

SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF REGENTS
NEVADA SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

System Administration, Las Vegas
4300 South Maryland Parkway, Board Room

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Video Conference Connection from the Meeting Site to:
System Administration, Reno
2601 Enterprise Road, Conference Room
and
Great Basin College, Elko
1500 College Parkway, Berg Hall Conference Room

Members Present:

Mrs. Amy J. Carvalho, Chair
Dr. Jeffrey S. Downs, Vice Chair
Mr. Joseph C. Arrascada
Mr. Aaron Bautista
Mrs. Susan Brager
Mr. Byron Brooks
Ms. Heather Brown
Mrs. Carol Del Carlo
Mr. Carlos D. Fernandez
Mr. Pete Goicoechea
Ms. Stephanie Goodman
Ms. Jennifer J. McGrath

Members Absent:

Mr. Patrick J. Boylan

Others Present:

Ms. Patricia Charlton, Interim Chancellor
Dr. Daniel Archer, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Dr. Natalie Brown, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Workforce Development and Community Colleges
Ms. Elizabeth Callahan, Public Information Officer
Ms. Lynda P. King, Senior Associate General Counsel
Mr. James J. Martines, Vice Chancellor and Chief General Counsel
Mr. Christopher G. Nielsen, Special Counsel to the Board of Regents
Ms. Keri D. Nikolajewski, Chief of Staff to the Board of Regents
Ms. Kelly Scherado, Interim Chief Human Resources Officer
Mr. Chris Viton, Vice Chancellor of Budget and Finance and Chief Financial Officer

Others Present: *(cont.)*

- Dr. William L. Kibler, Acting President, CSN
- Dr. Kumud Acharya, President, DRI
- Dr. Amber Donnelly, Interim President, GBC
- Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President, NSU
- Dr. Karin M. Hilgersom, President, TMCC
- Dr. Chris Heavey, Officer in Charge, UNLV

Faculty senate chairs in attendance included the following individuals: Ms. Valerie Conner, CSN (*Chair, Council of Faculty Senate Chairs*); Mr. David Sexton, GBC; Dr. David Cooper, NSU; and Dr. Jinger Doe, TMCC. Student body presidents in attendance included the following individual: Ms. Teresa Marie, UNLV-GPSA. Classified council representation included the following individual: Ms. Stacy Wallace, NSU, ex-officio.

Land Acknowledgment

Before beginning, we take a moment to recognize that here in Nevada we stand on the land of the Wa She Shu – Washoe; Numu – Northern Paiute; Nuwe – Western Shoshone; and Nuwu – Southern Paiute. We take a moment to recognize and honor their stewardship that continues into today. With this recognition, we state an intention to rightfully include their voice and respect them as the 27 sovereign tribal nations of Nevada.

Chair Carvalho called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with all members present except Vice Chair Downs and Regents Boylan, Brown, and Goicoechea. Regent Brooks led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chair Carvalho read the Land Acknowledgement.

1. Information Only – Public Comment

Regent Goicoechea entered the meeting.

Olga Mesina provided written public comment in support of Matt McNair, J.D., as the next Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education. (*Ref. Mesina.Olga04.25 on file in the Board Office.*)

Jim New provided in-person public comment as the Nevada Faculty Alliance President, sharing that faculty across the state were overwhelmingly unimpressed by the field of candidates. On behalf of himself, he stated that as difficult as it may seem to declare a failed search, starting a new search would be preferable to choosing a poorly suited candidate for the position.

Bill Robinson provided in-person public comment stating that in his 50 years working for the NSHE there has never been a successful Chancellor from the outside. Every successful Chancellor has been somebody who knew and understood Nevada and NSHE coming in. The new Chancellor needs to lead through the Board to the Presidents. There must be transparency and openness about all things.

Teresa Marie provided in-person public comment stating that students agree that the search should be failed. Students do not think these individuals can lead the institutions through what's currently going on in the state and nationally.

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education – The Board approved the appointment of Matt McNair, J.D., as Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education, effective June 1, 2025, and the Employment Agreement. (*Ref. BOR-2c and Supplemental Material on file in the Board Office.*)

Regent Brager, Chair of the ad hoc Chancellor Search Committee, explained how the process will work, noting that each candidate would offer an opening and closing statement and would be asked three questions.

