

January 25, 2006 Open Forum Transcript

Organized by Former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, Reverend Paul Bursleson, and Senator Peter Groff

The following transcript was typed at the time of the forum. At times, speakers spoke so quickly that not all thoughts could be registered. In such cases, a ... is shown. Also, it was not possible to verify the correct names and spellings of all of the individuals who spoke.

President Hank Brown
Chancellor Philip DiStefano
Dean of Students/AVC Student Affairs: Elease Robbins

Purpose: to give an opportunity for students to speak

Welcome to the audience

Introduction of students:
Emem Ekiko-President, Black Students Association
Mebracht Gebre-Michel – Tri-Executive UCSU

Derrick Watson: Issues are important to all of our students, though this Spring, we have had incidents related to African American students

Mebracht Gebre-Michel: We wanted to set up some ground rules for the session. We only have about an hour. Please limit to 2 or 3 minutes.

Emem Ekiko: If the line gets too long, we will start a list. Keep in mind it is for dialogue, not debate.

President Brown: Thank you. I want to thank all of you for coming. We look forward to the session. The University must include the climate on the campus. We have come together to improve the climate on the campus. We have to have real measurable progress. In terms of the reality of the experiences of the students we have on our campus. I want to thank Mayor Wellington Webb for his interest, and deeply appreciative of his advise and concern,

Chancellor DiStefano: I want to thank you and welcome you and thank Mayor Webb, Rev. Bursleson, Senator Groff. I want to welcome the Regents and thank the representatives, Alice Madden. Since spring 2005, we've had a number of meetings with students, meetings with members of the Board of Regents, legislators, Ministerial Alliance and additional meetings in fall semester, and just recently, the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC).

We have ten preliminary recommendations and are taking these recommendations very seriously. We will be releasing the report to the BRC members and will be working quickly to implement

the recommendations. I want to thank President Brown for calling the BRC and we are on the right track for implementing some of the changes on the Boulder campus.

Former Mayor Webb: Let me say to each and every one of you. WE appreciate you coming and being here. Let me share with all of you some of the origins of the Town Hall Meetings. How does it relate to the BRC? Do we really need to have a town hall meeting? Haven't we already had other meetings? The answer, is "yes".

President Brown wasn't here when many of these things happened. We will work with him to be successful and deal with these issues, not only on this campus but some of the others.

We don't want a debate. We do want to hear about some of the issues as it relates to climate at the University. Climate affects recruitment and why students will want to come to this university. We need to work on funding and how we deal with funding of higher education. We wanted to take this opportunity to share with members of the Denver community. We don't consider you in isolation. We are also part of the CU community. I have been dealing with some of the issues before you were born. We want to make CU a change agent to be a university of choice around the nation. We can only do that if we do it collectively together.

Chancellor DiStefano: Mayor, Thank you.

Senator Groff: Let me take one moment of senatorial privilege. Alice Madden represents this campus at the legislature. She is the majority leader of the House. Every time I have voiced concern, she has been concerned. I want to thank her. Your representative is on the case. Saturday she wanted to be here. She has two young boys and had family responsibilities and couldn't come. I want to introduce Kevin Patterson. He represents the same area I do. He is at the beginning of that pipeline. There is another partner, the better half of the Webb connection, former representative, former member of the JBC, Wilma Webb. I am going to be very quick with my remarks.

I want to know what is going on and what is not going on on this campus. I have supported everything that CU has asked for, but I am done with that because unless I see changes, they won't get my support. I am angry about it. My niece is interested in going to school and she asked me about CU and I didn't know what to tell her. I have two young kids and when they get that age, I want to be able to say, you need to put CU at the top of the list. I can't say that right now. But I do know the doors have been open so that we can start a substantive conversation to improve the campus. I want to know what is going on on this campus and I want to know what we, Alice and I, can do for this campus. Let me introduce Rev. Paul Burleson.

