

HEI HEI DEPEW: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome. Thank you to President Pollack for joining us today for the Annual President's Address to Staff. I want to take a moment to congratulate Reginald White, Senior Director of Human Resources to the Research Division, who's the newly elected member of the Cornell University Board of Trustees.

My name is Hei Hei Depew. I'm the newly elected Chair of the Employee Assembly. For the past two years, I have been the Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly. In that time, I've had the privilege of meeting staff members from across campus from all different positions. I've worked at Cornell for a little over five years, and previously I've worked outside of Cornell for eight years in global marketing and global e-commerce finance capacities.

I believe this gives me a unique perspective on Cornell. From what I've seen, Cornell staff have exhibited a strong level of dedication to the students we service, the work we do and the mission of the University, which is to discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to educate the next generation of global citizens and to promote a culture of broad inquiry throughout and beyond Cornell community.

In my own journey of broad inquiry as an Employee Assembly member trying to get a better understanding of what pressing issues our staff Cornell community are facing, I've reviewed priorities poll data submitted by hundreds of staff members, I've read correspondences online, and I've listened to many staff constituents in person.

And a common phrase I've heard across campus, and this is something I've heard prior to the pandemic, is staff have felt they've been asked to do more with less. And I get the sense that as COVID continues to evolve and its impacts are felt within our community that we on the Employee Assembly will continue to hear this phrase, but I trust Cornell staff will continue to persevere.

In these most uncertain times, I've seen staff step up to new challenges, new responsibilities, with resilience through hardship and persistence through the unknown. I think there's a lot of recognition and gratitude to go around to staff members for their work and continued commitment throughout this time.

I want to express my own appreciation as the chair of the Employee Assembly and as a fellow colleague to all staff. Thank you. With this said, I would like to introduce my fellow Employee Assembly Member Brian Goodell as we award our Annual Employee Appreciation Award. Brian, I'm going to send this over to you

BRIAN GOODELL: Thank you, Hei Hei. Good afternoon. Thank you all for joining us virtually today for the 2020 President's Address to Staff. My name is Brian Goodell and I am the Chair of the Employee Assembly Benefits and Policy Committee.

On behalf of the Employee assembly, it is my pleasure to present you with the winner of the 2020 Employee Assembly Appreciation Award. The Employee Appreciation Award is given to a

group of employees who within the past year have gone above and beyond in the support of the University. In the face of the global pandemic, staff members across University have stepped up to face new challenges and have contributed to the overall progress of the University.

It was difficult to choose just one unit for this award because it feels as if so many units deserve recognition, praise for their exemplary efforts, especially during this time. This year, we received six nominations from the 2020 Employee Assembly Employee Appreciation Award. The six nominations in alphabetical order are the Building Care Team, Campus Life Enterprise Services, CLES, Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratories, CCTL, Cornell Learning Technologies Team, Cornell Library Desktop Services and ILR Outreach Work in Coronavirus.

The Employee Assembly would like to take some time now to recognize the outstanding work of three of the nominations. These three units have gone above and beyond in supporting the University. Their efforts here at the University have kept us safe and through their work has enabled the University as a whole to continue operations.

The first unit the Employee Assembly somebody would like to recognize is the building care team from facilities and campus services. When COVID-19 hit, Building Care continued to be present on campus to provide the services that were needed to ensure the safety of everyone that remained on campus, especially the essential personnel that needed to continue working on the Cornell campus.

Building Care was at the forefront of preparing the buildings to welcome back students, faculty, and staff. Building Care showed flexibility and dedication and worked diligently to support the changes we all have faced during this unprecedented situation. Building Care had to adapt and change the routine in order to provide the additional cleaning and sanitizing needed.

They did this. They continue to be on the forefront by providing additional cleanings and disinfections where needed. The building care team has always worked behind the scenes to give us the best in service, but during this unprecedented time, they stepped up and showed why they are the best in the custodial business. The Building Care team did all this while they too were all dealing with the complexities of this pandemic but still accepting the risk to make others safe. They literally made it possible for Cornell to continue.

The second unit the employers somebody would like to is the Campus Life Enterprise Services. When you talk about unprecedented circumstances on campus, you have to speak of the entire Campus Life Enterprise Services team. The work done by the planning and frontline teams in response to COVID-19 has been paramount to the success of the university's ability to reopen campus to students, feed, house and provide students with essential supplies.

Campus Life Enterprise Services had to coordinate efforts to safely and swiftly move students off campus. Then Campus Life Enterprise Services had to coordinate the safe return of students

to campus. The conference and events services team mobilized to plan the mapping of the move-in process which would be coupled with COVID-19 testing and quarantining.

Dining services begin to reimagine their menu offerings to meet the anticipated capacities, and throughout, they needed to do this while maintaining safe distancing and offering some version of in-person dining. Campus Life Enterprise Services has done amazing work, but without their services, our students would have a much different on-campus experience.

The third unit I'd like to recognize is the Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory. While everyone had to adjust to limitations related to COVID such as working from home and having to socially distance, Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory also had to scramble to make plans for the fall with very little time and ever changing information and restrictions.

