met with Foundation Board members to understand their perspective and also invited Vice President Giraud to a meeting to speak to the rationale behind the recommendations. While the committee doesn’t generate the numbers, they have to trust the information they are receiving and to take seriously their role as Trustees to follow through on developing an understanding. While he understands the community’s perception, he does not feel the decision is being rushed and that the process was very thorough. In earlier budget cuts, items that were necessary or sacred to the college were determined and cuts were made to those areas that were “nice to have.” The grim reality is that this round of cuts will definitely involve those things that are sacred. The recommendations were looked at from a policy, strategic and business approach. Trustee Spomer stated he read through all of the comments and didn’t see any new ideas or information, which tells him the analysis that was done was very thorough as all of those things were discussed in depth. The Finance Committee has studied the analysis and trusts the administration in getting them to this point. He fully supports the recommendation.

Trustee Danko stated the Board Finance Committee began receiving data last fall and have looked at the College in terms of “who we are” and “what we have”, implications of eliminations and they are aware of the number of faculty

and administrative positions involved. These cuts had to be considered objectively and they are excruciating.

In response to a question regarding splitting the recommendation into two parts, Interim President Watson stated the memo is very complex and some of the items are personnel and others are operational. The first motion allows the college to work through the analysis and fine tune those numbers in budget preparation work. She stated that she took a less conservative approach and the proposal represents primarily the mandated cuts from the Governor. In the meetings she has attended with the Governor, there has not been an indication of state agencies receiving more money. If motion one is approved and the decision is to table the Reduction in Force portion of the proposal, the budget will still need to be reconciled in June.

**Motion carried with Trustee Housel voting against.**

**A motion was made by the Board Finance Committee to invoke Reduction in Force as per policy 5510 as described on page three of the memo, and would also include Item 10, discontinue operations of the Children's Learning and Care Center. This motion includes striking the last sentence of the third bullet point on page 3 relating to extended financial assistance for all other staff positions.**

Trustee Housel drew attention to the statement in the budget memo that states, "Of the 37 academic program designators pulled, only 7 had expenses greater than revenue." Understanding that we are trying to keep as many academic programs intact as possible pending the completion of transformational work, he questions why we are not considering eliminating programs that are not self-sustaining as that status is not likely to change once transformational work is done. He stated he is opposed to the motion and asks that it be deferred until these programs and the proposed motion can be fully considered. His request to table the motion died for lack of a second.

Trustee Kuipers stated she appreciates the expertise of the administrators and noted that Trustee Spomer's comments regarding the analysis resonated with her. However, she feels the cost of losing public trust and a sense of integrity in the community is being threatened. Strategically, there is risk in losing the public's trust in the institution and she is concerned about the perception that these decisions are rushed. She joins Trustee Housel in opposing this motion.

In response to a question from Board President Wurzel, Interim President Watson invited Vice President Giraud to speak to the analysis that was done related to academic programs. Vice President Giraud stated that analysis of all academic programs took place and it was determined there were seven programs generating a net loss. If all of those programs were discontinued, fifteen faculty positions, most of them tenured, would be affected. The net gain from eliminating those programs would be \$125,000. The students who enroll in those programs are coming to Northwest College specifically for those specialized programs and would go elsewhere if they weren't available. While the programs could be analyzed solely on how many majors, how many credit hours, how much revenue is generated, consideration must also be given to the fact that those students are living on campus and contributing to Residence Life and to the campus in unique ways because they are unique programs. The conclusion was that eliminating these programs for the dollar amount it would save, would end up costing more than it would benefit the College. The reductions that are being recommended are in general education courses, of which students have many options. Vice President Giraud stated that it was

important to maintain specialty programs or all that will be left are general education courses, which students can get anywhere.

Trustee Todd stated that he commends those involved with developing the criteria that was used as it wasn't only related to economic evaluation and it maintained academic health and integrity.

Trustee Spomer stated the same discussion took place regarding athletics and various other service programs. While these recommendations diminish the College significantly, at the end of the day, \$2.6 million has to be reconciled.

Board President Wurzel pointed out the while the CREG report is showing an additional \$135 million, the Legislative Session is not expected to wrap up until sometime in May. The timeline does not necessarily allow for the delay in a decision until then. He feels that even if the decision is delayed, it will have the same end result. One of his main concerns is for those utilizing the Children's Learning and Care Center and the public comments indicate there aren't many additional openings for children in the community.

Trustee Newsome stated that while the perception may be that these decisions are being rushed, that is not accurate. He has served on the Board for five years and these conversations started a year ago. In his conversations with Legislators, the state is facing a very difficult financial situation and any additional money indicated in the CREG report will not go far in relieving the financial burden. Because the Board is mandated to balance the budget, he is in favor of the motion.