Vice Chair Downs entered the meeting.

Regent Brager welcomed Matt McNair. Mr. McNair provided an opening statement.

Regent Brown entered the meeting.

Mr. McNair responded to the interview questions, including follow-up questions, and provided a closing statement.

Regent Del Carlo stated the Regents had received an article from a student newspaper in Ohio and asked Mr. McNair to explain. Mr. McNair appreciated the question because if he were reading the article, he would be concerned. Ohio State thoroughly investigated the matter and concluded that none of the allegations were true. There were no concerns, and he remained employed. The alleged filed a court case after he was terminated, and that was also dismissed. Mr. McNair stated it was all very unfortunate because that is not who he is. Regent Del Carlo clarified that the case is over and done. Mr. McNair stated yes, and that is why it is unfortunate, because the only thing out there publicly is the piece from the student newspaper.

Regent Brager welcomed TJ Bliss. Dr. Bliss provided an opening statement.

Dr. Bliss responded to the interview questions and provided a closing statement.

[Technical difficulties interrupted Vice Chair Downs' comments.]

Special Counsel Nielsen stated he believed that Vice Chair Downs was making the same disclosure he made during the ad hoc Chancellor Search Committee meeting, noting he is an employee of the Nevada System of Higher Education and Western Nevada College, and because the independence of judgment of a reasonable person would not be materially affected, he will vote on the matter.

Vice Chair Downs left the meeting.

Chief General Counsel Martines stated the Board could start deliberations and revisit Vice Chair Downs' disclosure prior to the vote.

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education –
(Continued)

Regent Goodman moved to appoint Matt McNair, J.D., as the next Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education and approve the Employment Agreement. Regent Brooks seconded.

Vice Chair Downs entered the meeting.

Regent Brooks stated that today comes down to a distinction of leadership styles and, from his perspective, when a candidate talks about and stresses transparency, inclusionary efforts, and clarifying goals and strategic plans, it hits the mark for him. Matt McNair has the leadership style and skill set to work with the NSHE's legislative challenges. He was extraordinarily comfortable in seconding the motion for Matt McNair.

Vice Chair Downs left the meeting.

Regent Goodman believed that they could not fail the search. She wanted to bring in an innovator and surround that person with a team that can effect change and achieve incredible things for the NSHE. They need to give an individual an opportunity to lead in this space and surround that person with the resources, know-how, and relationships that will help them succeed.

Regent Goicoechea left the meeting.

Regent Brager stated the candidates were brought forward not because they were Chancellors but because they could be a Chancellor. A search is a lot of work. It was done with honesty and integrity, and these were the candidates that rose to the top.

Regent Del Carlo appreciated all of Regent Brager's time and work. She noted it is a difficult decision and asked to hear from the Presidents.

GBC Interim President Donnelly agreed that they are very different candidates. Their answers today were very unique and different. Both seem excited to come to Nevada. They do have different leadership qualities and experiences, but she believed they could rise to the occasion. Either of the candidates seemed willing to learn about the NSHE rural institutions such as GBC. Matt McNair had a more outgoing leadership style, but TJ Bliss seemed very connected to community colleges. She stated her ability to work with either of the leaders would not be swayed one way or the other by today's decision.

Vice Chair Downs and Regent Goicoechea entered the meeting.

Vice Chair Downs disclosed he is an employee of the Nevada System of Higher Education and Western Nevada College. Because the independence of judgment of a reasonable person would not be materially affected, he will vote on this matter. He disclosed the relationship under NRS Chapter 281A.

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education –
(Continued)

UNLV Officer in Charge Heavey stated he had not had the opportunity to closely monitor the search, but if he were to stay in the role, he would be eager to work with either of the individuals. He added that the preference of those whom he has spoken with on campus about the search is for TJ Bliss.

UNR President Sandoval stated he has been impressed with all the candidates and would be happy to work for either. He did not think it was appropriate to express a preference.

Vice Chair Downs left the meeting.

DRI President Acharya agreed he would work with either of the candidates. He was particularly impressed with Matt McNair's response related to research.