They were able to take advantage of virus and public health experts at the college and use cutting edge technology such as robotics and pull testing to reduce the turnaround time and cost. Cornell has made national headlines for how well we have managed to circumstances brought on by COVID-19, and that is in no small part due to the tireless efforts of Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory.

They also communicated with the college community on a regular basis at townhall meetings to provide honest and thoughtful information while actively requesting feedback to improve in any way they could. They prepared for many potential scenarios and readily adapted to policy changes and technical difficulties.

While many universities understandably chose not to bring students back to campus this semester, Cornell was prepared enough to do that safely and successfully. The Employee Assembly is grateful for the dedication and hard work put forth by the Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory and take comfort in knowing that they are working hard on solutions to the pandemic.

When President Pollack announced Cornell would reopen campus for the fall semester with a hybrid model, this set in motion the need to ensure the safe reopening of campus. Without the efforts of the building Care team to keep our campus sanitized and safe for us, without the efforts of Campus Life Enterprise Services organizing and overseeing the safe return of students and without the efforts of the Cornell COVID-19 Testing Laboratory Team for their constant testing services, we would not have been able to successfully reopen for the fall.

So on behalf of the Employee Assembly, there is a great debt of gratitude owed to all three units for their commitment to our safety, for their work in support of the University. We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for your work. Thank you. And with that said, the winner of this year's 2020 EA Appreciation Award is the Building Care team from Facilities and Campus led by Director of Building Care, Robert Pils. Robert.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Brian. I'm now going to turn this over to Bob Pils for his acceptance. Bob.

ROBERT PILS: OK, thank you, Brian and thank you, Hei Hei. First of all, on behalf of the entire Building Care department, I'm very pleased and proud to accept the Employee Assembly Appreciation Award. Thank you for recognizing the important and essential work that we do every day to keep the campus healthy, safe, and clean.

I think also this is a proper time to congratulate all of the nominees who received the votes because we're truly one Cornell and we can't make the University work properly and support our students without everybody doing their jobs properly and on an everyday basis.

I'd also like to just take this time to extend my congratulations and thanks to everyone in the building care department from my ADS, the managers' leads and our frontline workers that make it happen every single day. As I'm completing my first year at Cornell, I'm very proud to help lead this great team of Cornellians, so thank you again, and once again, congratulations to all the departments recognized. Thank you.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Bob. That complete the Assembly Appreciation Award segment. I want to move this over to President Pollack for her President's Address to Staff. Thank you for joining us today, President Pollack.

MARTHA POLLACK: Thank you, Hei Hei, and good afternoon, everyone. It's great to see you. I've actually stopped putting "see" into scare quotes because this is just how we do things now, but I have to say that I am really looking forward to the day when we can all be back on campus again and really see each other in person.

I want to begin by adding my congratulations to this year's winner of the Employee Assembly Appreciation Award, the building care department. Now, if I got started on all the reasons that I appreciate our Building Care team especially right now during this pandemic, I wouldn't have time for anything else.

So instead, I want to tell you about an email we received in my office late in the summer. It was from a parent who had read an article about the risks of bacteria growing in the pipes of unused buildings, and she was concerned and she asked us to please be sure to check the water systems of the buildings that had been empty.

So we replied by sending her appendix 2C of our facilities reactivation plan. And in case you don't know what that is, that was the facility's water startup SOP. It details every step that Building Care was taking to make sure that every shower, every drinking fountain, every coffeemaker, every hot water dispenser all across campus was safe, and we also shared with her all of our Building Care reopen protocols including the very detailed breakdown of how and when each area was being cleaned.

And she wrote back to us and said, wow, if this is the care you put into your buildings, I know it's safe to send you my child. So kudos, congratulations again to the Building Care department and to all of the nominees for all you've done. Building Care department, you so deserve the EA appreciation award.

I want to stay on the topic of appreciation for just a moment because there really are just not enough words for me to express my gratitude for all of you and for the work that all of you have done over the last seven months to get us to the point we're at now.

I'm sure all of you know that when we announced our reopening plans last summer, we saw enormous skepticism about the likelihood that those plans would succeed, and the fact that we've been as successful as we've been so far is not due to any one person or any one aspect of our planning. It's due to the fact that the entire Cornell community, our staff, our students and our faculty, all came together to make that plan successful.

You Cornell staff in so many ways are the backbone of this community. All of you, whatever your role, all of you have done exceptional work in circumstances that none of us trained for, I don't think any of us could even have imagined. Our athletics coaches are now serving as behavioral compact monitors. There's an extraordinary team that was just described that stood up and helped run the Cornell Coronavirus Testing Laboratory and our surveillance program.

There are Statler employees who are now running a quarantine center. There's the Student Campus Life and the many volunteers who mounted a move-in like nothing in our history, and you know, those are just a few examples. Each and every staff member has had their life-- not just their job but their life-- changed, and it really has been remarkable how everyone has pulled together and dealt with those changes with grace and strength and good humor.

