

Good morning Chair Weisz, members, and guests:

My name is Joshua Wynne, and I come to you today as chair of the North Dakota University System Smart Restart Task Force. The Task Force has been charged by Chancellor Hagerott with helping to coordinate the campuses' response to the pandemic and maximizing the opportunity for students to remain engaged in their educational journeys, especially if that can be done with a safe on-campus experience. Because of the protocols that have been enacted on all eleven campuses, the member institutions have largely been able to return to a new "normal" level of in-person campus activity.

But looking at the history of COVID-19 cases on the various campuses is instructive, and clearly contains the warning that the pandemic is not over and can jeopardize campus operations very quickly if the campuses let their collective guards down. A panoramic review of the COVID-19 cases in the NDUS shows two peaks, one occurring in late August through September and the second from mid-October through mid-December. Fortunately, the curve has remained remarkably flat since then. Does that mean then that the emergency is over? Not at all - it means that the control and mitigation measures that were widely instituted have worked. The first peak in cases was due to the return to campus of faculty, staff, and students after summer break, likely with the importation of cases from elsewhere. The second peak coincided temporally with a rise in cases in the community. The fact that the curve is reasonably flat at present does not at all suggest that the problem has resolved; rather, it indicates that our control measures are working. However, we are vulnerable if we don't continue to do the things that are working. And I can assure you that the member institutions in the NDUS have no intention of relaxing their control measures.

So, when will the time occur when control measures may be relaxed? When will it be safe to consider the pandemic over, or if not over, at least under control? Realistically, there only are four ways that the pandemic will end:

- 1) The virus mutates in a way that it becomes less transmissible and/or less virulent – unfortunately, there is no evidence of this (actually, the recent data suggest just the opposite)
- 2) Very effective medical treatments blunt the impact of the disease – certainly progress has been made (with dexamethasone, monoclonal antibodies, and remdesivir) but the beneficial impact has been modest to date
- 3) Group ("herd") immunity develops – but this is not a desirable outcome for a disease with about a 1.5% mortality overall, and a much higher mortality in the elderly and those with underlying conditions
- 4) Widespread vaccination is achieved

Widespread vaccination clearly is the most desirable option, and one that is likely this year. Once that occurs, NDUS likely will consider relaxing some of the restrictions on its campuses. But until then, NDUS plans to continue to be vigilant, careful, and surveillant for any spike in cases. The threat remains real and the currently quasi-stable status throughout the NDUS can change in an instant. We plan to work to prevent that from happening.

Thank you for your attention.