Reverend Burleson: I also echo the concerns of all that have spoken before me. I have a passion about what goes on in this community because it is a passionate community. It takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to change the campus at CU. I am encouraged by the BRC. I am encouraged by some of the components of the UCB programs. I am a product of segregated schools. I am from Texas. My understanding is that education will dispel the issues of segregation and discrimination. I thought we were past it. I believe we are up to the challenge. I am here to hear from the students, what can we do to make a difference. It is past

the time of talking, we have to start walking, manifesting. We have to put the pedal to the metal and where the rubber meets the road. We have a grand opportunity. I believe as Martin Luther King said, we have learned how to walk and swim like a fish, but I do not believe we have learned how to live with one another. I need you and you need me. I believe this dialogue will open up the door and bring about some closure. And I welcome the challenge.

Mebracht Gebre-Michel: Is there anyone from the audience who wants to start with some opening remarks for our guests here today.

Wendell Pryor: My name is Wendell Pryor, Colorado Civil Rights Commission. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission has the campus and city on its radar screen. Annually, we have open forums with an open mic. One of our commissioners is on the panel, President Brown. I have met one of your students. Later on we will have a forum at Greeley, later in spring. And we will also be working with the Boulder Human Relations Committee. We have the same concerns of the panel members and we want to help you in resolving these issues.

George Walker: Good evening, I'm George Walker, a CU grad, applicant for Presidency. Several years ago the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, ... Efforts to push CU ...

A colleague of mine, 1970, Richard Jessor, said that the University of Colorado should reflect the state. That was 35 years ago. Today we have 1/3 of the number of black students, 1/3 of the numbers of Latino students and 1/3 of the number of Native American students it should have.

The 2003 Supreme Court decision is modeled after the report that Richard Jessor made. We are not even close. Denver PS is about 80% students of color and that is quite a gap. I was on the Kramer report. Basically, I want to start some dialogue and I want the Civil Rights Commission ... Senator Groff is the first legislator to take this issue seriously. I would like some people at CU to stop me from a full court order to start obeying Civil Rights laws.

Former Mayor Webb: I also have one question. Will those not employed by CU, raise your right hand? Please fill up seats in the front.

Kevin Matterson: I am on the Denver School Board. I wanted to take the time to address you as the father of two African American boys in Denver Public School. I was looking at the matrix of what it takes to get into college and the matrix with the school counselor. We were talking about this university. There is a concern about the conversation that we have about what is happening on this campus. It is not conducive for other people of color to come to this campus. Until there is a critical mass ... -- we want CU to become successful. We, from Denver Public School will talk with you about pipeline and what we need to do to improve the pipeline. We need to make sure that we are taking responsibility for our part and working in collaboration in educating our population, educating our citizenry. I want to offer my assistance to help you.

Jennifer Simpson: I am staff and teach in the Department of Communications. The purpose is to hear from students. I would like the adults to wait until the students can have an opportunity to speak.

Pia Mickline Peter: I am a student in Political Science and Women's Studies, CU junior from Sudan. I am here to ask CU, if they can do something about immigrants. They are treated as out-of-state students. They have just come from their native countries and they should be considered as natives and be paying in-state tuition.

Chancellor DiStefano: Recently President Brown and the Board of Regents did pass the Presidential Scholars, an opportunity to recruit the top out-of-state students and come to CU and pay quite a bit less-- tuition of about \$11,000 rather than \$22,000 per year. In meeting with the Blue Ribbon Commission, it was clear that we need to do a better job of recruiting students of color from out-of-state as well as from in-state. The high cost of tuition prevents students of color from coming here. We certainly understand that issue and I thank you for those comments.

Former Mayor Webb: Let me ask those in the audience, since we are lacking students-- Some would say we have too many diversity programs, 89 or 90 that includes our International Education Program, includes student services like the Recreation Center, but from the standpoint of diversity programs, we have been really focusing on about 16 programs, 14 in the LEAD Alliance program and pre-collegiate programs.

Senator Groff: What is the budget?

Chancellor DiStefano: For all programs – 21 million. About 8 million is state funding. The other funding is external funding- from contracts and grants. Of 21 million, about 8 is general fund money.

Former Mayor Webb: Let me pose more questions: Some propose that these programs can be merged together – do you think this is true? There are approximately 65 African Americans – what do you recommend to change that process? What is the role of faculty administrators on this campus in relationship to Denver surrounding community? If individuals on this campus don't know any African American officials, is that all right and if not, why?