You've supported Cornell. You've supported each other through one of the most turbulent years in the history of this University, and as we look ahead to the end of this year, one of the things I think we're all looking forward to besides the end of this awful year is Cornell's annual closure between Christmas and New Year's, that time when we all get a bit of a chance to unplug from our work responsibilities and rest and reset.

And we know that this year, you all need that downtime more than ever, so in recognition of that and with a great deal of gratitude, we're going to add an extra day to winter break, which means that once you finish your work on Wednesday December 23rd, there is no work on December 24th and we hope you can take a break until Monday, January 4th.

Now I recognize that some services must continue, and for those of you who do need to work through this time, you'll of course receive either premium pay or the equivalent number of days to use at another time. And I do need, as I mentioned-- I have to pause here-- to acknowledge the many employees at Cornell who kept coming into campus over the spring and the summer even as most of campus deactivated its physical operations and most of our students, faculty, and most of our staff transitioned to working and study at home.

You're the ones who kept our essential operations running. You kept our students safe and fed, the ones who had to stay through the shutdown. You kept watch over our buildings and our grounds. When the time came, you reactivated our research and our facilities safely, and you continue to make sure that everything on campus keeps running smoothly even in these most exceptional times.

And for the rest of you, those who are working remotely, we see you and we know that you are dealing with new challenges as you do your work from your homes. For all of you who are dealing with not just all of the stresses in the pandemic but also caregiving responsibilities, without the usual support of schools or daycares or eldercare, I want you to know that we recognize how difficult this time has been and we are continually looking to find the most effective ways to help.

The COVID-19 family work group has done a great job identifying specific concerns and making suggestions and our HR team is working on implementing many of their recommendations. I'd encourage you to take a look at the HR website for resources and services that might be helpful to you and your families.

Now one of the questions I've been asked a lot lately and that I was asked specifically for this talk was, given the current state of affairs in our country and the world, what gives you hope. And I want to talk a little bit about that because when I thought about it, and at the risk of sounding a little maudlin, the honest answer is that our Cornell community gives me hope, and that's true for three reasons.

The first is that if there's anything positive that this pandemic has done, it's highlighted for everyone how much our entire society relies on competence. Our country, really the entire world, needs expertise. They need people who know what they're doing in every area whether it's vaccine development or supply chain management or educational innovation or anything else, not least the arts and the music that are helping all of us survive and connect through the very strange times in which we're living.

Our society needs people with the skills to do things like mount a coronavirus testing laboratory in just two months and launch a successful surveillance testing program. We need people who are able to teach students how to communicate across difference, which I often say has become one of the most essential skills Cornell can provide. We need people who are able to assess evidence on its own merits and to make sound decisions based on that evidence.

In short, if we are ever going to get out of some of the messes that we're in right now as a society, we're going to need the kind of world class education and research that's provided at universities, universities like ours, and knowing that is a big part of what keeps me motivated day after day.

The second reason I find hope here at Cornell is summed up by Cornellian Dr. Anthony Fauci. I don't know if everybody knows it, but Dr. Fauci is a graduate of our own Weill Cornell Medical School, and he spoke at our stay-homecoming a couple of weeks ago, and what he said about our reopening for residential instruction was, quote, "If you could show that you can do it, it would be a great example of what can be accomplished."

And that's true not just in terms of Cornell as an academic institution that successfully reopened, but as a community that is finding ways to be resilient and to thrive in an increasingly uncertain world. When Cornell as a place with a foundational commitment to diversity and equity, to knowledge and truth, when Cornell succeeds where others have not, that to me is a beacon of hope.

And that's something that all of us are part of, living that example, saying, look what's possible when you value knowledge, look what's possible when you value truth, and perhaps most importantly, look what's possible when you take care of each other. And that brings me to the third aspect of Cornell that gives me hope right now, and that's our set of core values.

So I want you to remember for a moment the statement that as a community we developed, a statement that asserted that we value six things, purposeful discovery, free and open inquiry and expression, a community of belonging, exploration across boundaries, public engagement and respect for the natural environment.

Even though our core values were created to be specific and tailored to Cornell, they are, I think, point by very much what our society needs to value today in order to tackle the challenges of the pandemic and of social justice and of diversity and equity and of sustainability and climate change, in order to tackle the biggest problems we're facing.

They're the values that define us as a community as we pursue our mission of knowledge for a public purpose. So when we look at the incredible investments we've made of effort, of human effort and of energy and of resources, when we look at all the obstacles we've overcome to get to this point and the ones we still have in front of us, we're doing it all in order to enable that mission to continue.

And frankly, continuing that mission is exactly what we've done this year. We haven't just kept our heads above water until the pandemic passes us by. We've been excelling across our four priority areas of academic distinction, educational verve, civic responsibility and one Cornell. So I want to share just a few points. I could give a half hour talk on each of those, but I won't.

I'm going to give you just a few points on each of them, starting as I always do with academic distinction. Our faculty continue to lead in their fields and to be recognized across the disciplines for their extraordinary contributions. I won't list all the prizes and awards that they received this year. I just will note that it's very long, and it includes the American Philosophical Association Book Prize.

