

Reflections and Transitions
by Jonathan Lightman

This is the column that took (nearly) 20 years to write.

Last January, I announced my retirement from FACCC, effective September 7. As much as I have truly loved the last two decades in this role—something I can't emphasize enough—it's time for me to step off the twin speeds of frantic and extreme. I've got no particular plans for my post-FACCC career other than a four month hiatus. Afterward, I'm open.

In the meantime, I'd like to express my deepest appreciation to all the FACCC leaders who placed their confidence in me, particularly the association presidents under whom I served, Evelyn "Sam" Weiss, Carolyn Russell, Rich Hansen, Dennis Smith, Bill Hewitt, John McDowell, Dean Murakami, Shaaron Vogel, and Adam Wetsman. Just as important were the tens of thousands of faculty and millions of students who entered our institutions each day hoping the political class would provide them with the support needed to engage in the manner of teaching and learning worthy of the nation's largest system of higher education. Sadly, their lot was too often set aside in favor of the privileged class or the so-called reformers who claimed to know what was better for them.

While it's hard to encapsulate so many experiences into a single piece, there are some that are particularly prominent. A number of them are organizational, others political, and a few personal. When I put the list together, I came up with 11 big ones (a veritable 10+1) with some runners up. Just as the brain randomizes memories, these are presented in no particular order.

Please enjoy this last lap around track.

Shortly after his lackluster reelection in 2002, Governor Gray Davis shared the secret that only he and a few of his advisers knew during the campaign. California had squandered its surplus from a few years earlier and was now confronting a massive deficit. Legislators were simultaneously infuriated and stunned, and had no real solution to the problem. Republicans would surely deny the two-thirds supermajority for a tax increase leaving programmatic cuts as the only option.

As expected, Davis proposed mid-year budget reductions impacting publicly funded services, including education. What shocked and amazed us was the disproportionate impact on community colleges. It didn't take much to realize that we had become a target and were essentially political roadkill.

Together with the Los Angeles College Faculty Guild and the Community College League of California, FACCC helped reconstitute the defunct Californians for Community Colleges (which the California Federation of Teachers joined as a full partner several years later). The group hired

Democratic strategist Richie Ross and the Republican firm of McNally-Temple to help change the perception of community colleges as politically weak and mount a response to Gray Davis.

Although the consultants came from different parties, they had similar observations. Community colleges had spent decades trying to be loved, which in their assessment, caused the problem. They told us in politics, “when you want to be loved, the politicians harm you” (except they used a different four letter word than “harm”). The objective, they explained, was respect, not love.

Our first activity was a poll which was surreptitiously dropped on the Governor’s desk noting the widespread bipartisan support for community colleges (more popular than every other segment of education with elementary schools placing a distant second) and foreshadowing voter anger against anyone who would cut them. Through back channels, we learned the Governor read the poll and was angered by it.

The next step would be a march on the Capitol. How many would participate was completely unknown; we predicted a few thousand at most. Press reports estimated the crowds at 7,000-9,000 with the California Highway Patrol suggesting more like 10,000-12,000. As the offices along Capitol Avenue reported, we kept coming and coming. One Speaker after another decried the proposed cuts (with a brief interlude by one of our legislative champions, John Vasconcellos, who unsuccessfully tried being more analytical than motivational).

Gray Davis was so shocked by the march, he had his press secretary call an *impromptu* press conference to laud his record on community colleges. Hearing that, I instructed FACCC’s then communications director to return to our office, photocopy the issue of *FACCCTS* from the 1998 campaign in which Davis promised to restore the community college share of the Proposition 98 split, enact a guaranteed property tax backfill, and achieve 75% full-time faculty teaching credit instruction, and distribute it to all the reporters with a question of how many of these promises did he actually fulfill (the answer, of course, was none).

When the budget reduction deal was concluded, community colleges were cut, but not to the disproportionate level proposed by the then Governor. More importantly, that first demonstration on March 17, 2003, later annualized as the “March in March,” was the moment when community colleges discovered their mojo and ceased being roadkill. *Mother Jones* ranked that march as second place in its annual international campus activism list for the year, between the University of Tehran and New York University. Community colleges survived. As for Gray Davis, that’s another matter which I simply can’t recall.

Runner Up: While the 2003 march may not have been the biggest, it was clearly the most impactful. We had no idea what to expect when we arrived at Raley Field, the starting point, located about a mile from the Capitol. Little did we know how important that moment was.

The line-up of speakers was carefully controlled for maximum effect. Any legislator who showed up was immediately given the microphone; other speakers were pre-selected. Without question, the most memorable speaker was Tracy Marquez, president of the then CalSACC, the student organization of the day. A student at Mt. San Jacinto College, Tracy was not like any of

today's Student Senate presidents. She was well into her 50s, having raised children before starting college.

How she connected her life story to contemporary politics still reverberates in me. In front of the assembled thousands, she described how all the men (and a few of the women) in her life—including her father and husband—told her she was not “good enough” to make it. But for the intervention of a community college faculty member who helped her find and cultivate her inner potential, she might have believed what she had been told. Having found her strength at the community college (and having risen to president of CalSACC), she declared in full voice that she was not going to let Gray Davis tell her she was not good enough to be educated.

Well over a decade later, I ran into Tracy at a student conference and told her how I continued to quote from her speech. She seemed surprised that anyone remembered it but I told her I didn't think I would ever hear anyone as determined and inspiring.

Runner Up: After 2003, the student march became an annual event, called the March in March, with numbers that occasionally eclipsed the original one. In subsequent years, I was frequently asked to speak at the march, always with the billing that I was one of the organizers of the original event.

During one of the larger rallies—somewhere north of 11,000—I came prepared with my short speech that was meant to rouse the audience to chant something or other about funding. As an aside, speaking to that large of a crowd is a bit of a challenge. On the one hand, you can't exactly hear anything because the noise levels are way too loud, while on the other, you have to be quick and witty. It's not exactly the place for high level analysis.

Anyway, about three speakers before me was a legislator who happened to be one of FACCC's best friends in the Capitol. I was surprised, actually shocked, when instead of being pithy and resolute, h/she was long winded and ambivalent. When this person should have been validating the crowd's anger at proposed cuts, h/she told them that legislators would have a hard time with the budget discussions and the ability to fund community colleges amidst a major shortfall would be particularly complicated.