Curtis Love: You wanted to know what was going on. For me, the question is not what is going on. As a student who has been here for four years, it is an issue of hate and when hate is put on this campus it defers us as students from doing what we want to do. There is an issue of presenting hate towards others- when things like this start to happen – we as students, being such a small population of the university, we don't have the same background as others. It is hard to just stand here and speak to this issue because it happens every single year that we are here. We can go to meetings after meetings after meetings, but it deters us from just being a student. One of our main concerns is that when hate occurs that nothing is being done. It almost seems that the university kind of perpetuates this. As students we are vocal and we don't have any support.

Senator Groff: Let me ask a question. First let me say, that there are people at the Capitol who are interested. I have expressed in no uncertain terms that members of the legislature should be here. For those of us who are here. The Mayor talked about 89 to 90 programs. Do you see those as being effective? If the President were to say, why don't we merge some of them.

Curtis Love: I can only speak to the programs that I am part of. I am a scholarship recipient of the Ethnic Living and Learning Community program. Just to give a brief background about that. It is an academic program – where you live with individuals with different backgrounds. People are different. You learn how you can be educated and grow together in that same sense. There are so many different people that have diversity in different ways. They need different things in different ways – that’s why we are here in the first place. If we don’t have the social skills to embrace those techniques, it is pointless. The diversity programs, MASP (Minority Arts and Science Program), MEP (Multicultural Engineering Program), CU-LEAD Alliance program, they are all effective. It kept me here. I’m getting ready to graduate in December. If it were not here – I wouldn’t be here. Imagine without the programs, it would be less (there would be fewer students).

Reverend Burleson: Why do you say that when you see hate, that it is silenced?

Curtis Love: How many students are in here? If you look at their faces, what do they look like? You go to a campus, 30,000 students -- wrong is wrong and right is right. Of course we are going to stick up for ourselves. We know where we came from. We know why we are here. We can speak what we need to say. But for people who are perpetuating the hate--- they are just as bad, if they don’t speak up

Reverend Burleson: Are you saying the institution or the students need to say something?

Curtis Love: I’m saying both. We have laws, we have police to investigate these things. When e-mails, hate, graffiti – all these things are placed in front of us, it’s the campus’ responsibility to say, “This is wrong.” It is the administration’s responsibility to enforce the policies. They aren’t being enforced.

Reverend Burleson: When you first heard there was going to be a BRC. What was your first thought?

Curtis Love: I wasn’t sure what it was going to encompass. From my impression it was an evaluation of the diversity programs – to see what was going right.

Former Mayor Webb: What I heard walking through Alfred Packer – Some thought it (the Blue Ribbon Commission) was to do away with programs. I heard about what had happened with previous commissions – when you look at the words Blue Ribbon and CCHE and the programs that were looked at – some of them were cut – They got that and correlated the information and for me that is where I came to a conclusion of what this was going to be about. I was a commissioner and I sat at the Blue Ribbon Commission. It was good to see we had people supporting us.

Why are we looking at the diversity programs? We were still evaluating the diversity programs when it should be all the programs here at CU. I’m glad that actually came up and was included.

Karen Shimamoto: Hi, I’m Karen Shimamoto, UCSU diversity member. I want to give you another story. My experience here has been shaky at times. I have to admit it isn’t always safe.

I get asked out by white males, not because they like me, but because I'm Asian. If someone knew about Asian stereotypes, we get them all the time. It breaks my heart that students of color are being attacked and it should be unacceptable. What we really need is a climate change and it actually has to start at the top of the administration. Hopefully it will happen within the next year.

Reverend Burleson: To what degree, do you mean black students being attacked?

Karen Shimamoto: There is more violence, death threats. We see it more in the black community, but it goes on with other students.

Reverend Burleson: Did you say you see it every day?

Karen Shimamoto: Yes, we see it on a daily basis. We hear comments everyday. There are a lot of comments about Asian languages. If there is faculty training on diversity issues, it will help improve the climate and they would be models for their classes.

