

**EASTERN NEW MEXICO UNIVERSITY**  
**Telephonic Emergency Board of Regents Meeting**  
**Eastern New Mexico University - Portales**  
**Administration Building – Regents Room**  
**March 20, 2020 – 9:00 a.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Regent President Terry Othick called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and declared a quorum. Regent Joseph Gergel was physically present, and Terry Othick, Dan Patterson, Lance Pyle, and Edwin Tatum were present telephonically.

*Roll call: Regent Othick – Yes; Regent Patterson – Yes; Regent Gergel – Yes;  
Regent Pyle– Yes; Regent Tatum –Yes.*

**APPROVE THE AGENDA**

*Regent Patterson moved to approve the agenda. Regent Gergel seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0-0. Motion approved. Vote: 5-0-0. Motion approved.*

**BUSINESS MATTERS**

1. Cancellation/Postponement of Spring Commencement Ceremony, Portales  
Regent Othick stated that the purpose of this meeting is to determine the best plan of action for the spring commencement ceremony scheduled for May 9, 2020, in reaction to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. Current reports show that we have just surpassed 15,000 cases nationwide, 35 of which are in New Mexico, and three-million people are on lock-down in California.

Regent Othick welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the members of the Emergency Response Committee that are working hard to ensure that ENMU is compliant with the rapidly changing directives that are coming from both Federal and State agencies as they relate to how we respond under the threat of the Coronavirus. He also thanked Karl Terry, Director of the Roosevelt County Chamber of Commerce and Amber Hamilton, Portales City Manager, for the time input on the impact the cancellation of this event could have on the local economy. He noted that their concerns would certainly be taken into consideration.

Regent Othick recognized the extraordinary efforts of the Emergency Planning Committee, and their work on issues that must be dealt with in correlation to this virus. The EPC membership includes Dr. Jeff Long, Chief Bradley Mauldin, Mr. Scott Smart, Dr. Patrice Caldwell, Dr. Jamie Laurenz, Mr. Clark Elswick, Mr. Benito Gonzales, Mr. John Houser, and Dr. Jeff Elwell. He also recognized Mr. Brent Small of Financial Aid and Mr. John Kanmore of Physical Plant, Dr. Shawn Powell, ENMU-Roswell President, and Dr. Ryan Carstens, ENMU-Ruidoso President for their participation on this committee.

Dr. Jeff Elwell said that he and committee members have been in touch with HED and the Governor's Office as well as other universities. The recommendation on March 18 from the EPC unanimously recommended cancellation of all commencement exercises at Roswell, Ruidoso, and Portales following the Governor's recommendation to close all venues as of midnight on March 18, 2020. The Governor's recommendations state that there should be no more than ten people in any space. Dr. Elwell said if the University

waits until April 10 to make a decision on commencement, the final burden (mostly financial) would fall upon the students. There would be the added expense of rushing the program print job, regalia must be ordered no later than April 17 which gives students little time to respond, and also the *Marching Orders Vendor* that prepares much of the logistical means for commencement requires notice of cancellation or for contracting their services. Additionally, the Governor is working to restrict interstate travel. Dr. Elwell reiterated that the cost factor is not the primary concern, but the necessity for social distancing. He said that we would, at some point, honor these graduates, but it seems impractical to do so in the traditional setting at this time. Students will receive their diplomas, earn their honors, and their transcripts will reflect all of their course completions no matter the outcome of this decision.

Chief Bradley Mauldin referred to correspondence from Sara Ricklefs, Associate Registrar, as it pertains to how commencement ceremonies are planned. He explained that alternative methods for carrying out commencement has been researched, and that he has received candid input from various individuals on campus about the potential risk of having any type of gathering in an enclosed environment. There is concern that the interest of politics will prevail over public safety. Chief Mauldin further noted that sometimes what is in the best interest of public safety is not what is the best interest of political officials or their business affiliates. He affirmed Dr. Elwell's concern that if we move forward with this event, the venue will have to be evaluated to maintain safety standards.