At that moment, I made a snap decision to tear up my speech even though it had already been shared and approved by the organizers. Since the legislator in question had left the rally and was completely out of earshot, I approached the microphone completely *impromptu*. I reminded the assembled that a prior speaker had just described how difficult it would be for lawmakers to fully fund community colleges. For me, that didn't seem like a hard decision at all. Legislators had two choices before them, promote education (holding up my right arm) or ignorance (holding up my left).

The crowd went wild, which was my signal to exit, stage left.

Runner Up: One of the best lessons I ever learned from a public relations professional was use of the word “nearly” when applied to numbers. Describing an event as having “nearly 1,000”

participants is far more impactful than saying “400 showed up.” While the former would be technically true, it is based more in spin than in fact.

Several years following the original demonstration against Gray Davis and long after he left Sacramento, I sat next to an Assemblymember on an airplane trip, where she was waxing eloquently about that first march. Despite the subsequent rallies—some far eclipsing the participation of the first—she wanted to discuss that initial event.

At some point, she asked me how many participated, wasn't it 50,000? Without flinching, I affirmed her estimate, “yes, *nearly* 50,000!”

The political ascendancy of California Community Colleges in the last decade took place over a number of years, most prominently between 2003-09. It started in a period of cutbacks, continued through the short-lived recovery, and continued into the much deeper economic downturn. By the start of the Great Recession, community colleges had developed a stronger imprint on legislators, with our system avoiding significant reductions during the first round of cuts (by the second round, we certainly felt it, but not disproportionately to other publicly funded services).

Just as FACCC and its coalition partners were working at saving our institutions, another movement was also on the horizon, one that would prove more formidable and insidious than originally thought. The self-styled educational reformers who made their debut in K-12 with *No Child Left Behind* were entering higher education with an agenda that accused community colleges of failing on the job. Not surprisingly, it coincided with a rightward shift in the Lumina Foundation, which had once tried to help colleges and universities, and its California proxies.

In February 2007, press reports were abounding on the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy's study called, *Rules of the Game: How State Policy Creates Barriers to Degree Completion and Impedes Student Success in the California Community Colleges*. This report slammed the California Community Colleges for their low completion rate, blaming state policies as the cause. As bad as the report was, the press coverage was worse. Needless to say, this engendered tremendous negative attention.

Not surprisingly, *Rules of the Game* was partly funded by two of Lumina's allies, the Irvine and Hewlett Foundations. Our community colleges, which had just begun to recover from the Gray Davis era cutbacks, were suddenly attacked for another reason. If the politicians could no longer treat community colleges as political roadkill, they were now provided analytical cover to say we were floundering. In other words, we were now considered a bad investment.

But the opening rounds didn't go well for the reformers as the system collectively counter attacked the report for its flawed methodology and failure to understand our students. The Assembly Higher Education Committee, chaired by then Assemblymember Anthony Portantino (D-Pasadena), convened an informational hearing on the report in which it highlighted the

analysis of the FACCC Education Institute’s Policy Committee. Even our then system chancellor, Mark Drummond, weighed in, noting, “the report sorely underreports our student success numbers and misses the mark relating to what works and what doesn’t. It further fails to acknowledge the work underway by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, faculty and staff across the system on increasing student success.”

Against this background, I received an invitation in September 2009 to present at Columbia University in New York City to an assembled group of journalists from across the country covering higher education. Over the years, I had received a variety of speaking invitations in other states and even around the globe, all of whom ended in the round file as they did not include reimbursement for travel or registration costs.

Something about this invitation prompted me to place a phone call in which it was explained that journalists from around America would regularly come to Columbia University for a week at a time to intensively examine their area of interest. While the program was expensive, the journalists would compete for both placement and scholarship, meaning they had no out of pocket costs—they simply had to be chosen in a competitive process. The particular week I was invited was about higher education with specific emphasis on community colleges. Yes, all my costs would be reimbursed and I was asked to speak for no more than 10 minutes. It was also confirmed that I would be the only presenter that week from California.

With no formal training in journalism, I consulted Anthony York, husband of our then Government Relations Director, Andrea York. At that time, Anthony was assigned to cover Governor Jerry Brown for the *Los Angeles Times*; his byline was consistently on the front page of the newspaper. Anthony’s sage advice was to not attempt teaching which stories are worthy of coverage. The journalists wouldn’t find that credible, and it certainly couldn’t be done in 10 minutes. Nonetheless, he suggested I tell them how to *avoid the wrong story*, such as studies with a huge public relations campaign behind them that reflect a pre-existing agenda from their funders.

Although the event organizers were not supposed to interrupt the presentations, they asked me in the middle of my talk if my words were specifically targeting the *Rules of the Game*. I noted that this was not the only study around, but the coverage had been so universal and uncritical, it created a real problem. What was evident was that the public relations machine that accompanied the report was so effective, few questioned the methodology or the conclusion. This would be a harbinger of worse things to come.

At 10 minutes, the organizers cut me off; my time was up. Since I had not finished, I emphasized that I had flown across the country for this presentation and wanted an additional minute (for whatever reason, I don’t think the extra 60 seconds hurt their schedule, even if it interfered with their “rules of the game”). After I concluded, the organizers shared that mine was one of the few talks over the course of the entire week in which the participants actually took notes (a victory of sorts).

Runner Up: In 2017, I was invited to be the lone representative for community colleges nationally, not just from California, in a meeting of about 30 higher education professionals and

select others at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton University. The subject, no surprise, was Donald Trump.

As grateful as I was to be included in this prestigious group, I was disappointed that the discussions were not more politically oriented and solutions based. While the dynamics of private four-year research-based universities overlap with the California Community Colleges, for the most part, they are philosophically distant.

It's going to take a much bigger effort to derail Trump, particularly if his newest Supreme Court nominee is confirmed. That must start with significant attention to political organizing, a grander version of our own *FACCCtivism*; there is no other way.

September 14, 2012 began simply enough. We had a FACCC board meeting scheduled in Oakland with several of the staff carpooling together from our office in Downtown Sacramento. The long car ride to the Bay Area would certainly entail discussions of politics, traffic, weather, movies, sports, music and whatever. We certainly didn't expect to be reading an op-ed on SF Gate (the online portal to the major San Francisco daily newspapers) blaming the local academic senate for the accreditation difficulties at City College of San Francisco, but that's exactly what happened. I had the unlucky task of driving which meant the staff had to read the piece to me (several times if I remember correctly) hoping that my blood pressure wouldn't explode (not a pleasant thought especially with the morning commute).