Vice Chair Downs entered the meeting.

NSU President Pollard thought there was an awkwardness in the Presidents articulating a preference for a candidate, given the fact that they will be supervised directly by one of them. She offered that she would be happy to work with either candidate. She thought that it was incumbent upon the Board to think about the qualities they want to see in a Chancellor and how to hold that person accountable for the work.

CSN Acting President Kibler stated the candidates are opposites in terms of background, experience, and personality. Today, TJ Bliss was more ambitious and aggressive. In terms of risk assessment, TJ Bliss is the lower risk, more traditional candidate, while Matt McNair is the higher risk candidate. Neither of those has anything to do with their potential or ability to perform the job. They both bring unique skills. It's incumbent on the Board and the System to do absolutely everything, regardless of who is chosen, to make sure the next Chancellor is successful. He thought it was important to develop a transition and onboarding process. He recommended that the Board: 1) hire an executive coach; 2) set up a mentor who has been in the position; and 3) that the Chancellor be actively involved in the National Association of System Heads to begin building a network.

WNC President Dalpe acknowledged that this is a Board decision. The search firm presented candidates with very different portfolios. The question is how they will align with the Board's vision and contribute to stability for the NSHE.

Regent Goicoechea believed the Chancellor would have to hit the ground running as Nevada deals with the trickle-down effects from the federal budget and upcoming special sessions.

Regent Fernandez stated he also believed that the Board could not fail the search. He believed it was time for the Board to show leadership and get behind whoever they choose as the next Chancellor. He stated that, as a new Regent, in his review of the Strategic Plan and NSHE goals he was more comfortable with TJ Bliss. He felt that Dr. Bliss had

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education –
(Continued)

reviewed the Strategic Plan and sought to understand it. He also showed a level of confidence that NSHE needs.

Regent Brown stated Nevada is a welcoming state, and if NSHE has the right person in the role with the best of intentions, Nevada will wrap their arms around them and make them a part of the community. She stated there are benefits to both candidates. As someone who champions economic development, higher education is a crucial part of economic development, but economic development is only a part of higher education which, given the motion on the floor, gives her hesitation. She added that there are a lot of hurdles ahead for the implementation of the Strategic Plan and not having a fundamental understanding of operations and a strong higher education infrastructure is what concerns her with Matt McNair.

Regent Bautista stated today the Board saw a more confident TJ Bliss and noted his support.

Regent Goodman felt strongly about taking a chance on a non-traditional candidate who may take the System to a new level.

Regent Goicoechea reiterated that the candidates have different personalities and approaches. He believed the Board may need to change direction and thought Matt McNair would provide that.

Regent Arrascada stated that Title 1, Article VII, Section 3, lists the responsibilities of the Chancellor, and states “The Chancellor is the chief executive officer and ex-officio treasurer of the Nevada System of Higher Education and is responsible to the Board for the administration of the Nevada System of Higher Education, the implementation of Board policies and directives, and the financial management of the Nevada System of Higher Education.”

Vice Chair Downs left the meeting.

Motion failed by roll call vote. Regents Arrascada, Brager, Brooks, Goicoechea, Goodman, and McGrath voted yes. Chair Carvalho and Regents Bautista, Brown, Del Carlo, and Fernandez voted no. Vice Chair Downs and Regent Boylan were absent.

Regent Brooks asked Counsel how to move forward. Special Counsel Nielsen noted the Board could make another motion for a different individual, a motion for reconsideration for either candidate, or direct the search committee to continue its work and recommend additional nominees for consideration at a future meeting.

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education –
(Continued)

Regent Del Carlo moved to appoint TJ Bliss, Ph.D., as the next Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education and approve the Employment Agreement. Regent Bautista seconded.

Regent Del Carlo reiterated that this is a difficult decision because there is such a contrast between candidates. She saw a different demeanor today in TJ Bliss and more confidence. The NSHE is in the business of academics, and she believed that TJ Bliss had the experience needed. She stated for the record that she will support either candidate wholeheartedly. She wants the System and students to succeed.

Special Counsel Nielsen clarified for the record that the motion includes the approval of the Employment Agreement, with Regent Del Carlo responding yes.