Obie Xxxx, Black Students Association: All I can say, if you all value diversity, February 23rd through February 26th, there will be a conference on black student leadership – this event will cost us a boatload of money. If some of you know of way to get money, this is on black student government --this helps to enhance our leadership. Do you know of some people outside the university? It is really hard to get money. That's just the way it is. If you know other pathways to get money, we need money. We gain so much money from that conference. If you do have money – we'd like to see you afterwards. We can tell you everything you'd like to know. Also support us on many events that students support. Also the Martin Luther King conference –it is the last day of the Martin Luther King symposium and there is something after this.

Former Mayor Webb: Can we get you back to the mic? The last student talked about incidents. Have you seen incidents especially against African American students?

Obie: This is my second year. My first semester here, there was a party on the Hill. It wasn't just black students, but we went to this party. It was predominantly a white party. Most of the houses are filled with white students. When we first went in, we felt a weird vibe. The way they were looking at us, it wasn't easy and it wasn't comfortable. We went upstairs and saw the guy who was hosting the party. Someone asked, "Do you know this guy who's hosting the party? If you don't know us, you have to get out. If you don't know what the party is about, then you have to leave." I doubt he knows every white student on this campus. There were a lot of white students who weren't invited to the party. That was one of the most racist things, the first thing that happened. The things that people say, even some of the teachers, when they say certain things, its like, you are like, it makes you think, if the teacher says, it must be all right for me to say it.

Former Mayor Webb: Give us an example. Think of me as a teacher. Can you give us an example?

Otem Allii: There was an incident with a black student who was fair-skinned. This white student repeatedly called the black students the “n” word and the teacher never said anything. After you get that repeatedly, he retaliated, yet at the end, the white student ... When they called the police, why did the black student get a higher charge than the white student? Why couldn't the teacher do something? I knew the teacher heard it because the class wasn't over as well.

Former Mayor Webb: Is Karen who came up right before here? When you talked about Asian stereotypes, have you heard those in the classroom?

Karen Shimamoto: That was my first experience with a faculty member. He was making fun of the Indian language saying it was just a language with a lot of oo lalalas and of course the whole class laughed.

David Romero: I want to applaud you all. Dave Romero, staff member. I want to just talk about a few of the things I have heard. I believe change needs to happen. As students leave, the vision also leaves. Continuity – so it carries on for the future. There are existing programs that do not work. I've used these processes and programs and had no success with it. I do not see that they have real value in what they are set out to do. I believe that as a minority, you are made to feel that you are different and you are not given the same opportunities. As a staff member, I see that in terms of promotion and there is retaliation for reporting such things. I believe that if we are going to get serious about this, it needs to be taken seriously at different levels. I believe that there is a difference in respect when minorities say something, to express one's thought and opinion about what they feel is pertinent to that. That's all I have to say, thank you.

Chante Waters: I am a student in the Leeds School of Business. I wanted to speak to experiences on campus. The first weekend I was here, I had students invite me to the Hill. While I was there, I was downstairs in the basement. I was getting upstairs to leave. They were talking about how African Americans as a race didn't have the intelligence to receive a true benefit from education – something about our DNA, we didn't have – it was basically the way we were chemically made up that we didn't have any form of intelligence at all. CU was not my first choice. When I told people, I just got blank stares. A number of my mother's friends told me, “Do not go there. I went to CU and I had to leave.”

What are you going to do as President, beyond the Blue Ribbon Commission? What are you going to do on a day to day basis to combat what the students have to experience every day?

President Brown: That kind of experience is hideous and has no place on this campus. People who do these things have no place on this campus. We will work on things that students suggest and try to implement them. We are trying to raise money for scholarships, and we are going to put our back to that in raising those funds. More important than anything is that we need to change the way people treat each other. We can't have people spouting that kind of trash. The most important thing is how we deal with each other on a day to day basis. If I can follow up on a day to day basis, last year we cut merit scholarships because of the budget situation.

Senator Groff: How has that impacted your ability to attract students of color?

Chancellor DiStefano: It has significantly impacted the Boulder campus. When we compare ourselves with our peers, we are at the very bottom (for scholarship funding).

