

MINUTES

**SPECIAL TELEPHONIC MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF REGENTS**

THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

HELD IN

COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

January 25, 2021

(Approved May 20, 2021)

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**MINUTES OF THE
SPECIAL TELEPHONIC MEETING
BOARD OF REGENTS, THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

January 25, 2021

CONVENE

Chairman Elaine Mendoza convened a special telephonic meeting of the Board of Regents of The Texas A&M University System at 5:02 p.m., Monday, January 25, 2021.

Chairman Mendoza said the purpose of the meeting was shown in the agenda materials posted with the Secretary of State. She said each party to the conference call should clearly identify himself or herself prior to speaking.

The following members of the Board were present by phone:

Ms. Elaine Mendoza, Chairman
Mr. Tim Leach, Vice Chairman
Mr. Phil Adams
Mr. Robert L. Albritton
Mr. Jay Graham
Mr. Michael A. Hernandez
Mr. Bill Mahomes
Mr. Michael J. Plank
Mr. Clifton L. Thomas, Jr.
Mr. Cahlen Cheatham (Student Regent)

**PRESENTATION FROM THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
COMMISSION ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

Dr. John L. Junkins, Interim President of Texas A&M University, thanked Chancellor John Sharp and members of the Board. He introduced and thanked Dr. Jimmy Williams '83 and Dr. John E. Hurtado '91, for their efforts as co-chairs of the Commission.

Dr. Williams thanked Dr. Junkins for stepping up and working with them during the transition period. He said that he was honored to co-chair the Commission with Dr. Hurtado. He also thanked Chairman Mendoza, Regent Mahomes, and Dr. Ruth Simmons, President of Prairie View A&M University, for their engagement and leadership. Dr. Williams thanked Chancellor Sharp, Mr. Michael K. Young and Dr. Carol Fierke for their attention and support of this critical topic. He said their biggest thanks went to the Commission's 45 students, former students, faculty and staff -- a very diverse and passionate group of advocates for Texas A&M. Dr. Williams reported that they had spent hundreds of hours talking and listening to 450 individuals which was reflected in their report. He said they consulted with campus experts,

community leadership and small groups. They received additional input through Commission email, online forms, letters and phone calls. Dr. Williams added that there was a very strong affection and respect for Texas A&M -- even among its harshest critics. He said this was indeed an inflection point for Texas A&M, as well as many other educational institutions. He said that we at Texas A&M have a strategic opportunity to demonstrate leadership, and fortitude in this area, much like Major General James Earl Rudder '32 and others throughout Texas A&M's history. Dr. Williams said that we must remember and remind ourselves that this is a journey and not a destination. He said they were extremely encouraged to find key supportive programs already in place, but also recognized that there is work to be done to ensure that all parts of the Aggie family feel welcome and included on campus.

Dr. Hurtado thanked the Board and said that he has long appreciated this institution but never as much as during the opportunity to co-lead this commission. He echoed Dr. Williams thanks to the leaders including Dr. Junkins and Dr. Mark Weichold, Texas A&M's Interim Provost. He said that the executive summary of the report described the components of the commission's charge (a copy of which is on file in the Office of the Board of Regents). As part of its work, the Commission spent time benchmarking the compositional diversity at Texas A&M and found that in some areas compared to other land grant universities and the Association of American Universities, Texas A&M ranked average or below average. Dr. Hurtado said there were opportunities to do better. In the "good news department," he said Texas A&M performed above average in Hispanic student enrollment. Additionally, in terms of actual numbers, Texas A&M graduates more underrepresented minorities than many other land grant institutions. Dr. Hurtado said that Texas A&M falls short, however, in matching the demographic populations of Texas. He reported that the enrollment of Black and African American students over the past 20 years has been flat with faculty and staff following the same trend. He said that more troubling was Texas A&M's poor comparative retention rate for Black and African American students which has fallen from 13 to 20 percent lower than other peer institutions. Dr. Hurtado concluded by saying that there are many good efforts like the ACES Program, the Regents' Scholars Program and others that could be expanded.

Dr. Williams said that more than just numbers, it's Texas A&M's public statement and actions that create the campus climate and culture that significantly affects students, faculty and staff. He said that while many in the Aggie community are open and willing to improve campus culture for all, there are a few vocal groups that do not value or see the need for diversity, equity or inclusion, just yet, at Texas A&M. He reported that for part of the campus culture, the Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue is the source of significant emotions for both defenders and detractors of the statue's presence. He reported that they benchmarked over 19 different universities to understand how they have managed such monuments and names on their campus, and they provided this insight in their report. Dr. Williams said that it is critical that Texas A&M address both sides of this issue thoughtfully and respectfully for both groups. The Commission's discussion found that although the six campus core values were well known, they were not clearly defined, lived, or understood throughout the campus community. He said that while there were many good efforts to address issues at Texas A&M, many in the campus community expressed frustration at the perception of inaction and meaningful efforts to improve. Dr. Williams said it was the Commission's belief that this is absolutely a journey and destination that all Aggies are willing to step up to.