Regent Brager stated that the Presidents are the academic leaders. She felt strongly that it was time to try something different. Matt McNair has superior skills. She implored the Board to unite.

Regent Goodman stated Matt McNair is an innovator who will create partnerships with industry that will help fund the institutions.

Regent Brooks stated the Board's intentions are to move forward and enhance higher education in the state of Nevada, but if they want to make some differences and changes they must stop doing the same things.

Regent Brown stated she views the Chancellor position as an operations manager, not someone who's actively engaging with industry partners. She felt that was the role of the President.

Regent Brager stated it is time for the Board to be bold. She believed that Matt McNair could hold his own and would represent the Board extremely well.

Regent Fernandez stated he found it interesting to hear the different thought processes of his fellow Board members. He pointed out that the Board approved the Strategic Plan and implementation of the Plan will require additional meetings, especially during a legislative session. Whichever candidate is appointed will have to abide by the parameters set by the Board.

Regent Brooks stated both candidates would serve the Strategic Plan well. He added that there are a lot of agenda items that come before the Board that are outside the scope of the Strategic Plan that have more to do with the operations of the institutions, and those decisions need to be made quickly to ensure the success of the institution.

2. Approved – Appointment, Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education –
(Continued)

Regents Del Carlo and Bautista withdrew the motion and second on the floor.

Regent Del Carlo moved to reconsider the previous action concerning the appointment of Matt McNair, J.D., as the next Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education and approval of the Employment Agreement. Regent Brager seconded.

In response to a question from Regent Arrascada asking for clarity on what the Board is voting on, Chief of Staff Keri Nikolajewski stated the motion on the floor is to reconsider the Board's prior action concerning the appointment of Matt McNair.

Motion carried by roll call vote. Regents Arrascada, Brager, Brooks, Del Carlo, Fernandez, Goicoechea, Goodman, and McGrath voted yes. Chair Carvalho and Regents Bautista and Brown voted no. Vice Chair Downs and Regent Boylan were absent.

Regent Brooks moved to appoint Matt McNair, J.D., as Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education, effective June 1, 2025, and approve the Employment Agreement. Regent Goodman seconded. Motion carried by roll call vote. Chair Carvalho and Regents Arrascada, Brager, Brooks, Brown, Del Carlo, Fernandez, Goicoechea, Goodman, and McGrath voted yes. Regent Bautista voted no. Vice Chair Downs and Regent Boylan were absent.

Chair Carvalho congratulated Matt McNair. Mr. McNair thanked the Board and voiced his excitement to work with all the Regents.

3. Information Only – New Business

Regent Del Carlo requested that the Board discuss how to change the NRS requirement that the Chancellor must have a degree from an institution recognized as equal in rank to those having membership in the Association of American Universities. Chief General Counsel Martines stated that NSHE is attempting to address this by submitting an amendment to a bill under consideration by the Legislature. He will keep the Board updated on its progress.

Regent Del Carlo requested an update no later than the September Board meeting on CSN's five-point plan to address the ghost student issue. CSN Acting President Kibler stated it was CSN's intent to bring an update to the June Board of Regents meeting.

3. Information Only – New Business – (Continued)

Regent Brager requested a review of current law regarding the number of members in a public body that make up a quorum.

4. Information Only – Public Comment

Interim Chancellor Charlton thanked the Board, noting that Matt McNair will be well served by a strong slate of presidents. NSHE has talented, effective leaders of its institutions. He will also benefit from a strong Cabinet that is well-positioned to support him as he moves into this new role. Interim Chancellor Charlton publicly thanked the Board because NSHE has done well over the past 18 months. The Board cares about the students and institutions. Matt McNair will need support in making community connections. She strongly echoed that he would benefit from mentorship and executive coaching. She again thanked the Regents for their support and friendship.

Teresa Marie thanked Interim Chancellor Charlton for her leadership. She urged the Board to ask questions and believed there was a misrepresentation regarding the outcome of the court case mentioned earlier.

The meeting adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

Prepared by:

Angela R. Palmer
Special Assistant and Coordinator

Submitted for approval by:

Keri D. Nikolajewski
Chief of Staff to the Board of Regents