After a few moments of rage and reaction, we kicked into gear. Within 30 minutes of our arrival in Oakland, we contacted the local academic senate at CCSF, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, and the op-ed manager of SF Gate. We were told that the best response to this damaging piece would be a counter op-ed from a state legislator, and we had exactly four hours to meet the publication deadline. Our two main hurdles were that it was a Friday, a day when legislators are away from the Capitol and could literally be anywhere, and we had a board meeting to staff.

Sure enough, we found Senator Leland Yee in his district office (two years before we knew anything of his mafia ties or gun running in the Philippines). Senator Yee told us that if we could ghost write an op-ed for him in four hours, he would submit it post haste.

The next challenge was writing the piece while staffing a board meeting, about as difficult a task as could be imagined. Our then Government Relations Director Andrea York took the first crack at it with other staff members helping as best they could. Each time a board member needed their attention for the meeting in progress, the staff lifted their head from the laptop to participate. Mine was the last set of eyes, and I'm typically the most persnickety writer/editor on the staff. I also have the chief staff responsibility for board meetings, a challenging combination to say the least.

We finished the op-ed with about 20 minutes to spare at which point the board gave us a resounding ovation. The meeting occurred as if the op-ed were not a distraction and the op-ed was written as if there were no board meeting. It was published a few days later with the Bay Area public reading an important counter-piece to the prior screed.

As much as we all like to think of ourselves as multi-taskers, that one earned us our stripes like never before.

Runner Up: In 2013, FACCC and others in the community college system were locked in a heated battle with former Assemblymember Das Williams (D-Santa Barbara) over his efforts to legislate a two-tier system for student access. Essentially, Williams wanted wealthier students to have access to courses that would be denied to others. It ran counter to the democratic nature of California Community Colleges and similar proposals had already been rejected twice by the Legislature.

At some point in the summer, we received a call from *Al Jazeera America* asking if we had either staff or board members in Los Angeles who would be willing to be interviewed on camera to discuss our opposition to the Williams measure. While not questioning how media officials in Qatar learned about this measure, we began making plans for a TV interview of one of our board members in the L.A. vicinity.

A few days later, *Al Jazeera* called back, noting that the story had ratcheted up on their priority list and they now wanted to contract with a Sacramento-based TV crew to interview me at the FACCC office. We conducted it in the downstairs office of our then Communications Director Brenda Crain who also helped with lighting and make up. While I'm fairly certain that I was the first FACCC official on *Al Jazeera*, I'm hopeful that the national and even international spotlight on our work doesn't disappear.

As a quick aside, the *Al Jazeera* interview occurred during my year as synagogue president, an extra-curricular activity that kept me busy. The congregational rabbi had called me minutes before at which point I told him I had no time to talk since I was going on *Al Jazeera*. I could only imagine that he thought I was being asked to comment on Middle East diplomacy, which thankfully remains way outside of FACCC's purview.

It's hard to ignore that part-time faculty are the first to be harmed when times are bad and last to be helped when they improve. Wages, working conditions, and professional respect are treated as rare, even unexpected, commodities for this 40,000 corps of faculty professionals who outnumber their full-time counterparts by more than two to one. In the past decade, policymakers and various iterations of the Chancellor's Office have pretended that student success can be magically attained without addressing the structural imbalance between full- and part-time faculty. It's phantasmal thinking at best, spurred by the California proxies of the Lumina Foundation who emphasize institutional efficiency over instructional infrastructure.

In June 2003, part-time faculty achieved a rare victory, akin to a Tarantino revenge fantasy. It wasn't against the districts who exploited their labor, the system that protected the districts in this practice, or the policymakers who maintained the legal *status quo*. Rather, it was against the Employment Development Department (EDD) who routinely denied them their legally earned unemployment benefits, forcing them to file endless appeals until the correct law was applied. By then, many part-timers were brow beaten or humiliated by the bureaucracy and simply gave up.

Essentially, the EDD was processing claims for community college part-time faculty using the K-12 standard, which was significantly different. According to both the Unemployment Insurance Code and Court of Appeals, a community college faculty member is entitled to unemployment benefits when he or she lacks reasonable assurance for a continuing assignment. The legal test is met when there is uncertainty in one of three areas: program, enrollment, or funding. K-12 teachers have a different test for unemployment benefits, relevant to their dynamic.

For years, part-timers had complained to FACCC and their unions about the endless appeals process. It would take a myriad of phone calls and letters to the vast EDD bureaucracy before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) would overturn the decision of the initial intake worker, often at the end of the summer when personal funds were low—and even that was not guaranteed. Occasionally, the ALJs would also apply the incorrect law, forcing a second appeal in court.

Something had to change.

In 2003, FACCC sponsored AB 237 (Bermudez), requiring EDD to conduct an evaluation of its own processes with respect to processing unemployment claims of part-time community college faculty. EDD hemmed and hawed, and claimed the bill violated numerous unnamed sections of federal law. Our advocacy efforts, nonetheless, were successful through the Assembly Insurance Committee, and we were finally able to extract a promise from EDD that it would not oppose the bill moving forward. When the measure died on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File, we subsequently learned the EDD broke its promise; it had quietly advocated for a quick death.

No question, we were angry. Rudy Bermudez, our bill's author, was beyond anger. He was livid.

Bermudez told us he would not let this die and asked if there was another relevant committee in the Legislature in which he could raise this issue. Since the budget hearings had already concluded, the budget subcommittees were no longer an option. Nonetheless, we informed him that there was a Select Committee on Community Colleges, chaired by the late Assemblymember Mervyn Dymally, which rarely, if ever, met. With our then Government Relations Director, Jennifer Baker, and I in his office, Bermudez called Dymally and told him that the Select Committee needed to meet as quickly as possible to discuss the EDD processing of part-time faculty unemployment claims.

Shortly thereafter, the Select Committee convened (actually, it was just Dymally and Bermudez, who technically was not even part of it). More to the point, Bermudez, who was deputized by

Dymally as the virtual chair for the day, had FACCC construct not only the agenda, but also the analysis. Basically, we told it the way we saw it, which was not sympathetic to the EDD.

