

Chancellor's Office Podcast CCC21039 - Transcript

Hi, this is Eloy Ortiz Oakley Chancellor of the California Community Colleges and you're listening to another episode of the California community colleges Chancellors Office podcast. Happy New Year, everyone coming to you in early 2021 and I wanted to take a moment and do a solo podcast wanted to ring in the New Year reflect on 2020. But as I sit here recording this I can't help but let you know that today is Wednesday January 6th, and I have spent the day like many of you watching the images on the television watching images of domestic enemies, domestic terrorists, reaching the doors of our country's capital. And as some of you know, I'm a former member of the U.S. Army and they gave me a pit in my stomach to watch the scenes, to watch our democracy being undermined in full view of all Americans. 2020 has been a very challenging year. It is been a surreal year. We've had a pandemic. We've had a terrible economic crisis that is affected California community college students and community college students and all low-income students across the country. We have had to deal with transitioning our instructions literally overnight to online remote instruction our faculty and staff have jumped over enormous hurdles to bring instruction to our students and to ensure that we continued to provide the education to our students that they deserve. So as I reflect on 2021 I can't help but be proud of the amazing work that our faculty and staff have accomplished. And I say that not just for the California community college system, but all of the public and nonprofit systems of higher education across the country all of our K-12 teachers and administrators have done an amazing job to continue to allow students to receive the education they deserve And as we struggled through 2020, the one thing that was obvious was that this crisis was bringing us together in the ways that we always come together as Educators. We pull together in support of our students. So I want to begin this podcast by saying thank you. Thank you to the faculty, to the staff, to the administrators, managers, supervisors. And all of the policymakers that supported or students in our colleges throughout 2020. It was a very difficult year as we turn the corner to 2021. We see the vaccine showing up and being distributed. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. But the images are we saw today. We must take a hard look at; we must hold up a very brutally honest mirror in front of us and asked the question. How do we get here? How did we get here? And how do we get ourselves out of here? Community colleges in my opinion are the best vehicle to address many of the issues that we see play not in front of us. Community colleges are the most democratic system of higher education in our country. We serve the top one hundred percent of students. What does that mean? That means that whether you are a newly graduated high school senior coming to college for the first time weather like myself after serving four years in the military then working for four more years. I found a community college to go back to and start my higher education. Or perhaps you're formerly incarcerated or a recently emancipated foster youth. Community colleges are in just about every community in all parts of this country doing the work of opening the doors to Americans who need higher education to improve their lives to improve social mobility to improve their economic mobility. So this is a time for the community colleges in this time of crisis, this time of civil unrest, this time of lack of understanding of how our Democratic process works and an embrace of the understanding that our democracy is

fragile. It is extremely fragile. We've learned so much about how elections work in the last few months. We have learned so much about the electoral process of votes are counted. We've seen at the lowest level in Precinct after Precinct across the country how elections happen. And the rules and the laws that govern those elections, we have witnessed firsthand how fragile our democracy is. Our democracy survived because we are willing to accept the will of the voters. We are willing to accept the peaceful transfer of power. And it's times like this when we see groups of individuals, groups of domestic terrorists, trying to impose their will upon Congress when they are trying to conduct the business of the Constitution. It makes us stand up and take notice and has to question. What do we as Educators need to do? I think this is the perfect platform for us to engage with our students, to engage in our communities and to use as an example of why Civic engagement is so critical. Why critical thinking is so important? And why expressing your free thoughts, your opinions is important but to embrace the notion that crossing the line into Anarchy, crossing the line into lawlessness... is not the answer. So we also see. And I personally saw the Confederate flag in the United States Capitol today and I tell you. As American as a person who served in the military, as a person of color, that deeply deeply disturbs me and it should disturb all of us because that flag is a symbol of hatred. That flag is a symbol of racism. There's no other way around it. And this is another one of those crystallized moments that we've had so many of which has come to bear in 2020 whether it was George Floyd's murder, or the actions of Neo-Nazi protesters, or an individual picture with the Confederate flag in the Capitol today. Racism and systemic discrimination are still alive and well in our society and we must take these issues on as Educators. We might take them and root them out in our practices in our institutions and our hiring processes, and we must be the example to our students into our communities about what needs to change and what change should look like. I know that I'm putting a lot on our colleges for educators, but this is what we signed up for. No other system of higher education has the dedicated faculty and staff the community colleges do. We signed up for one reason and one reason only: to serve students in our communities. We are community colleges. We open the doors to everyone. We believe in the potential of every member of a community. So This Is Our Moment. This is why we exist. We are here to engage in these challenges to highlight the ways that our students in our communities can deal with these challenges, overcome these challenges and use this as an opportunity to change the direction that our country is going. So I want to thank all the Educators out there for all that you do to support our democracy and I call this to action. The action to continue to defend our democracy to lift up communities, to build communities in the work that we do together. As we await the inauguration of incoming President Joe Biden, this is an opportunity for us as Educators to shine and for us to begin to build a better America for everyone. So again, Happy New Year to you all. I hope that you join me on several of the other podcasts that we will have throughout the year. It's going to be I believe a great year. It's beginning in a very sad way. But I believe the actions that we saw happen today will bring us together in a way that gives us the opportunity to create a better America. Thank you for listening to him and I hope you join me in our future podcast. Take care.