Mr. Scott Smarted added that the Emergency Planning Committee has made many critical decisions over the past few days with health and safety being the driving factor. The financial aspect is less relevant, and they are moving forward to make sure students are paid their work-study allocation throughout the rest of the semester. He said that based on the virus model, there is no indication that this pandemic will be over or slowing down as we approach May. To the committee, it seems imprudent to ask students, faculty, family, and friends to travel to Portales while we are dealing with this challenging situation. Given the severe nature of the pandemic, it seems wrong to divert resources to a graduation ceremony, albeit important, as we scramble to deal with all of the other issues. Dr. Elwell added that New Mexico Highlands and Northern New Mexico plan to celebrate their student's commencement, but not at the originally scheduled time and not likely in the traditional method.

Regent Othick recognized Mr. Karl Terry, Executive Director of the Roosevelt County Chamber of Commerce, and asked him to voice his concerns. Mr. Terry said that we must get through this together and that it is probably prudent to postpone commencement plans, but to cancel outright at this time might be premature. He said that it would not harm anything to get a better picture of what



we are facing. He said that the business community will be significantly impacted and will need every opportunity to rebound from this situation as quickly as possible. He voiced that it is his hope that the University will consider postponing this event until the summer or fall.

Regent Dan Patterson said that this is an unprecedented situation, and things are changing by the minute. We must consider the health of our students, faculty, staff, parents, and community as our priority. He said that canceling this event is something we should try to avoid and thinks we should postpone and come back to planning when and if things change. He further commented that we might consider some non-traditional means of celebrating the accomplishments of these students.

***Regent Patterson made the motion as follows, "Because of the National Emergency declared by the President and the CDC's guidelines that there be no public gatherings of more than ten people because of the current COVID 19 outbreak, that ENMU and its branches postpone their spring commencement ceremonies until such a time as there is a reduced danger to our students, staff, parents, and communities. Such as postponement may require that the ceremonies be non-traditional ones (i.e., without caps and gowns or official programs as determined by the University's Emergency Planning Committee. The Emergency Planning Committee shall remain on-top of this situation and assist the Board of Regents in determining an appropriate future date for the ceremonies to be conducted, but if it is determined that the ceremonies cannot be held prior to August 1, 2020, the ceremonies shall be canceled in their entirety and students shall be given the option of attending the fall 2020 ceremonies." Regent Pyle seconded the motion.***

Regent Othick asked for further discussion, and Regent Joseph Gergel read his brief statement as follows, "We are again met with a challenge, a difficult one and a difficult decision must be made. Before I get to the topic at-hand and my opinions on it, I want to first discuss the principles underlying this decision and our role as Regents. First, being an ENMU Board of Regent members is inherently a utilitarian position in a general sense. What I mean is that as a Regent and in our decision-making process, we cannot make a decision based solely on one aspect of the issue at hand. For instance, we cannot have our decision guided solely by the benefits to the business office; or based solely on the benefits to Athletics; or based solely on the benefit of the Portales community and economy of Portales. If we only based decisions on one aspect of ENMU – let's say only basing decisions on what most benefits students, then increases in tuition and fees would never be warranted, just as an example. Rather, as Regents, our decisions must be guided on the totality of the circumstances and what accomplishes the most good for Eastern New Mexico University at-large and the

*public. So, this decision to postpone and seek alternative measures for commencement must be guided by what is in the best interest of ENMU as a whole and the public, and we cannot just focus on one or two aspects of this decision that may harm certain groups. Undoubtedly, this decision will harm students, the graduates, and their families. I know, I am one of them. So I must leave my subjective emotions behind and objectively look at this at all angles and guide my decision on what is the best way forward for ENMU as a whole and the public in this public health emergency."*

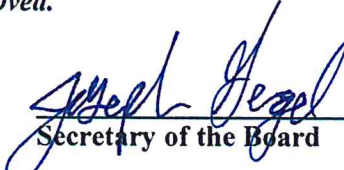
Regent Edwin Tatum commented that he agrees with the motion. Regent Pyle voiced his appreciation of the EPC and said that in these trying times, it is crucial to protect the health and safety of our students and staff. He added that it might be necessary to think outside of the box to honor our spring graduates. Regent Othick concurred.

**Regent Othick asked for a vote on this motion. Vote 5-0-0. Motion approved.**

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

*Regent Patterson moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 a.m. Regent Pyle seconded the motion. Vote: 5-0-0. Motion approved.*

  
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President of the Board

  
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Secretary of the Board

*Minutes recorded and transcribed by Karen Van Ruiten  
Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Regents*