When the Director of the EDD arrived at the committee hearing with his staff, Bermudez exclaimed: “wipe that smirk off your face!” This would not be a whitewash by the bureaucracy against the powerless, but exactly the opposite.

FACCC had invited representatives of CFT, CTA, and CPFA, along with a few part-timers who shared their horror stories of navigating the EDD bureaucracy. Their stories were far more compelling to both Bermudez and Dymally than any excuse offered by the EDD on why its own intake workers consistently applied the wrong law.

Following the hearing, the EDD staff approached FACCC and suggested establishing a back channel to quietly resolve cases. Furthermore, it immediately reversed the negative rulings against one of the part-timers who we brought to the hearing. While the EDD continues to make mistakes, the dynamic dramatically changed at that moment. FACCC has continued to enjoy back channel contacts with them and they have quickly resolved numerous complaints. Also, we sponsored a second bill on the EDD process the following year which was signed into law.

While the Legislature spends a great deal of energy enacting laws, it devotes less time on oversight and compliance. For the most part, lawmakers leave that to the courts.

One of the few mechanisms to examine oversight is the Bureau of State Audits, which can be assigned to audit an agency pursuant to a vote of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC). In May 2000, FACCC sponsored an audit request on community college compliance with the Fifty Percent Law. The resulting study found rampant errors in the system, placing the blame for noncompliance squarely on the Chancellor’s Office. This resulted in millions of dollars returned to faculty and a major lawsuit settled by the Santa Monica College district with its faculty union.

Enshrined in the Education Code in the early 1960s, the Fifty Percent Law requires that at least half of a district’s expense, minus categorical funding, be spent on instructional salaries. To its detractors, the Fifty Percent Law is an anachronistic vestige of a time long past when the then junior colleges were governed by K-12 districts. For its supporters, this statute keeps community colleges as teaching institutions. If less than half of a district’s expense is spent on teaching, where would the rest of the money go? Research? Administrators?

Against this backdrop, I flew to Burbank late in the afternoon in December 1999 to meet with former Assemblymember Scott Wildman (then JLAC chair) and Terri Bernstein, former chief negotiator of the Santa Monica College Faculty Association. As a Certified Public Accountant, Bernstein had accumulated significant data on the egregious violations of the Fifty Percent Law by the various districts, particularly Santa Monica. More importantly, she identified a single cause for the problem, the Chancellor’s Office Budget and Accounting Manual, otherwise called

the BAM. In her various binders, she demonstrated how the BAM led districts to shortchange faculty out of millions.

In the scope of one meeting, Wildman had all he needed. He was willing to bring an audit request of the Fifty Percent Law to JLAC, requesting a study of three districts, urban, suburban, and rural, along with an examination of the BAM. Our job was to secure the needed votes—easier said than done.

At the end of the day, we pulled out all the stops as the districts were doing whatever they could to prevent the audit. During the hearing, we were ironically helped by the testimony of an opposing lobbyist who delivered a lengthy diatribe against the Fifty Percent Law. One of the most politically conservative members of JLAC interrupted him mid-sentence, noting that the function of this committee was oversight, not policy. We were so surprised by this exchange, I privately quipped that if the lobbyist promised to continue, we would pay his way.

It took hours to round up the votes, but at the end of the day, we got what we needed. Once the Bureau of State Audits commenced its work, it determined that three districts was not statistically sufficient for a study; it would need at least 10. Not surprisingly, it found seven of the 10 egregiously out of compliance with all 10 making errors. As mentioned above, it placed the blame squarely on the Chancellor's Office and insisted on changes to the BAM and oversight mechanisms.

FACCC put out a press release the day the audit was complete, which did not sit well with the apologists for the districts. We were publicly accused of not taking a more collegial approach to the problem. From our perspective, a collegial remedy was not readily available as faculty had been cheated out of millions and everyone let it happen. The audit indelibly changed compliance with the law with limited complaints on oversight moving forward.

Whether there is a better way to craft the Fifty Percent Law with today's dynamics is a different question, subject to continuing conversation.

It's rare that the mere introduction of a bill—particularly one that did not become law—would cause a stir, let alone an uproar. FACCC sponsored AB 1741 [(Fong) of 2012], *The California Community Colleges Student Success and Support Program Act of 2012* was one such exception. Like anything else, it's important to understand the context to appreciate the story.

As California was in the depth of the Great Recession, there were 500,000 community college students on wait lists. In other words, the students were there; the money wasn't. While a few Republicans had agreed to a modest temporary tax increase under Arnold Schwarzenegger, they would not provide the needed two votes in both the Assembly and Senate to place an extension on the ballot. That left staggering cuts as the only option.

At this point, the California proxies of the so-called education reformers went to work. In conjunction with their champion, Senator Carol Liu, they introduced the first serious performance-based funding measure in the Capitol. Incurring the opposition of nearly everyone in the community college system, including former Chancellor Jack Scott, Carol Liu amended the bill twice, the second time deleting all prior language and initiating a task force on “student success” to develop recommendations on improving the delivery of education.

What had been billed as a wide ranging discussion proved anything but. For the most part, the task force was a cover for the “R” word, rationing—with limited funds, community colleges would need a policy excuse to do less. Students who played in orchestras, enrolled in P.E., or who repeated courses became the stereotypes for our “broken” system. Because of these non-serious students, the argument went, *legitimate* students were precluded from enrolling in transfer, basic skills, or Career Technical Education programs. It was a convenient argument that could only be understood amidst the chaos of the Great Recession.

When it finished, the Task Force produced 22 recommendations, the bulk of which placed a higher burden on students in completing their education without promising them anything in return. Faculty members on the task force were repeatedly shut down when they raised issues like full-time faculty or increasing part-time faculty support, noting that those were outside “student success.” Go figure. Students would now have to complete their educational planning efforts to receive priority registration, even if the counselor to student ratio was at 1:2000. When asked how we could accomplish this, the Chancellor’s Office responded, with “technology, peer advising, and creativity.”

Following a raucous hearing of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors in the Capitol during which faculty advocates pleaded for an understanding of the difference between *broke* and *broken*, and in which a large group of City College of San Francisco students who overcame trouble backgrounds explained that under the new scheme they would be deemed failures, the Chancellor’s Office agreed to sponsor SB 1456 [(Lowenthal) of 2012] to implement several of the Task Force’s recommendations.