Trustee Housel stated that while he understands the comments of Vice President Giraud to be of the intangible value of certain programs, intangible value can be applied to the Children's Learning and Care Center as well as the faculty positions that are proposed to be cut. He feels the classes that are recommended to be cut will affect reputation and recruiting efforts.

Trustee Todd stated that the purpose of institutions of higher education are to foster learning across disciplines and across domains of understanding. He feels that higher education is often seen as non-essential in terms of state budgeting. We need to seek solutions to ensure economic viability. Trustee Todd went on to state that he is concerned about the recommendation to terminate tenured faculty. He has seen firm evidence in the development of the proposal that existing policy has been scrupulously followed. However, eliminating tenured faculty must be seen as an absolute last resort. He is concerned how taking this step will color future perceptions of Northwest College when we are in a better position to recruit new faculty. After going through the process and becoming tenured himself, he notes that it's not an abstract job title or another classification of employment. He stated that he is fully committed to the concept of tenure and questions whether he could hold his sense of intellectual integrity, ethical values and honesty and vote for eliminating tenured faculty. When exploring why we weren't looking closer at non-tenured faculty, he was surprised to learn that pool is very small as a great number of faculty at Northwest College are tenured. He noted that in eight years, no application for tenure has been denied. This "tenure bloat" represents a disrespect for the institution and is almost on par with suggestions for removing tenured faculty. While he understands the economic challenges, for reasons that differ from Trustee Housel, he will likely not vote in support of the motion.

Trustee Spomer stated that if there is opposition to the motion, he is open-minded about solutions; however, the Board still has a job to do in relation to

the budget reductions.

Board President Wurzel stated there is value in a community sense that more time was spent and the job was done thoroughly. While there may not be much that is changed, the current perception is that the decision is rushed.

Trustee Danko stated that cuts have been taking place for six to eight years and every year becomes harder. In response to Trustee Todd's comment regarding the number of tenured faculty at Northwest College, Trustee Danko shared that faculty have stayed for many years and worked on advanced degrees to the benefit of Northwest College. Many have dedicated their lives to this school and have helped build the institution. Northwest College has a large number of faculty with doctoral or terminal degrees, which makes the College unique in that way. Trustee Danko stated she has lobbied Legislators for many years and they continually vote down any revenue legislations. She is unsure what the solution is, but feels there is no choice.

Trustee Todd stated he wanted to clarify that he was not denigrating the tenured faculty that have worked hard and built the reputation that many of the commenters spoke to, but that the policy possibly needs revisioning.

Trustee Kuipers agreed with Trustee Spomer in questioning if not now, when and what would be done next. She understands the critical need and opportunity to take to heart the discussion that was shared tonight, such as questioning the reputation and credibility of the Institution in the community. She feels at a minimum, building understanding would be a reason to delay the decision.

Trustee Spomer stated that he feels the resolution that was passed earlier in the evening is a regurgitation of what has been said to the Governor and Legislature for years. He feels the conversation needs to shift to reimaging the revenue stream and reimaging the market.

Trustee Danko stated that Trustees have attempted to communicate that the community colleges are part of the solution to the economic problems in Wyoming. Suggestions to Legislators to increase revenue streams are presented year after year and are denied.

Board President Wurzel called for a vote on the motion, to which Trustee Spomer raised a Point of Order and questioned whether it was an option to revisit tabling the motion. Trustee Danko stated she would also like to table the motion for one month.

Interim President Watson stated she is in full support of whatever the Board decides to do, but suggested a slightly longer timeline. She stated she is asking everyone who took the time and energy to be part of the conversation to "dig in" and "step into" CampusWorks and the transformational work necessary to reinvent ourselves. Many people have worked very hard and very diligently on the proposal and she appreciates that has not been discounted. In thinking about re-envisioning ourselves, time and energy needs spent on creating guidelines of which the Board chooses to stand firm as it relates to programs, services, reimaging our revenue streams and asking ourselves who we are.

In response to a question by Trustee Danko, Interim President Watson stated that if the motion is tabled, she feels the decision should not go past the April Board meeting. Knowing that the College would be on a very short timeline to develop a final budget.

Trustee Spomer suggested the possibility of a Special Meeting or a workshop



to help educate the entire Board on the work of the Finance Committee and the challenging intricacies involved in these budget decisions.

**A motion was made by Trustee Danko and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to table the original motion to be revisited no later than the April Regular Board meeting. Motion carried.**

In response to a question from Trustee Todd regarding guidelines for “digging in”, Interim President Watson stated she would recommend the Finance Committee meet to discuss the feedback and discussion from the Board meeting. She would also recommend a Board Retreat. She feels the Board needs to determine the guiding principles of the College that will guide decisions made in good times and bad.

Board President Wurzel stated he would like to plan a Board retreat sometime during the week of February 18 through 24. Ms. Borders will work with Trustees to determine a date and schedule the event.

**A ADJOURNMENT:**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.**

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LARRY TODD, Vice President/Secretary

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Date