It includes the Jonathan Skytte Prize, which I learned is equivalent to the Nobel Prize, in political science, and it includes the Carl Sagan Medal of the Division of Planetary Sciences of the American Astronomical Society. It includes the Humboldt Research Award and a Career Enhancement Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

It includes nine NSF Early Career Awards, and we also have a faculty-produced film which was nominated for an Emmy, and so much more. Our faculty are continuing to excel, and you, of course, are the people who enable them to do this. On the research front, Cornell is deeply involved in helping to answer some of the most pressing problems of the pandemic, including the ongoing mystery of how one virus can produce no symptoms at all in some people and lethal disease in others.

Faculty at Weill Cornell Medicine are investigating that question with a grant from the National Institutes of Health, and up here in Ithaca, we have faculty who are leading a systematic review of the evidence of coronavirus transmission via breastfeeding. That review is going to inform the World Health Organization's recommendations to governments and healthcare systems, being designed to keep mothers and babies as safe as possible everywhere.

Our second priority is educational verve, and in the words of Professor Julia Thom-Levy, our Vice Provost for Academic Innovation we've never seen more educational verve at Cornell than we have this year. We've seen incredible teaching innovations from using shoelaces and phone chargers to enable remote physics labs to moving entire classes outdoors.

And I need to give a shout-out to all of the staff who have been part of that innovation, whether by keeping our classrooms clean and well ventilated or supporting the work of the Center for Teaching Innovation, or as part of the incredible tech support teams who made the transition to remote instruction as smooth as possible.

Our third priority is civic responsibility, and frankly, if we have ever had a moment in our history where we have been face to face with our common responsibility for our shared future, it's now. We've seen vividly in the past few months that the impact of climate change is already here, and Cornell's goal of carbon neutrality is more urgent than ever.

At its May meeting, the Board of Trustees voted to institute an immediate moratorium on new private investments focused on fossil fuels and to grow its investments in alternative energy sources. Earth source heat has been a part of Cornell's climate action plan since 2009. It's an ambitious proposal to heat most of the buildings on our Ithaca campus using a deep geothermal system that would draw on the thermal heat that's stored deep within the earth.

I'm delighted to share that in late July, Cornell secured a grant from the US department of energy which is expected to total about \$7.2 million, and it will fund exploratory research in the form of a two-mile deep borehole to help verify the feasibility of earth source heat.

Beyond that in June, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, ASHE, recognized our work by awarding Cornell its highest sustainability rating, stars platinum. We're the first Ivy League University and only the sixth university in the world to achieve this status.

Now of course, along with the pandemic, our nation was rocked last spring by the killings of black Americans followed by months of protests for social justice. As an academic community built on the bedrock values of diversity and inclusion and openness, we have an obligation to ensure that the forces of these events and our feelings about them drive us not backwards but forwards, which is why we put in place a series of actions in response-- strengthening community involvement in public safety, holding community conversations on race and racism, and supporting a range of faculty and staff-led projects that will expand our commitment of being a welcoming community for any person.

All of you should have invitations to take part in our staff training course, Advancing Diversity and Equity at Cornell, and I urge you to make the most of it to engage with the material, to discuss it with your colleagues and use it to make Cornell a more welcoming and equitable community for everyone.

And I could not conclude the topic of civic responsibility without mentioning the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, class of '54, who frequently referred to the formative experiences she had as an undergraduate at Cornell.

After her death, we had many requests from students, faculty, alumni, and staff asking us to create a physical reminder at Cornell of Justice Ginsburg's history here, and those discussions came together with ongoing discussions that we were having about how best to honor the memory of her fellow alumna, the late Toni Morrison, masters of art class of '55.

Ms. Morrison of course was a critically acclaimed novelist, essayist, professor and winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature. For both alumnae, we wanted to create a memorial that would be seen by all Cornell students reminding them that their path from Cornell can take them anywhere, so I was delighted to be able to announce at my State of the University Address two weeks ago that we will be honoring Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Toni Morrison by naming for each of them one of the new North Campus residential expansion halls.

And that brings me to my fourth priority, one Cornell. I truly can't say enough about the way our community, not just here in Ithaca, not just in New York City but around the world, has come together during this crisis, offering assistance and support of every kind. Among the many challenges we faced as an institution since February, one of them of course has been financial.

The cost of transforming our campus including mounting and running our own testing lab has been enormous, and that impact has been compounded by lost income from our enterprise units like our hotel and our campus to campus bus, by lost tuition from international graduate

students who haven't been able to enroll, and by our reduced housing and dining income, but all of that is small relative to the increased costs of our commitment to meeting the full financial need of our enrolled undergraduates.

We've done a great deal to keep the university budget on an even keel throughout these changes, and some of those steps have been extraordinarily difficult, notably including the pay and benefit freezes and temporary reductions that we announced over the summer. While we can never promise that no one will lose a job or be furloughed, our approach has been to do everything in our power to keep our community together as much as we possibly can because Cornell, as we've seen so clearly over these past months, is so much more than its physical campuses.