When FACCC reviewed the bill, it asked why there was no mention of the following:

- A. Full-time faculty
- B. Part-time faculty support, starting with office hours
- C. Counselor to student ratio
- D. Restoration of statewide student services, like EOPS and DSPS, whose budgets were slashed in the recession

Repeatedly, we were told that these areas could not be in the bill because they weren’t advanced by the Task Force. Yet, the faculty members on the Task Force told us that when they tried raising these issues, they were shot down. This was circular logic at its best.

Jeffrey Michels who now serves as president of the California Community College Independents but at that time was a member of the FACCC Education Institute Policy Committee, suggested we introduce our own student success bill. While initially seeming farfetched, the idea gained

traction as the wheels of circular logic spun faster. Our plan was to draft amendments to SB 1456 incorporating the above-mentioned items, and if those were rejected, to pursue our own bill.

While that approach seemed straightforward, there was much more to it—a highly dramatic moment in legislative deal making. The deadline for introducing new legislation had already passed, which would have made it nearly impossible to seek a new measure. Nonetheless, we had reserved a spot bill (defined as legislation with inconsequential language) in the event we needed to legislatively overturn an anticipated court ruling negating the local academic senate’s role in shared governance, which thankfully never materialized. We had thought that our author of the spot bill would accept substitute language on student success. It didn’t turn out that way.

As expected, Senator Lowenthal’s staff refused to accept our amendments. When we subsequently brought it to the author of our spot bill, she also refused, claiming she now had other priorities requiring her attention (as we suspected, she was subject to extreme pressure by the Lumina proxy and Chancellor’s Office to deny FACCC’s request). Nonetheless, she gave us the bill in its spot form—like handing over a car with no passengers or driver.

It was then that our Government Relations Director, Andrea York, went to work. She promised that within 24 hours she would find us another author. I was skeptical; after all, the introduction deadlines had already passed, and this form of “gut and amend” was not typical for March. Further, the Chancellor was getting the word out that we were “shopping” for an author, and there was a major effort to tag our work as radioactive.

Despite these obstacles, former Assemblymember Paul Fong (D-Cupertino), who was not only a community college faculty member, but a proud FACCC*tivist* (he kept FACCC membership brochures prominently displayed in his office), agreed to champion our cause. It should be noted that he overruled the advice of his staff on this as they too had been pressured by the Chancellor’s Office to not touch our bill.

The introduction of AB 1741 caused an immediate uproar because there were suddenly two student success bills (technically three, as the Chancellor’s Office sponsored a relatively minor effort with Carol Liu at the same time). The Lowenthal measure, which was the official Student Success Act, would implement the major Task Force recommendations while the FACCC proposal, AB 1741, stated that regardless what was happening with any other student success effort, the Chancellor’s Office would have to prioritize full-time hiring, part-time faculty support, counselor to student ratios, and restoration of student services in its annual budget request to the Department of Finance.

Those who understood AB 1741 from a policy level recognized that it accomplished little. The symbolism, however, was monumental as suddenly there were two narratives on student success, one by the educational reformers; the other, by FACCC.

The day that AB 1741 went into print, I had to go to Orinda, about 80 minutes west of Sacramento, to speak to the community college faculty leaders in the Contra Costa District. Upon hearing of AB 1741’s introduction, one faculty member hugged me so hard, she would not

let go. “For the first time” she declared, “someone was listening to the faculty.” It was about as emotional an experience as I ever had at FACCC.

Runner Up: When AB 1741 was introduced, we had no idea whether it would advance through the Assembly, let alone the Assembly Higher Education Committee. Our contract lobbyist, Christy Bouma, had set up a closed door meeting with three legislators, former Higher Education Committee Chair Marty Block, Paul Fong, and Alan Lowenthal, together with Chancellor Jack Scott (a former legislator) and me. It was the five of us slogging it out, trying to find common ground.

Chancellor Scott was having none of it. He wanted our bill killed. That eventually happened, but not for a few months.

Much to the Chancellor’s chagrin, the Higher Education Committee approved AB 1741, suggesting it as an appropriate complement to SB 1456. Following that, AB 1741 was referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee where it was placed on the Suspense File (all measures with a fiscal impact go there as a matter of course—getting a bill off Suspense is the tricky part). Amazingly, the more the Chancellor’s Office lobbied against it, the more attention it got. Legislative staffers were sympathetic to our cause and angered by the hyperbole against our bill.

During the official “Suspense” hearing, when the disposition of hundreds of bills was announced, I declined going to the Capitol, preferring to watch the hearing online. I was literally counting down the seconds to our bill being killed when it was announced that it was approved on a “B roll call” (all Democrats supporting, Republicans opposing). I was so stunned I couldn’t move. Afterwards, I stomped my feet and hollered so loudly, I suspect they heard me four blocks away in the Capitol. Our effort had cleared its major Assembly hurdle, providing us new leverage to negotiate.

While we knew that AB 1741 stood no chance in the Senate—Senator Lowenthal chaired the Senate Education Committee and he would not be favorably receiving it—we had a short window to affect a compromise. Since our bill was essentially symbolic, we proposed incorporating AB 1741 into a “Findings and Declarations” section of SB 1456. Findings and Declarations record legislative intent, but have no legal impact.

This ultimately happened and created the basis for subsequent discussion on the connection between faculty priorities and student success. Without FACCC’s intervention the entire conversation would have been driven by the educational reformers, a scary prospect at best. It’s important to recognize that despite the significant policy difference we had with Senator Lowenthal on SB 1456, we had developed a close relationship with him over the years which continued after his election to Congress. He took the extraordinary step of amending his bill in our direction even though we did not remove our opposition to it (there was another provision on financial aid that we wanted removed as it had nothing to do with student success).

As an aside, the AB 1741 drama exposed the underbelly of community colleges, which also correlates to today. In the few months that the Chancellor’s Office was on a full court press against our bill and supporting the official Student Success Act, SB 1456, several college

presidents, a few district CEOs, and even members of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors privately pulled me aside to encourage FACCC to keep up the fight. While all admitted that they were under tremendous pressure to tow the party line, few agreed with either the process or the outcome, and they definitely did not like supporting something they didn't believe in. (One lower level administrator told me that the Student Success Act would "kill her students." When asked why her district was supporting it, she told me she wasn't allowed to say anything.)