Chairman Mendoza thanked Dr. Williams and Dr. Hurtado for their tireless leadership in this regard -- she said they demonstrated selfless service. Chairman Mendoza expressed a point of personal privilege and said that she had enjoyed her time on the Commission and was honored to participate. She said that it was probably not a surprise to anyone that the students who served on the Commission were incredible and it was clear that each of them loved Texas A&M. She said they just felt there were some things that could be done better and they put their hearts and souls into doing that. Chairman Mendoza said that a lot of time and energy went into the report. She said that she could not imagine the time and energy it took for Dr. Williams and Dr. Hurtado to lead the Commission throughout the entire six months. She added that she knew that Regent Mahomes enjoyed serving his time on the Commission as well.

Regent Mahomes concurred with all the comments expressed by Chairman Mendoza and commended the co-chairs for their willingness to serve and for their leadership. He said this was an excellent example and demonstration of selfless service.

Dr. Junkins was asked to review the response. He said the report sometimes read like an intelligence document, but was obviously focused on the problems. He said that some of the voices were in conflict with each other, which was not surprising given the diversity of the Commission. Dr. Junkins reported that he had assembled a “kitchen cabinet” to help him assimilate what this meant in regards to moving forward with the University, recognizing that they had to engage the Board’s wisdom to try to see where they would go from here. He said that he decided early on that he could not do everything with all the issues raised. He reported that he had looked for the tall poles in the tent, the things that required investment and the things that would make the most difference. Dr. Junkins said working with their “kitchen cabinet,” they decided to try to use two overarching umbrellas for all of their thoughts, directions and proposals.

Dr. Junkins said the first umbrella was the Aggie Core Values. He said that in his 35 years at Texas A&M, he had witnessed a time of incredible growth but the intensity and uniformity of the core values’ buy-in had decayed somewhat. He said with such a large university it is harder to feel included -- it does not matter what your pigmentation or chromosome is -- you are just in a big place. Dr. Junkins advised that all of those things fold into this -- our overarching umbrella is our core values and our responsibilities as a land grant university to take a look at how we are serving Texas. He said in his opinion we should always strive to improve. He said that there is room for improvement with the largest area being to improve the demography by increasing the fraction of Black and African American students that we are attracting from Texas. Dr. Junkins said that we also want to improve the demography of the faculty by attracting more outstanding faculty who are from underrepresented groups, especially Black and African Americans. Dr. Junkins said their proposal to the Board had nine areas and they were asking for \$24 million of investment over the coming four years. He said they felt that it was important to have a multi-year strategy. He said the goal was to reach the underrepresented students and the students who are the first members of their families to attend the university. He said they also recommend that the threshold for family income be increased from \$40,000 to \$60,000 to qualify for the Regents’ Scholar Program. He advised that they were doing a number of initiatives to try to expand the number of students.

Dr. Junkins said that the Commission's proposal addressed the two main issues to improve Texas A&M's reputation over time and making it more affordable. He said that expanding the pipeline would include a sequence of things to target the underrepresented students. He said that item nine of their proposal would document the success of our many former students of color. He said that Texas A&M has hundreds of very successful Black and African American students who have attended Texas A&M, loved it, and been successful and they want to capture their stories and their voices in commanding videos. He said they already have videos where students were interviewed eight to nine years ago as freshmen and then they had them captured several years into their jobs. He said these stories are so commanding and he thinks that this will help high school counselors and students see Texas A&M through the eyes of someone who had been there and done that, loved it and succeeded.

Dr. Junkins said that they propose to invest the funds necessary to significantly increase the Regents' Scholarship Program by 93 students per year over and above the current investment and to increase the national recognition scholarships by 89 students per year. He pointed out that these Regent national recognition scholarships are derived from the College Board scores. He said these are outstanding students who scored very well. Dr. Junkins said that they are seeking to go from 61 a year to 150 of those students to afford them under increased national recognition scholarships. He said that these scholarships are \$6,000 per student and renewable up to four years with good grade performance. The Regents Scholarship Program is open to not only underrepresented students, but to all students who are first year attendees and whose family income is low.

Dr. Junkins said that the pathways to doctorate program is new. They are looking for bachelor's degree candidates, in their senior year primarily, from our peer and regional campuses that are interested in attending graduate school. He said this program would consist of 10 students per year for four years with the college and department picking up stipends after the first year. These are \$40,000/year fellowships -- the going rate for the National Science Foundation Fellowship.