It's a community, and it's a community-- I'm not just hopeful about this, but I'm confident-- it's a community that will continue to thrive and help our society move forward. All of you are part of that. All of you are part of our mission. All of you are part of our success. I can't thank you enough, and as difficult a year as this has been for all of us, I have truly never been as proud as I am right now to be a Cornellian. So once again, thank you all, thank you all, and let's turn to your questions.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, President Pollack. I want to remind staff members that you can submit your questions via the Q&A function of the Zoom. We are going to have Marin Cherry, the Cornell Tech Employee Assembly Rep, and also Michelle LoParco, the Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly, moderate the Q&A section and provide the questions.

And again, President Pollack, I think I speak on behalf of a lot of staff members when I want to express my appreciation to you for being outwardly facing, for coming to the table, for addressing the staff. I think there's a lot of appreciation to go around to you yourself on the leadership team and the senior leadership as well for guiding us in the right direction. So with that, I'm going to turn this over to Michelle LoParco and Marin Cherry for the Q&A segment.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Thank you, Hei, Hei, and thank you, President Pollack for your remarks. We're going to start with a question from-- this is more of HR related question from David Kingsley, and he is asking, is it reasonable for a direct report to expect to receive truth from their supervisor, and what should one do when their HR rep says there is no Cornell policy against lying.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

MARY OPPERMAN: So can I jump in? So I think it's always great to have a conversation about individual matters, but those are probably best kept to individual conversations, David, so you can how email to reach me.

MARIN CHERRY: Thank you. We had a question-- let me see if I can find it-- from Jay. We have had many discussions we're seeing in the news about immunizations. As those are approved,

could you share if Cornell has a plan to get the appropriate immunizations for the Cornell community?

MARTHA POLLACK: I assume the question is about influenza immunizations. Or is this about COVID immunizations? Oh, this is probably about COVID immunizations.

MARIN CHERRY: It is not specified.

MARTHA POLLACK: Yeah, so right now, we are certainly interested in that. We are certainly looking at what the options are. I have to tell you that right now, there is just no certainty at all about not even when the immunization, when vaccinations will be available, but how they will be distributed. I can tell you that we've been talking with the governor's office. We're trying to work with the state. We are looking at it, but we don't have a good answer for you yet. There's just isn't enough information yet.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Thank you. I'm going to take this question from Sara Albrecht, and she is asking if President Pollack would comment on the expected, quote, "end of the work-from-home situation." My staff often ask about this and I tell them, for the foreseeable future, but would appreciate your comments regarding it.

MARTHA POLLACK: Yeah, you know, again, I wish I had a better answer than that. Right now we are continuing to ask everybody who can to work from home. I mean, I'm working from home right now. This is my tiny little study at home. There is actually a significantly growing rate of infection in the local community, particularly outside of Hopkins County but we're also seeing it in Hopkins County.

Fortunately, the numbers are still low at Cornell, but we still need to have the campus as dedensified as possible. It's safer for you and it's safer for everyone if you stay home. I do recognize the challenges that imposes. I wish I could say to you, you know, January 15th, we're all going to be back in the office. We just don't know yet, but right now is the worst possible time. Really since about the beginning of the summer, right now would be the worst possible time to start coming back into the office because we are seeing growing rates in the surrounding communities.

MARIN CHERRY: Thank you. We have a question from Margaret Nichols. Could you share the status of the University's plans to expand its student body? Are these plans on hold or are they still expected to be implemented in 2022 or so?

MARTHA POLLACK: Yes, they are still planning. We are growing by-- I've sort of lost track exactly because we grew a little bit more than we expected-- I think it's about another 800 students or so across the whole student body, not per year. North Campus, the new North Campus residence halls, construction is on track. We still expect those to open next summer and that will enable us to begin to grow the student body as planned.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: We have a question from Beth Koons. Thank you for all you have done to protect jobs. We are fortunate. Do faculty have to participate in the diversity training?

MARTHA POLLACK: Particularly, the diversity training program that I mentioned is for staff. However, the Faculty Senate is working on a set of initiatives. There are actually three of them. One is the creation of a new center for research around structural racism and inequality. One is a required course requirement for all students, and the third is a diversity training program for faculty which will be required. It does not exist yet but they are working on that.

MARIN CHERRY: And we have a question from Brandon Fortenberry. I believe it was stated at one point--

MARTHA POLLACK: Did you bring any food? I need to know, Brandon, did you bring me food? So Brandon is the head of catering. Sorry, go ahead.

MARIN CHERRY: He did not include that in his question. Hopefully he will drop us another one to clarify. I believe it was stated at one point that there would be a potential reassessment of the financial impacts to the University in mid-October to assess if there was the ability to return folks' pay and retirement funds back to their previous levels. Is there still a plan to do this?