This hearkened back to the origins of FACCC in the 1950s and 60s when administrators quietly encouraged the then Junior College Faculty Association (FACCC's predecessor name) to keep up the fight to separate the then junior colleges from K-12. Administrators knew what was best for the students and for our colleges; they also recognized that it would be the faculty, not them, that would lead the charge.

My line during the Student Success days was that if I had a dime, not a dollar, for every administrator who privately supported us in our sponsorship of AB 1741 and opposition to SB 1456, I'd be rich beyond compare.

I've long joked that my book on Proposition 92, the Community College Initiative, will be called, *How to Lose 57 Out of 58 Counties: Go Imperial!* In all seriousness, Proposition 92 began with great intentions and had tremendous significance for community colleges despite its drubbing at the polls.

Prop 92 emanated from the Californians for Community Colleges, the same group that organized the big rally against Governor Gray Davis. Not long after his recall, the coalition funded a second poll to gauge voter interest in a ballot measure guaranteeing funding for community colleges while separating them from K-12 within the already approved Proposition 98. The K-12 connection, while once important, had become a political albatross, with community colleges continuing to lose millions in the process.

When the poll was commissioned in 2005, the economy was up, confidence was high, and voters expressed support—check that, extremely strong support—for shoring up community colleges. Our Democratic and Republican consultants both told us now was the time to pounce. The result was a fairly straightforward or complicated measure, depending on your vantage point, that would have accomplished three things: roll back student fees while limiting their ability to be increased; separate community colleges from K-12 within the overall Proposition 98 framework; allow the chancellor of the California Community Colleges the ability to appoint his or her own vice chancellors (a fairly obscure provision understood by few).

While the three original members of the Californians for Community College coalition, FACCC, the Community College League of California, and the Los Angeles College Faculty Guild, took painstaking efforts to neutralize the K-12 groups, the California Teachers Association decided to

oppose, pouring millions into the campaign (the community college wing of CTA, the Community College Association, supported Prop 92 but it had no ability to financially assist).

The Proposition 92 signature campaign was tense, with no guarantee that we would reach the minimum threshold. In a way, this tested the resolve of the California Community Colleges with their newfound political moxie. If the measure failed to qualify, we would have been like the emperor's new clothes, with no substance to our swagger. As such, we raised money like never before to supplement the volunteer signature gathering effort with paid signatures from both Democratic and Republican firms. The day the Secretary of State certified that we met the goal and were assigned the number 92—superstition and numerology play a role; that number didn't faze us—we were ready to roll.

My one prominent memory from the campaign was taking the lead on outreach to the ethnic press. I connected with newspapers serving the African-American, Latino, Asian, and Jewish communities. We wrote op-eds, conducted interviews, and placed paid advertisements for the measure. In a rare moment of levity, we noticed the same stock photograph used to promote 92 in the Jewish press was also on display by the opposing side in a completely different newspaper. I always wanted to meet those 18-24 year olds who posed for that stock photo, likely from another state, to inform them they had the distinction of simultaneously supporting and opposing a California ballot measure on community colleges.

Once 92 qualified for the ballot, the California Federation of Teachers joined the Californians for Community Colleges as a full and much needed partner. Their resources and energy helped out immensely, but not enough to overcome the CTA and changing landscape of California politics. As it happened, the Great Recession began December 2007 with Prop 92 scheduled in the February 2008 ballot (there were three statewide elections that year, February, June, and November). Voters were no longer as optimistic as they had been in 2005 and anything that could remotely result in a tax hike was subject to stricter scrutiny.

While the voters overwhelmingly rejected Prop 92, the politicians got the message. Community colleges might not yet have figured out how to win a ballot initiative, but they demonstrated they could get one qualified and run a legitimate campaign. That was worth a lot, so much so that when then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed the first round of cuts in the Great Recession, he largely bypassed the community colleges. It may not have been the victory we wanted, but it was a significant achievement nonetheless.

By 2017, I had started my 18th year at FACCC and had long ceased being the new kid on the block. At that point, I was the seasoned veteran on community college faculty budget and policy, with a sizeable list of former FACCC staffers now working as advocates in other capacities.

That year, all the lobbyists for California Community College faculty, whether in-house or on contract, had worked for FACCC (and for me). The California Community Colleges were contracting with David Balla-Hawkins, CTA had hired Jennifer Baker, and CFT had hired Bryan

Ha. Both Balla-Hawkins and Baker had been FACCC's Government Relations Director, with Ha having served as our Membership Director.

Within the FACCC staff that year, we made a significant shift in our internal operations, merging the government relations and communications positions while assigning two staff to these joint positions. With his background in lobbying, Austin Webster successfully added government relations to his communications portfolio (in fact, he proposed it), and we hired Cynthia Castillo from the political campaign world as his assistant. Recognizing that Castillo would one day register as a lobbyist, we contracted with another former FACCC Government Relations Director, Andrea York, to mentor her and provide additional lobbying assistance.

All told, there were seven of us representing community college faculty that year, four FACCC alumni plus two current FACCC staff and me. While there is no good English translation for the Yiddish word, *kvell*, other than bursting with joy and pride, I spent the year *kvelling* over everyone's great work.

Both Webster and York have since moved on to different positions, with Castillo ensconced in her new role as a lobbyist. She has a new partner at FACCC, Stephanie Dowdle (now Goldman), who has taken on the other half of the government relations and communications team.

Runner Up: While not exactly a "runner up" like others in this article, I have to temper my pride in these former staffers with a note about the seductive nature of politics. The 1887 adage of Lord Acton, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is just as true in California today as it was in 19th Century England.

Sadly, I have all too often witnessed the corrosive nature of politics which sadly turns people into what they hate. Hubris is a staple of the political landscape which can eat at the hearts of those who are not careful. After 28 years as a registered lobbyist, I'm happy to be taking a break from the legislative gladiator arena in which winning is prioritized above and beyond everything else.

In 2012, we paid off the mortgage on the FACCC building, 20 years ahead of schedule. It was an emotional moment, which ensured the long term financial viability of the organization and sent a strong message that at age 59, we were not going away. I remember using an inexpensive blue Bic ballpoint pen to pay the final bill, and then sealing it in an envelope for posterity. It's my own brand of sardonic humor that someone will open it decades in the future wondering why we didn't have anything fancier.

Runner Up: Purchasing the FACCC office building was not easy. When I began in 1999, the organization had exactly \$16,000 in the bank on a \$1 million annual budget. The board had limited fiscal discipline and lacked a funding plan. The spending appetite was larger than the stomach could bear; a top to bottom culture change was needed.