Israel Garcia: I want to reiterate what everyone has said. It is not a welcoming climate, for any student of color. 45% of our student body is from out of state. You have to come from an affluent family – mostly white, affluent suburban families, families who don't have a way to interact with students of color and when they do interact – a lot of times, it is not pretty. A growing part of our population is what we call illegal immigrants. Many of them have achieved great things in high school, but they are not granted the opportunity even to go to higher education. If you support the ...Act ... at the congressional level. At the state level, we don't have someone who is willing to bring this issue up. That would help people attend this university

Joe Roy: I am the Chief of Police. I would like to talk about this circumstance about what happened in the situation. The facts as we heard it based on our discussions of the people involved. It started in the classroom. A black student was involved in discussion in the class. The white student asked the black student to stop talking. There was a disagreement. As the verbal altercation escalated, the “n” word was used, and a physical altercation happened. We issued a summons to the white student for use of “fighting words” – Boulder and State – someone using words that are provocative. We charged the black student with assault because when you punch a person and cause an injury, it was a third degree assault charges. We have to do that objectively to protect the citizenry – objectively. I believe they used their discretion appropriately. Both were charged in the city court. Neither was charged in the state court. The State's third degree assault statute is classified as an extraordinary risk crime (there are higher fines and longer jail terms associated with it). Part of what I think is that there were issues in this case - both were heard in the same court (in the city) and the result, that the city fines for third degree assault were less (no jail time).

As a 52-year-old black person, it is important to the enforcement arm to say we will not tolerate others physically assaulting people. Should be appreciative of the fact that the police department will act. As we have received information about people acting inappropriately, we have charged people. We had athletes engaged in a bias-motivated incident. We have another one, that involves the FBI. In some cases, it feels like rubbing salt into the wound. I understand, but you cannot physically assault people.

Obie: The fact is that the “n” was used. The instructor did not do anything. Why can't they be considered “hate words”? I consider the “n” word not just fighting words, but hate words.

Joe Roy: There is a reason and it is legal.

Former Mayor Webb: In conjunction with the district attorney at the conclusion of some of these cases, if the findings can be made public. If you have a way of making the findings public so that both parties from the investigation, so everyone can see what takes place in the investigation.

Detre Godinez: Why are we even discussing the degree? If students don't feel safe, the students don't feel safe. Second, I would like to talk about values. I think this university has a lot of integrity issues. I have experienced, that what is valued is not my community involvement. My professor, she was told by people ahead of her that she needed to stop being involved in the community and start to focus on her research. Maybe they need diversity training. I need to do community work, it is valuable to me. Maybe you should be encouraging students to be more involved in their communities. We need a societal change, financially with time and their professors. I can't believe that a professor that was involved in these events was told not to spend time in these events.

Pia Mickline Peter: I am here again. I want to share a brief history. It happened with my boss. Last spring, I was walking in Alfred Packer – when my boss hired new students to come to work. We were 30 students. She was using my name as an example. Don't be doing things like Pia – like “dirty”. She was suspecting me of stealing food. I just want to let you know that I am following you. After two weeks, she delayed me- I was not able to say – until after 4 weeks later. I was given a sheet to sign and get the money. I went to the higher boss and explained – He didn't do anything. I shared with other people. Two weeks later – the boss quit the job. What if it happened again to someone- not me – if things can be handled like that.

Greg Carey: My name is Greg Carey, faculty member. I have a suggestion when it comes to the implementation phase at the end of this program. I had the opportunity to sit in as a rep with various student groups. I was edified by students to put time into this endeavor, but I was a little bit saddened because I was able to predict what would happen. The students did implement strategies, but they never took off. We have movements like Shoulder 2 Shoulder and Colorado Creed. If you go into a classroom and ask if students know – not very many know very much. My suggestion is to use science to change attitude. You who are politicians, the message is simple and you repeat it and repeat it and repeat it until everybody knows it. All of us know about Geico insurance and the cavemen thing. What we need to do is to make sure that we have experts in terms of marketing and advertising – message simple and gets it out everywhere. For example, start with respect – have that word written – am I too long.

Mebracht Gebre-Michel: Can you summarize?