MARTHA POLLACK: There absolutely is. I started actually just yesterday. I had a meeting with the provost and the EVP CFO. They are going through the numbers. They will be reporting the numbers out to Faculty Senate, probably to the Employee Assembly. I will tell you that right now, the numbers look pretty good, and if they hold up, then I expect by six months in, for the second half of the year, to be able to stop the reductions in the benefits, but we have to wait a little bit longer and see what the next few weeks to month bring because there still is enormous uncertainty.

But we are committed. We have no interest, have no interest, in keeping benefits or salary reductions a day longer than we have to. We just need to make sure. The worst thing would be if we restored it and then the budget went terrible, and we had to put something back in place. So we are very carefully monitoring that situation.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: We have a question here from Michelle Reichardt. With the higher infection rate in the community, can employees who aren't working on campus also get COVID-19 testing through Cornell? Can their families? And secondly, are there plans to help school districts with ongoing testing?

MARIN CHERRY: Mary, would you like to answer the first part of that?

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah. We are looking at the possibility of being able to offer some additional, what I'd call ad hoc testing, to employees. We're not there yet. As you can imagine right now with the students and the on-campus employees, our testing schedules are pretty

full, but as we look to the students starting to depart, that is in our hope list and we hope we'll be able to say something about that shortly.

MARTHA POLLACK: And the same thing is true of things like the school system. I mean, we worked very hard to make sure that we added testing capacity, that we weren't drawing down community testing capacity, which is why we set up the CCTL. We were able to offer one-time testing in combination with Cayuga Medical system.

We were able, I think people know, to offer one-time testing to the students returning to the Ithaca public school district before classes started up. Again, as Mary notes right now, we don't have the capacity on an ongoing basis, but particularly in that period of time when there'll be fewer students, we're just trying to figure out what we can do. We of course want to partner with the community as much as we can.

MARIN CHERRY: So before we get to the next question, I think it's worth shouting out, we've had the comment, I hope we have a wonderful huge blowout party when it's possible to put this all behind us.

MARTHA POLLACK: Would you like to know what my idea is? I talked to Mary about this. Those of you who were here a little more than three years ago-- so I came in three and a half years ago, and then my inauguration was about four months later, and we had-- I thought it was a lot of fun-- a street fair on the arts quad, and Mary and I have been-- with lots of ice cream by the way-- and we have been secretly planning that if this thing ends in a time when the weather is nice that we're going to have a huge street fair for the whole community again.

MARIN CHERRY: I cannot wait. We should make sure that Cornell Tech staff can come on up too.

MARTHA POLLACK: No, no, no. Come on up.

MARIN CHERRY: Let's do do an actual question. Could you share if there are any specific plans in place to increase the hiring once that starts up again, and retention of BIPOC staff and faculty? It would be great to have more University guidance on affirmative action and other recruitment and retention strategies.

MARTHA POLLACK: Again, I see Mary nodding, so I'm going to let her take the lead on this.

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah, thank you for the question. We actually have just stood up a number of committees to take a look at how we currently search for, hire and then retain our BIPOC community. So the answer is yes, our intention is to really dig deep and see what we're doing that's working and then be open to changing what we do that is not resulting in the hires that we want.

More to come. We're just standing up the committees right now, but we are committed to looking deep inside of the way we do things to see if there are processes or procedures that need to be improved. Right now, as you know, there's very little hiring going on because we're still in the hiring freeze, so only the most essential positions are being posted, so this is a good time for us to dig deep and really look and understand how we get things done in the hiring and retention areas.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: So Brandon Fortenberry says, and I quote, please let Martha know ice cream is on me if she would like to stop by the Cornell dairy bar.

MARTHA POLLACK: I just might do that. Thank you, Brandon.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: And on to a question from Jeff Bishop, how has the moratorium on travel reduction of bodies on campus and limits on spending impacted the budget?

MARTHA POLLACK: They've all helped. They've all helped. I mean, they've helped a lot. All of the many things we put in place, from the hiring freeze to the limits on travel and discretionary spending, to the fairly significant salary cuts that my leadership and my team took, to the no raise, all of that has helped, and it's only because of that that we are in a position now to actually be very seriously considering our ability to stop the benefits reduction and salary reduction, even, I should say, while making good on our commitment to meet full financial need for our students, which is a significant cost.

MARIN CHERRY: So we have a question from Bert. I'm fortunate to have stable internet access at home. What ideas and support programs are available to those staffers who don't have reasonable internet access?

MARY OPPERMAN: This is a big issue for us in this area. So we do have a remote work group that's been looking at exactly these issues. How can we create opportunities and improvements in things like internet? Even phone service in some areas is quite bad. So we know that these enabling services are somewhat limited in some areas.

There are some services if you look on the CIT website for assistance with your internet, so you might want to start there, but we're taking a look now to see if there's anything else we can do. In some places, it's just really spotty, and we know that, and we have had some people who need to come into campus on a couple of days a week just to get the work done that requires internet. But as Martha said, right now with the cases going up, we want to try to look for other ways if we possibly can to get that issue resolved.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: So we've had a lot of folks chime in that love the street fair and ice cream idea and are going to volunteer to help put that together when we can. And we do have a question from Fernando Gomez-Baquero. Is the University planning to use the opportunity to expand online programs and reduce the cost of degrees? And he also says, thank you for your work and dedication. Love this community.

