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March 13, 2020

Coronavirus: President Kennedy discusses the steps underway at CU

Mark Kennedy

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Hosted by:

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Ken: It's Friday, March 13th and today we have a special edition of CU On The Air amidst the coronavirus outbreak. We have university of Colorado President Mark Kennedy, who's been quite a busy man the past several weeks dealing with this on CU's campuses. We have a community with more than 100,000 people, about 70,000 students, more than 30,000 faculty and staff, operations in four cities. How does an operation that big get its arms around something like this?

Mark Kennedy: Well, first of all, you plan for it. We have emergency plans on each of the campuses and here in the system office that try to anticipate what could happen and what we need to do. We have professionals that are focused on that in each campus and bringing them in with the chancellors and me and the broader community has allowed us to come with action steps that address the situation as it evolves. So I'm very pleased with what each campus chancellor and their

teams have done in conjunction with their emergency management teams and what we've done here. But it's a fast evolving situation and we need to continue to keep ahead of it.

Ken: What are some of the action steps that CU' take?

Mark Kennedy: Well, if you look at a pandemic that's evolving, the number one thing we want to try to do is limit it spreading. To do that, we want to limit the number of large group gatherings, that includes classes. So you'll see this moving to remote teaching so that we don't bring people together in a classroom. We're also limiting on campus gatherings for the next several weeks, perhaps essentially every on campus gathering. We're trying to have all meetings be done remotely and similarity giving every staff possible the opportunity, particularly in this next couple of week period, to work remotely. That's requires an adjustment, a huge adjustment, on the part of our faculty and staff. So they've done great work to get there. The third thing is to limit travel, to not have travel. There's a restriction except in the most rare of circumstances to do domestic or international travel. So if you're limiting people moving back and forth that could be spreading it, if you're limiting gatherings of people that could be spreading it, that's I think the most important thing we can do to have this pandemic impact the least number of people possible.

Ken: The CU Anschutz Medical Campus, one of the top academic medical centers in the nation, does it have a special role in this?

Mark Kennedy: Well, it has a very special role. I mean, we decided to move towards remote learning beginning on Wednesday and a lot of people were saying, "Why are you doing this so early? We haven't had a confirmed incident on campus." Part of that was the input that we received from our medical campus that knows how these things evolve, seen what's happened in China, seen what happened in Europe, anticipate what's happened here, so us being further ahead of the curve I think also encouraged a lot of other people to come along with us and put I believe the whole state in a much better position in part because of the advice and counsel we were getting from our medical campus. The other thing is the Governor's requested the medical campus, can they help with when we're doing testing? Some of our students are helping with that testing to make sure that we're being responsive during this surge period and we've stepped forward in that period.

Mark Kennedy: But it's times like this when you understand just how valuable having a strong medical campus and a medical academic center in the state is for us and for the state.

Ken: One of the primary things that's happening on all the campuses, remote instruction, how will that differ from in person?

Mark Kennedy: It will differ both in person and online. Online is prepared to be online. What we're doing now is, whether it be through our learning management system or

for Zoom or other mechanisms or whatever the faculty can come up with as the best way to continue the instruction throughout the remainder of the semester is having that engagement through digital means. So this is going to be a big change for a lot of our faculty. I know they're committed to the education of our students, and so I know they'll do the best they can with the circumstances in the short period of time that they've had to prepare. Luckily, there's a spring break period coming up that, for better or for worse, unfortunately, some of our faculty may have to spend part of that break preparing for the remainder of the semester to delivered something digitally that they had in person.

Mark Kennedy: I think the students hopefully will do a good job of adapting to that too. We're going to deliver the best education we can remotely. In some cases, as in nursing, where you have to have the opportunity to go and see it and do it in sight, we're going to have some of that, but we're going to try to maintain social distancing whenever we do have to have some of our students come onsite.

Ken: So you as a nearly \$5 billion annual operation and it's early on, but what kind of financial impacts do you expect?

