

## **Board of Regents President Michael J. Richards Comments**

**June 4, 2020**

The COVID-19 virus and the response to it has brought about many changes to our country, state and Regent institutions. Many of those changes are temporary, while others may be with us on a more permanent basis. Time will tell, as we continue to make our way through this crisis.

First, I want to take a moment to congratulate all the graduates of the Class of 2020. The thousands of students that received diplomas at our institutions did so in a unique way, through virtual ceremonies. We are empathetic that they could not have a traditional graduation. Unfortunately, the safety and health of everyone takes precedence, and graduation in its typical form could not take place. I applaud our institutions for putting together virtual ceremonies in short order for our students.

Still, current circumstances does not take away from the tremendous accomplishment of our graduates at our universities and special schools. Receiving a degree is one of life's truly great moments, and on behalf of the Board, I want to personally congratulate everyone in the Class of 2020 for their achievement.

Now, our Board and universities look forward to the fall semester.

We have been clear that our intention is to open our campuses this fall, including in-person instruction, open residence halls, on-campus dining, and campus activities. Our universities have each established a committee dedicated to preparing plans for how our campuses can open, in as safe as environment as possible. They have been working hard on these plans. We will continue to use guidance from the CDC, the Iowa Department of Health, and others, to make informed, fact-based decisions. We do believe that we can open our campuses in a safe manner, so that is how we are proceeding.

There are many details to be worked out, both inside and out of the classroom. When our campuses open, we plan to have as full a range of on-campus experiences as possible, including athletics. How our campuses will operate in the COVID-19 environment will be specifically dealt with by the committees. We recognize there are many questions, but I want to let everyone know that these

plans are proceeding as quickly as possible. As plans are finalized, each institution will communicate them publicly, so everyone will know what the guidelines are for the Fall 2020 semester.

At the Board level, we have established an advisory group, made up of four Regents and university representation. This ad-hoc committee has already had initial meetings. The group's primary charge is to look for academic and administrative collaboration opportunities across the Regent enterprise.

Public higher education was already evolving before COVID-19, but with the added pressure of the pandemic, we must begin to make systemic changes now. Our universities have withstood many challenging times in their history: Numerous wars, economic depressions and recessions, and even a previous pandemic. As Regents, it is our responsibility to make sure that the University of Iowa, Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa remain healthy so they can be here for the next hundred years.

This advisory group may consider many different things. For example, making strategic investments to expand the opportunities for students at one university to take classes online from one of the other universities, creating new online programs for nontraditional students, expand the post-secondary enrollment option for high school students, and whether administrative functions at all three universities can be consolidated. We also may need to consider whether to put a moratorium on new construction and exploring additional public-private partnerships.

Those are merely some examples that the advisory group will be looking at in the months to come, but I know it will be comprehensive and thoughtful. They will make formal recommendations to the Board at this November's meeting, and I look forward to hearing what financial, academic and administrative changes they believe will make our Regent universities stronger.

As we continue to navigate current circumstances, and move forward, know that the Board's top priority remains continuing to provide an affordable, accessible, high-quality education for our students.