MARTHA POLLACK: Thank you. I love this community too. There's actually two separate questions in there. So yes, we are absolutely working to expand online education-- honestly online degrees, but online education. We're actually very well situated for this because this is something I had wanted to do since I came to Cornell, and actually back in January before this all started, we completed a nearly yearlong process of bringing Cornell into the University to sit under the provost.

And what that does is it does a number of things. It provides greater coordination between our 4-credit courses and our eCornell courses, and it also allows us to stand up, for example, new master's courses that need the academic oversight of the provost's office. Since the start of the pandemic, we've seen huge growth, just huge growth in what's going on in eCornell, again, not so much in new degree programs but in lots of not-for-degree programs.

So for example, we have a pilot program with high school students, or we have a program where we're taking some of our course material and community colleges can use it. There are a whole bunch of things going on and I certainly want to see continued growth there. The reduction in cost issue is very tricky.

You know, there is this thought that somehow if you just maybe offered a year online, it would be a lot less expensive for students, but the problem is this. The courses that it might make most sense to do that for are the really big courses, and those are the courses that are least expensive to offer. So if you drive down the costs on those, what you then do is you make the smaller courses more costly.

There is no silver bullet at least that any of us know. If any of us knew how to reduce the cost of higher education, we would absolutely do it. There is no silver bullet. That said, I've become more of an optimist than I ever was as a result of my experience during this pandemic. I don't think anyone thought we could stand up a testing virus lab in two months.

I don't think anyone thought the Student Life folks could work so creatively with our students to come up with a kind of compact that brought them in and encouraged this kind of behavior. I think there is a can-do sense out there in academic communities and particularly in our community, and I think we should take this on again, this question of college costs, and see what we can do.

But simply putting things online isn't in and of itself sufficient. It's also the case, of course, that our students really want to be here. They don't want to be online. We've seen that more than ever during the pandemic. So we've had this question a couple of times and it seems to keep coming in. Could you share a little bit about whether or not any of these aspects of remote work and working from home that might be able to be integrated into the way that we run the University in non-COVID times?

Yeah, I'm going to say a very little bit and then turn it over to Mary because she's actually been working on this, but my answer is yes, absolutely. I don't want to understate the challenges of working at home. We had a question earlier about when I can come back. For some people, working at home is very challenging for a range of reasons.

For other people, working at home has been a great thing, and I think for many people it's a mixed sort of thing. I can't imagine ever permanently working at home, but I could certainly imagine one day a week or two days a week working at home, and so Mary has been heading up a little group of people looking at this, and I'm going to ask her to say some more about that.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thanks Martha. Exactly what you said about your own preferences is what we heard in our surveys, so we did a survey of people about their experience with remote work, and what we heard was with the exception of a small percentage that wanted full on-campus experiences, the vast majority were interested in keeping some element of remote work in their lives.

It's working well for them, but we did get a lot of comments in this survey that are 100% remote was very isolating and they missed their time on campus and they missed their colleagues. So going forward, I think we do want to look at how we can use remote work, one, to be honest with you, to look at our footprint. We don't necessarily need the same kind of office spaces if we are creating hybrid models for working.

But the other is so that we can recruit and retain talent that wants that flexibility and where they get their work done, so it's all part of our remote work review, not just about what to do right now but then also how to think about it more broadly.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Moving on to a question from Peter Alexander. For students remaining on campus, how will they be fed and will they have access to the academic buildings while staff are away?

MARTHA POLLACK: There will be dining services provided for our students. Student Campus Life is overseeing that. I don't know the details of all the academic buildings. I'm sure a number of our academic buildings will be closed over the winter break, and even over what we're calling fall, too. So most of our students are leaving at Thanksgiving.

Some students who for one reason or another can't go home, say international students who are worried about being able to get back, they will be able to stay, and I believe that the provost office in coordination with campus and Student Life is deciding what buildings it's essential must stay open, but many of them we will have to close. We will definitely feed our students, however.

MARIN CHERRY: I'm sure we will.

MARTHA POLLACK: We'd hear from them if we didn't feed them. Brandon, where are you? Give them ice cream. No.

MARIN CHERRY: We have two questions that I think are very related, so I'll read them both and allow you to structure your answer. The first is from Zach. Will the shift in remote working expand the talent pool Cornell reaches for to wider than just New York City, Buffalo and Ithaca, for example, to increase its staff diversity and expertise? Very related-- what has been the impact of the pandemic on collaborative research across Cornell locations and with other universities?

MARTHA POLLACK: So I think the answer to the first is, absolutely. I had a lot of experience with this. When I came to Cornell, I actually only hired one person-- actually, my leadership team hasn't changed at all except I hired one person, then I added someone later. And that one person was my chief of staff, and she had worked with me at Michigan.