Greg Carey: Have it written on the pavement – entrance of the campus – have pictures of faculty and students – CU respects students regardless of ethnicity. Have a theme song R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Tio: I am a first year student and proud daughter of a CU faculty member. Continue to encourage students of color to take leadership. When I came to orientation, I saw, not only a black, fellow female and an African American – when I saw a Black Student Alliance – I knew that I could stay here. Continuing to see African American students in positions of leadership here ... As member of student council of UCSU - I feel community at BSU. It worries me that I saw a racist flyer on my father's door and my mother's worried about me running for leadership

Andre: I put together a mosaic against hate. You would think that was something. I was only able to get 3 panels. The majority were students of color. I had a man tell me that I was creating

hate because I was creating an anti-hate message. When professors won't address issues--. When faculty (of color) are being told – you aren't allowed to do anything that will promote diversity.

Jarvis Fuller: I am saying this out of respect. I don't mean to offend anyone. I think this forum is kind of pointless. We have forum after forum after forum. I think it is sad, we are continuously asked what are the issues that are going on. We continuously hear that this has been going on for years and years and years and years. I think it is weird that VCs, Presidents, and people like you – you've earned a degree. I think this forum is doing more harm than good. I have asked you Mr. Webb to come up and speak and we haven't gotten a response. What's different now? Why are you here now? I think it is sad we have to rehash old stories. We as students have done all the work. Now it is time for the clean-up crews. The students have done the work. We changed the whole direction of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Before we have another forum – why are we only getting 7% of our funding from the state? Maybe you need to get this together. I'm a student, I have things to do. I'm done.

Emem Ekiko: We face this everyday. We face this in the classroom. We want a change, but we need you behind us.

Phil DiStefano: I want to thank the students, President Brown, Senator Groff, Wellington Webb, Reverend Burleson. We need to see with the discrimination and harassment policy that we will take action with individuals who violate that policy. I heard the importance of faculty and staff diversity training and it was mentioned in the Blue Ribbon Commission. We are working toward doing that kind of training. We heard yesterday that we are ready to pilot that class in the fall. We think it is a very important class. Many of our out of state students who have come here have not had many experiences in diversity. These are 3 issues, I wanted to mention. We will talk more about that in the future.

Former Mayor Webb: Jarvis, don't leave. Dr. Horton is going to be the keynote speaker.

Senator Groff: There is a very easy way for you all to deal with this – to come down to the capital. We don't give higher education enough money. I have said it over and over again. If Rep Madden is the only one saying it, we need to have you at the capital, we need to have representatives. I'm calling out my colleagues. Tupa, Palmer – why aren't you here? If their (the university's) own constituents don't tell them to make a difference, they aren't going to make a difference. Other people have other issues and they aren't going to change these issues. Why aren't you there talking about the issues that concern this community? As soon as you give up and everybody else gives up, there is no reason for us to be here. You shall be called the repairer of the breach. It can't just be Representative Madden.

President Brown: You have friends that are going to help you do that. I've told the lobbyist we are here. We are going to continue to push and make this campus a better place.

Xxx: Representative Palmer was very upset he couldn't be here. He asked me to say that.

Reverend Burleson: I want to echo what Senator Groff has said. We have failed. We all need to stand up. The appalling thing – I'm not upset by the vicious words, so called - bad people. But the things that we, as decent people permit. We have work to do, Jarvis. Whether the weather be cold, whether the weather be hot, we are going to weather this weather. We will weather it in the night. Joy comes in the morning.

Former Mayor Webb: I have high hopes for this President bringing institutional change. Al Sharpton was supposed to come last year, not this year. What we need to be about is trying to make sure that this university – I believe that what is going on at CU is not isolated to CU only. I believe it is at UNC and CSU. Some of us have freed up our schedules to allow these institutions to reach potential of what they are set up for. Students of color need to be in an environment that is free of racism. When they walk out of this institution, they have to work with people who they have to work side by side with. We have the opportunity to do better than we are presently doing and I want to be a part of that.

President Brown: I'm glad that Chancellor walked through some of the initiatives and the efforts to enforce this, with a feel for the hurt that is there when these ugly incidences take place and a sense that this glorious place, this city and this campus have the potential to have the finest spot on the face of the earth, the excellence that is available here, but it will never reach its potential until we learn to treat each other with love and respect. We clearly have our work cut out for us. The longest journey starts with the first step and we dedicate ourselves to progress.

Emem Ekiko: We do appreciate you in the bad times. We need you here in the good times.