Within two years, we had reduced the number of staff and instituted significant controls. There was a modicum of savings, enough to see the tide turning, although not enough to feel comfortable. At that point, the board voted to purchase a building and directed us to begin looking.

I found two commercial real estate brokers and informed both that we would work with whoever found us a place first. In December 2001, two months after 9/11 when the real estate market was still temporarily depressed, we received a call about a building that had just fallen out of escrow. The broker knew the circumstances behind the failed transaction and believed he could get it for us at a discount.

While the negotiations for the building weren't easy, finding a commercial lender to give us what would otherwise be a small loan was exceptionally tough. Our bank of 30 years basically laughed at us with other prominent lending institutions telling us up front that they were not interested. When we switched our search from the big to the small banks, we got a much warmer reception with the (then) Bank of Sacramento promising to give us an extra sweet deal if we moved our money there.

Needless to say, done and done. Not only did we enjoy a productive relationship with them, they refinanced our building twice, each time improving our interest rate and never asking for an early payment penalty. That allowed us to accelerate payment each month for a decade with one final balloon check to eliminate the note in 2012.

We're extremely happy in this office, less than two blocks from the Chancellor's Office and a mere four from the Capitol. Thankfully, we left our old office when we did, despite the objection of some of the FACCC staff at the time, as it was converted into the Citizen Hotel with little trace that it was ever an office building.

Runner Up: In either 2016 or 2017, I had received a call from a commercial developer wanting to discuss the sale of the FACCC building. Acting like he was offering us a great deal, he offered to triple our investment and land us within four blocks of our current location. Having done the negotiations for the FACCC building, I was insulted by the offer. Our building was worth more than three times our initial investment and there was no way we wanted to be another four blocks from the Capitol.

I told him that I would only consider speaking to him if he guaranteed us \$1.5 million net profit and a comparable setting within the same radius of both the Capitol and the Chancellor's Office (I emphasized that was the *starting* point of negotiations; afterward, he would be subject to the desires of the FACCC board). Upon hearing my terms, he quipped, "well, you're asking for a lot" to which I reminded him that he called me, not vice versa.

We have not spoken since.

Since announcing my retirement from FACCC, I have been asked to inventory the skills needed to be executive director. Without prejudicing the search for my replacement, I would list effective communications—both oral and written—at the top of what I believe is necessary to do this job effectively.

That skill was tested like never before in 2016 when the keynote speaker at the Advocacy & Policy Conference, our signature event for the year, decided to not show up and not tell us. A prominent UCLA faculty member, this individual had quite a following, so much so that a couple drove all the way from Albuquerque to Sacramento for our conference to hear him speak.

With slightly less than 15 minutes to go, I learned that he had not come (he feigned illness on the phone, which hardly explained his failure to tell us he wasn't showing, particularly after speaking with him about the event over a period of several months and having a signed contract in place). At that point, I was asked by my staff what I wanted to do—not much time to think—which exercised another tool in the executive director arsenal, the ability to make snap decisions and deal with the consequences later.

Not afraid of a microphone, I did an emergency fill-in, reprising a talk that I had given several times before about how California was essentially five states, each with its own socio-economic demographic, and how community colleges had to welcome students from all of these simultaneously. Unlike the times I had previously given that speech, I had few notes and no PowerPoint—it was mostly *impromptu*.

Thankfully, the audience was not only forgiving, but supportive. The ovation at the end felt sincere, even though a part of me wondered if I had simply received their sympathy.

As luck (or fate) would have it, two other speakers canceled on us the following day, but these were for legitimate and serious medical issues (including the wife of a legislator going into labor). We worked around those changes as well and got through the conference relatively unscathed.

Runner Up: That 2016 Advocacy & Policy Conference was not my first extemporaneous speech, although it was the one and only *impromptu* keynote of FACCC's signature annual event.

In 2011 or thereabouts, I had just completed a morning dentist appointment and called the office from the car to check in. We were holding a professional development event that day at Sacramento City College which I was scheduled to attend in the afternoon, but not as a presenter. After telling my staff that I was headed to the office, two started screaming “divert, divert.” I had no idea what that meant, except it seemed I now wasn't going to the office. It turned out that a speaker at our event had canceled and I was to take the microphone in roughly 20 minutes—again, nothing prepared. I literally have no recollection how it went. The acoustics in the room were so challenging, I doubt anyone heard me.

The following year, I had two other experiences of equal surprise. At one point, I had understood that I was attending a board meeting of a student services organization. I was expecting to walk into a small room to facilitate a dialogue about their needs. This was clearly a misunderstanding as the room in question was a big ballroom with several hundred people inside. When I arrived, they told me I was up (meaning, to give a speech) in five minutes. Oh my—here we go again!

Several months later, I was scheduled to present as part of a pre-conference program to another student services organization. This time I was prepared, or so I thought. When I arrived at the event in Monterey, a four hour drive from Sacramento, I asked how long the pre-conference program would last and who else was presenting. It was then I learned that the pre-conference schedule was three hours and I was it, all 180 minutes worth.

Once again, the mental wheels started turning when I decided there was no way to give a three hour speech; it would need to be three one hour talks. I told the audience that the first hour would be heavy duty policy (when they were most awake); the second, combining policy and politics; the third, a fun interactive advocacy training session. It all worked fine and went fairly quick. Between the second and third sessions, I gave a 10 minute break, which as normally happens, lasted longer. While waiting for the audience to return, I started telling jokes from the microphone—really bad ones at that—and threatened to keep going (I kept saying I had many more where those came from) unless people returned to their seats. I had no doubt that my career in stand-up comedy would end quickly.

Approved in 1960, the California Master Plan for Higher Education was expected to have a 15-year span. Forty years later it was still alive, albeit on life support. Budget cutbacks, tax reductions, and attacks of the “edu-reformer” community had neutralized much of its effectiveness. Each subsequent decade thereafter, the Legislature convened a panel to review the Master Plan and make recommendations for the future. At various times, this would occur twice in a decade, usually with a five year hiatus in between.