Mark Kennedy: I think it will have financial impacts, whether they be foreign students not getting around to applying and coming here next year in as big a numbers as they have in the past. University of Colorado Denver has a Beijing Enterprise Partnership with a university in China. Will that have a hiccup? That has been an important revenue generator for the University of Colorado Denver, but also there's extra expenses we're incurring and undoubtedly the recruiting process is being disrupted. The ability to have accepted students come on campus is being disrupted. All of those will have an impact. So in the end we will have higher costs as well as foregone revenues, but our highest priority right now is to focus on the safety, wellness of our students, faculty, and staff and those that come upon our campuses as well as continuing to deliver the mission of education that we promise to our students.

Ken: Again, so as a large complex far-flung organization in a situation like this, communication is critical. Are you pleased with the flow of information?

Mark Kennedy: I am pleased and what has set this up is a regular rhythm of the chancellors and I getting together with our teams, then getting together with their teams, us keeping the Regents informed, us keeping the public informed. And it's not over, it's a fast evolving situation. So each have set up websites that are available that are updated on a sometimes hourly basis depending on how things are evolving. And I would encourage people, depending on what campus is of most concern to you, to keep looking back at that website and finding out what new information is being added on a regular basis. And to the extent you don't know your campus's website, go to cu.edu and we'll make sure we get you there.

Ken: You mentioned a key strategy is limiting large gatherings of people. Some wonder why we don't close the campuses altogether.

Mark Kennedy: Well, if you look at a lot of our students, we are their home, they have no place to go and they have no place to go dining as easily and as conveniently and affordably as our dining halls. So our international students and other students, it would be irresponsible for us to close our campuses. And if you think about, we already have a stressed healthcare and safety net system throughout the state of Colorado. If we further stress that system by closing our campus, that would be a disservice to the state. So frankly, when we made our announcement, I immediately had a conversation with the Governor and the Governor's concern was he wants us to make sure we keep those campuses open for just those reasons. And we'll continue to watch the situation as it evolves but I believe that for the time being it is important that we keep our campuses open and I can't imagine a situation where we would not meet our obligations to those students that really have no choice.

Ken: What do you want those students to know and their parents to know about CU's response?

Mark Kennedy: Part of the reason we are keeping our campuses open is that they also have our healthcare facilities, our medical health facilities and counseling that's available, as well as the food and room and board. So know that their safety, their wellness, is a top priority. We're committed to delivering the educational experiences, but campuses have come to mean so much more than just education. All the support networks we're trying to keep in place for the people on campus. If they choose to go home, fine, but they should know that we are committed to keeping our campuses a place where if there is an incident that we're sequestering those that are affected and making sure that we have places on campuses for that to happen, but that otherwise we're going to do our best to make the campuses a place where the services they come to expect continue to be provided.

Ken: You had a special meeting of the University's Governing Board of Regents today. What happened at that meeting?

Mark Kennedy: Well, we gave a full briefing to the Regents on each campus and what's happening here in the system office as well to make sure that all their questions were answered. It's a public meeting as is all of our meetings with the press there. We want to be open and transparent about what we are doing.

Ken: What do you expect in the days and weeks ahead?

Mark Kennedy: As of today, we've had one incident of a confirmed positive test at Boulder yesterday. Just in the meeting it was reported that there was one incident at Anschutz Campus. These pandemics typically get worse before they get better. I expect that we're going to see in the near term an escalation in the number of cases, hopefully less than it would have been had we not taken these actions. But we will continue the watch that situation as it evolves, stay in close contact with the healthcare professionals that are advising us with the Department of

Public Health and the Governor and the State Board and with each other and be as responsive as possible.

Ken: In a situation like this, what do you feel is the most important the University can do?

Mark Kennedy: The most important thing that the University can do is make sure that our students and parents know that the safety and wellness of people on our campuses are our highest priority and we are committed to delivering their education and we are there with the services and support we can provide to make sure that it is a great experience that they've had at the University of Colorado despite these very trying times that we are all going through. And so we appreciate everybody's confidence and questions and I would encourage them to look at the website to keep updated as to how we are working hard every day to keep that confidence.

Ken: University of Colorado President Mark Kennedy, thank you for joining us today. The University of Colorado comprises four campuses, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Denver, and the CU Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora. To learn more about CU, go to www.cu.edu. Thanks to our producer Cathy Buton and audio engineer John Arnold. I'm Ken McConnellogue and we'll see you on the air next month.

Speaker 1: University of Colorado.