And for family reasons, she couldn't leave Ann Arbor on a permanent basis for the first two years. She would come for a few days and then go home, and so long before the pandemic, we were working on-- it wasn't Zoom. It was Skype, and it worked incredibly well, and what that experience taught me was that if you have a really talented person who lives somewhere else, you can make it work.

It may not be ideal, but sometimes the talent and the skills that you get really make it worthwhile, and so yes, I absolutely think that this will be a real boon for us-- especially because we are in a fairly remote place-- to be able to hire greater talent. And now I've forgotten the second question. I'm sorry, what was the second question?

MARIN CHERRY: The question was whether or not the-- let me see if I can find it again for the exact wording-- if this has increased the potential for collaboration with other faculty and institutions that we otherwise would not necessarily have been collaborating with.

MARTHA POLLACK: I'm less sure of that only because, I mean, having been a faculty member myself, we're so used to remote collaborations around the world that I'm not sure that the existence of Zoom has increased that by a huge amount, but yeah.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: So there's been a lot of folks who have chimed in and thanked you all for the extra day off for the winter break. And we do have one question that sort of follows that. It's from Brandy Nicholson, and she's wondering, for all these essential employees when this is over, is there any consideration for some extra time off? She states that the street fair sounds great but these team members are also exhausted at this point and are going to need to regroup.

MARTHA POLLACK: Mary, do you want to take that?

MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah, maybe I can start. Yes, for those individuals who are working on the reactivation of the campus, all the folks that are dealing with testing and the many complexities of our current model, it's been a really tiring time. Here's what we know, though. In some cases it's about the availability of time, but in other cases it's about the ability to take the time.

So we're tracking time-off banks right now. We'll keep monitoring those, but I think our biggest challenge until we get through this is to try to create support networks so that people can get breaks. They don't need to even be long breaks, but they need breaks, and so we're encouraging all of you who are understandably tired to try to use your time to refresh or work with co-workers if you need to to create shared understanding if possible, but we are really, really aware of this.

We know it's been a tough go and people have countdowns for the break, and we understand that. So yes, we're aware.

MARIN CHERRY: So we have a question that's very timely. This is from Christine Mahoney. Given that the local COVID cases are on the rise, the political environment is heating up and society is becoming increasingly unstable, and mask wearing and social distancing is seen more and more as a political statement, what suggestions do you offer to managers to assist us in maintaining staff engagement and collaboration during the next three weeks?

MARTHA POLLACK: Yeah, I'll say something and I see Mary nodding. She may want to say something too. Look, I would just point to the success we've had so far, right. We are a campus, right now a campus community of about 28,000 people once you think about the students who are remote. And we've had, I think, it's 107 cases something like that. 81 of them were in the first few weeks.

We've been running at about four or five cases a week. Why is that? It's because people have worn masks. It's because people have socially distanced. It's because people have washed their hands. It's because people have avoided large gatherings, and it's because people have complied with testing.

I cannot stress how important it is that you comply with the testing. I know it's a hassle. I do it myself. I go in the morning, Monday mornings. I go. I get my test. We have got to do these things, and I would just appeal to a sense of community. It's been working. We have the evidence it's been working. Look at what's going on in a lot of our peer universities.

And if it keeps working, we can keep our students here studying. We can keep our staff here and our faculty and staff here working. If it breaks down, that all breaks down and we're in a totally different situation. So I know how hard it is. I do want to say one other thing while I'm talking about things that are hard because I said this to the students when I went to Student Assembly, and I said this to the faculty.

If you can at all avoid it, please do not travel this Thanksgiving. Believe me, I know how hard it is. I have adult children and it's been almost a year since I've seen them face to face. January was the last time I saw them face to face, but right now, if you can at all of it, don't travel. If you do travel, first of all you've got to pay attention to the quarantine rules, not only where you're going but when you come back.

Most of the states right now, including the states around us, are on the governor's quarantine list, and if you travel, when you come back you're going to have to quarantine for 14 days. If you have people coming here they're going to have to quarantine for 14 days. But I'm asking you. I know it's hard. I'm asking you to make one more sacrifice because we've got to get through this and we want to keep everybody employed, and we want to keep our students in classes. Mary, I don't know if you want to add anything to that.

MARY OPPERMAN: I'm good. That was great. Thank you very much.

BRIAN GOODELL: Thank you, Mary. Thank you, President Pollack. I think that that really is time. From the comments, from the Q&A, it sounds like a lot of people are very grateful for the additional day off, also for this opportunity to engage. I think you've answered a lot of really great questions and provided a lot of wonderful feedback, so I want to thank President Pollack for coming here.

I want to thank Mary Opperman for her engagement. I want to thank the moderators, Michelle and Marin. I think you all did a really fantastic job. Congratulations to Bob Pils. Congratulations, everybody that was nominated. The Employee Assembly is grateful for all of the work that we've all put in during this very difficult time. And with that, I think I'm comfortable ending this President's Address to Staff.

MARTHA POLLACK: Thank you, Hei Hei, and again, thank you all. Thank you all so much. Bye-bye.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Take care.