Dr. Junkins said that they want to pay attention to an award program, which recognizes anyone in the university doing an outstanding job, leading by example, in a way that helps them address demographic challenges. He said they were trying to increase the competition by attracting stellar people at all levels including the faculty. They are looking to establish an action orientated task force to help them decide how to proceed with respect to all things on campus that represent the history of this university. Dr. Junkins said they want to change the conversation to emphasize the leaders that built this university, and those that were leading during times of important transition. The goal is not to deify people and the entire spectrum of their lives, the goal is to recognize those who elevated this university over time. He said that establishing an action oriented task force to tell the story of Texas A&M is a broader issue than simply statues.

Dr. Junkins submitted the Commission's report to the Board for consideration (a copy of which is on file in the Office of the Board of Regents). He said they felt it would be transformative for the university and something that would validate the effort that went into the study. He said they felt their response goes outside the full spectrum of the report and is also

responsive to the main threads that are there. He said they did not respond to everything but that Dr. Annie S. McGowan, Texas A&M's Interim Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity, and others were going to look at things that they did not. He said that they would primarily concentrate on things that required substantial investment and required the Board to make a decision.

Chancellor Sharp thanked Dr. Hurtado and Dr. Williams, as well as the members of the Commission for their hard work and a job well done. He reported that he and members of his staff reviewed Dr. Junkins' recommendations and supported them. He said he believes this report maintains and strengthens our Aggie traditions, Aggie culture, and Aggie family while expanding our family all across Texas. Chancellor Sharp said that if someone were to ask him today what this report was about and what the Board was considering he would simply say that what Texas A&M does better than any university in the country is to take ordinary kids and turn them into extraordinary citizens. He said the biggest favor that Texas A&M can do for the State of Texas is to be sure there is at least one Aggie ring in every single family in Texas. Chancellor Sharp expressed his appreciation to the Commission co-chairs, as well as The Association of Former Student and the Texas A&M Foundation for their endorsement. He recommended that the Board approve Dr. Junkins' recommendations.

Chairman Mendoza said that the Board appreciated all the work that had been done from the members of the Commission to the Interim President and his team, and of course, the Chancellor and his team. She said the Regents asked that the report be delivered to them to ensure accountability or action from the very top of governance. She said there certainly was a sense that it was appropriate for this Board to adopt a statement showing its appreciation for the work of the Commission and the action items developed by the Interim President and university leaders and accepted by the Chancellor. Chairman Mendoza said that she and Vice Chairman Leach had worked with the Chancellor and his team to prepare a proposed statement and a draft had been distributed to each Regent for review prior to this meeting. She said that it was their hope that the other members of the Board would review it favorably and that they could vote to approve the statement as recommended by the Chancellor and send an important signal to our students, faculty, staff, former students, legislators, families and friendly rivals regarding our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and to our goal of having Texas A&M University be representative of the demographics of the State of Texas consistent with our land grant mission.

Vice Chairman Leach echoed the comments made by Chairman Mendoza and thanked the Commission for its hard work over the past six months. He said the Commission raised some important issues for the university. He said they appreciated their dedicated effort to bring forward a report that would help build the fundamental successes already achieved by Texas A&M while paving the way for us to be a national leader in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion for years to come. Vice Chairman Leach said that it was evident that members of the Commission love this university as he does and he commended them for a job well done.

Chairman Mendoza asked if there were additional comments. There were none.

Chairman Mendoza called for a motion to approve the Regent’s Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Regent Mahomes moved to approve the statement. Vice Chairman Leach seconded the motion. Chairman Mendoza called each regent’s name for the vote. The record of the vote is as follows: Adams – yes, Albritton – yes, Graham – yes, Hernandez – yes, Leach – yes, Mahomes – yes, Plank – yes, Thomas – yes, and Chairman Mendoza voted “yes”.

The following statement was approved [004(B)-2021].

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**MINUTE ORDER 004(B)-2021**

**APPROVAL OF  
REGENTS’ STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION  
BOARD OF REGENTS, THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

The Regents’ Statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, a copy of which is attached to the official minutes, is hereby approved.

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Chairman Mendoza thank Dr. Williams and Dr. Hurtado for their diligence, work and time. She also thanked Dr. Junkins, Chancellor Sharp and their staffs for coming together and moving forward on this important issue.

RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Mendoza said the Board would recess to executive session to consider matters as permitted by Chapter 551, Sections 71 and 74 of the Texas Government Code. She said in accordance with the law, no final action, decision, or vote with regard to any matter considered in the executive session would be made or taken.

(Note: The Board met in executive session from 5:35 p.m. until 6:05 p.m.)

RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION

Chairman Mendoza reconvened the meeting in open session at 6:06 p.m. and announced that the Board had met in executive session from 5:35 p.m. until 6:05 p.m., and conferred with Chancellor Sharp, administration and attorneys on personnel and legal matters.

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**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, on motion of Regent Adams, seconded by Regent Plank, Chairman Mendoza adjourned the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

Vickie Burt Spillers  
Executive Director, Board of Regents

*(Minutes transcribed by Jackie Bell, Office of the Board of Regents.)*