In 1999, the Legislature approved a resolution forming a new Master Plan review committee which began meeting the following year. From 2000-02 this joint panel of Assemblymembers and Senators, chaired by former Senator Dede Alpert, met for a seemingly endless number of meetings. Their goal was not simply to tweak the Master Plan, but reinvent it on the basis of cross cutting issues between the segments. As such, the Committee did not want to focus on segment specific problems but on issues common to all.

Moreover, this group did not want to limit themselves to higher education. It considered pre-K and K-12 as essential players in the discussion. It was wholesale change—including the possible elimination of local community college trustee boards—or bust.

Despite its ambitious start, the effort began to sputter in 2003 and by 2004, was barely active. Those of us who lobbied the Committee and provided testimony believed it was doomed to

failure. It was one thing to discuss cross cutting issues in the abstract; it was quite another to write legislation in this form.

In July 2002, the FACCC Education Institute Policy Committee sent Chair Alpert a 12-page letter detailing its analysis of the proposed Master Plan Review's impact on community colleges. We received the perfunctory acknowledgement for the letter and nothing more.

During the final days of the legislative session in August 2004, the Joint Legislative Master Plan Review Committee introduced several bills which they wanted vetted and approved in a single week. Since the last week of the legislative session is typically reserved for floor session only, this was extraordinary, particularly considering the ambitious nature of the bills and how little transparency would be involved.

Since the staff to the legislators had so little time to analyze these measures, they incorporated the FACCC EI Policy Committee's letter *verbatim* as the definitive community college analysis on the bills. I had no idea this had happened until I walked into the meeting room. That was also when I was told that they would expect me to testify on our observations. Although it had been two years since our letter had been sent, I did my best to explain FACCC's findings and recommendations.

As expected, little emerged from that effort. The Assembly is now on its second Select Committee on the Master Plan since then, with the current effort chaired by Marc Berman (I believe he stands a better chance for success because he is willing to be both patient and deliberate in this process). As an aside, I was one of the first advocates in Berman's office when he was appointed as chair. I shared with him the pitfalls of the 2000-04 effort and suggested that he take a long and hard look at higher education before suggesting changes. That's exactly what he is doing, with FACCC willing to help wherever possible.

Runner up: Before 1984, California Community Colleges were free. While there were fees for labs, activities, and parking, classes were completely subsidized by the public. Community college courses were considered an investment, not a cost, part of the California social compact. Former Governor Deukmejian completely destroyed that when he held up the state budget to impose fees on our students.

When I started at FACCC, community college fees were set at \$11 per unit; they quickly rose to \$18 per unit and then to \$26 in the early 2000s. In the waning days of Gray Davis and opening ones of Arnold Schwarzenegger, state revenues were tanking and the Legislature was continuing to redirect the community college statutory share of Proposition 98 funds to K-12.

In 2006, the state was on the path to fiscal recovery from its earlier slowdown (it turned out to be short lived because we had no idea what was coming). At that point, student enrollment stopped growing and it appeared the Legislature had set the fees too high. The Assembly was determined to lower fees and would not be bullied or steamrolled by the Senate (the upper house did not share the same enthusiasm for lowering fees).

Upon arriving at one of the final Assembly budget subcommittee hearings for the year, our then Government Relations Director informed me of the Assembly's desire to reduce fees and that the Assembly leadership wanted me to take the lead in testifying as aggressively as possible in support (I seem to remember hearing they wanted me to "knock it out of the park"). Following the short testimony of another lobbyist, I took the microphone at the hearing and did not let go until I hammered the point that the high-fee high-aid philosophy—then favored by the so-called education reformers—was utterly disastrous and needed to be changed. While I have no idea how long I spoke, we were successful in reducing fees, at least until the next recession, soon thereafter.

Runner up: The budget hearings during the Great Recession were an exercise in either theater or futility (or possibly both) depending on your perspective. It was clear that the Republicans would not agree to a tax increase without extracting several pounds of flesh which left the Democrats floundering on how best to salvage programs.

During one of these hearings on higher education, I noticed that senior staffers of the Democrats and Republicans were one-upping each other whenever their respective bosses, meaning the legislators, misspoke on the most picayune of details. It was enough to say that if they couldn't salvage the University of California, California State University, or the California Community Colleges, at least they could play *gotcha* when their opponent misstated a trivial fact. Watching this from the audience was completely nerve wracking.

At some point during the hearing, one of the Democratic lawmakers asked a budget representative of one of the four year systems to explain what he thought the first priority should be of the Legislature. The answer, not surprisingly, was to restore funding.

As much respect as I had for the advocates of the other segments, I found this answer to be completely unsatisfying. When it was my turn to speak in public comment, roughly 75 minutes later, I asked permission of the Chair to answer that same question in lieu of my prepared public comment. With permission granted, I explained that public higher education had once been a sacrosanct matter of bipartisan consensus, as Californian as sunshine, which had now devolved into partisan gamesmanship over inconsequential statistics. I suggested that the best thing the politicians could do was to figure out where there was still bipartisan agreement on higher education, and build from there. Once they understood that point, the money would follow.

If only they had listened.

Runner up: Back to the recession of the early 2000s, during one of the Assembly budget subcommittee hearings, former Assemblymember Mervyn Dymally asked the lobbyists for community colleges whether they thought the Legislature would raise student fees. While I thought that was an odd question, I understood where he was coming from. The Legislature at that time was prioritizing K-12 over community colleges and was continuing to view student fees as the way to backfill the money it was transferring from community colleges to K-12 in the then highly porous Proposition 98 split.

I frankly have no recollection of what I said at the hearing, but I do recall running into Dymally a day or two later on the streets of Sacramento. I told him that I had given a lot of thought to his question and came up with a better answer, “there will be a fee increase if you, the Legislature approve it; there won’t be one if you oppose it.” The onus was on them, not us, to determine what would happen.

When I started writing this, I thought it would be short, a few thousand words at most. Twenty two pages later, I still have more stories to share. Like anything else, there is usually an ending, whether it comes naturally or arbitrarily. I’m choosing to conclude the article here just as I’m deciding to step down and let someone else take the leadership of this magnificent organization. There’s no overarching reason for it other than it’s time.

I’m truly grateful for the opportunity to serve and wish everyone tremendous courage and good fortune ahead. In its 65-year history, FACCC has had exactly five executive directors (the first one hired 17 years after the organization was founded): Bill Plosser, Karen Angel, Paul Meyer, Patrick McCallum, and me. I have tremendous confidence in the endurance of FACCC, and that director #6 will surpass us all.