

TOPIC: COMMISSIONERS' INITIATIVE FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE VALUE AND BENEFIT OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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I. SUMMARY

Several members of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education are interested in leading a yearlong education and outreach campaign that would raise the awareness of the diverse public higher education institutions and programs serving Colorado and its students. It would also reinforce the public benefit – or greater good – of a high quality public higher education system. CCHE Vice Chair Patricia Pacey serves as a member of the Rocky Mountain PBS board of directors and is specifically proposing that the Commission lead a statewide public awareness TV campaign that would be designed and developed by PBS with input from the Colorado Department of Higher Education and all the public institutions of higher education. A cornerstone of this proposed initiative would be a series of 30-second public service announcements strategically aired during key viewing times. The campaign would be funded through private donations raised by sitting and possibly former CCHE Commissioners, who would host receptions in their respective communities in partnership with local business and institutional leaders, along with PBS board members or personnel, as a way to promote the greater good of higher education and simultaneously boost member support for Rocky Mountain PBS.

II. BACKGROUND

Members of the CCHE have long grappled with how to better inform the citizens of Colorado about the efficiency and efficacy of the state's public higher education institutions, and their critical importance to the state's economic vitality and civic and social wellbeing. Most people know about the personal benefits of a postsecondary credential, such as better job prospects and salaries. But higher education is about more than that: The broader "public good" benefits of a robust public higher education system include a stronger state economy, a better prepared workforce, job growth and industry innovation, a more civically engaged public, less reliance on public welfare programs, better health outcomes and more parent involvement in a child's education.

While several Commissioners have given presentations on the challenges and goals facing public higher education in Colorado, the reach of these presentations is limited.

Earlier this year, several Commissioners attended a presentation hosted by the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce on the two-year Greater Good Campaign run by the *Seattle Times* in partnership with key sector business leaders in the state of Washington. This public awareness campaign is credited with successfully preventing cuts to higher education funding in that state and cementing a legislative mandate in support of public higher education. Central to the Greater

Good Campaign's success was the strong involvement by business and industry, both viewed as clear third party voices in support of public higher education. Several Commissioners have discussed whether such a public awareness campaign could be implemented in Colorado.

Commissioner Pacey views PBS as a viable partner for a similar campaign - or one piece of a larger "greater good" campaign. However, the campaign as presently proposed focuses more on the public good of higher education than on specific funding issues. She notes that Rocky Mountain PBS has relatively even distribution across political affiliations and seven out of eight viewers who vote in presidential elections.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff believes advocacy of a quality public higher education system is an important role of the CCHE and probably one of the main reasons Commissioners agree to serve on this volunteer board, even though advocacy is not spelled out in state statute.

One of the four goals in *Colorado Competes*, Colorado's master plan for higher education, is to develop resources, through increases in state funding, which will allow public institutions of higher education to meet projected enrollment demands while promoting affordability, accessibility and efficiency. Specifically, the master plan states:

"Building public support for higher education will require more than simply pointing to statistics of revenue deficiencies. It will require ongoing demonstrations of effective stewardship, such as maintaining or improving productivity, maintaining quality and recognizing the ways in which changes in costs affect participation decisions. In other words, to build the public's trust and confidence, we must focus less on the ways other states fund their systems of higher education, and more on the ways in which improvements in funding help Colorado families."

*"Additionally, the commission believes strongly that measuring productivity, while critically important to building public confidence in the effectiveness of public higher education, isn't, alone, enough. **The Commission believes that it too has a responsibility to advocate for improved public revenues to higher education.**"*

This campaign is one way for commissioners to advocate for higher education - or at least a way to promote awareness of higher education as a greater good. This initiative would not preclude the development of a broader "greater good" campaign but could be viewed as a piece of a larger initiative or as a stand-alone campaign. The campaign would be educational in nature as opposed to advocating for or against ballot issues or measures or other campaign issues, which would be prohibited by PBS.

It is important to note that the campaign as proposed is different from the *Seattle Times*' initiative in a few key ways: The *Seattle Times* initiative was led by the publisher of a leading news outlet in consultation with key industry leaders, who sponsored the campaign, with higher education playing a supporting role. The Commissioner's Initiative proposed here is led by the

Commission, involves individual donations rather than corporate sponsorships, and features a concurrent goal of generating additional support for Rocky Mountain PBS. However, Commissioners and other interested higher education advocates understand the benefit and importance of partnering with key business leaders representing the state's top industries as part of this campaign.

Also, the *Seattle Times* committed its reporters and editorial team to aggressively cover the issue of higher education funding as part of the campaign, along with the public service announcements. This proposed campaign is solely a messaging campaign using paid public service announcements.

At this point, Commissioners have not discussed this type of proposal with other media outlets to understand what other interest or options may exist. Clearly a Commissioner's ties to PBS could be viewed as an asset for such a campaign. However, it would be important to better understand the demographics of the Rocky Mountain PBS audience so that the messages are hitting segments of the population who are the best position to act on the information. A way of measuring outcomes and impact would also need to be developed once the end goal(s) are defined.

Finally, Commissioners will want to consider marketing efforts already underway to promote individual institutions and college programs. Whatever messaging is part of this campaign should not duplicate institutional efforts or add to a sense of competition between schools. This campaign should promote big picture thinking about the benefits of a sustainable and high quality public higher education system. A regional vs. institutional approach could be effective in this regard.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

This item is for discussion only and therefore staff is not making a recommendation at this time.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §23-1-108. Duties and powers of the commission with regard to systemwide planning.

Included in language requiring the Commission to prepare and submit a statewide master plan are these two goals, which fit with the Commission Initiative for Public Awareness of the Value and Benefit of Higher Education:

- Increasing the overall number of baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees, and career and technical education certificates issued by the public institutions of higher education in the state, while maintaining accessibility to the institutions, to provide support for economic development and a well-educated workforce for the business community in the state;

- Implementing strategies that strengthen the link between higher education and economic development and innovation in the state.