

## **March 17, 2026 Town Hall Recap**

*AI was utilized to support the development of this document. All questions asked were kept in their original format, and the responses from leadership were revised only for clarity while preserving the accuracy of what was shared during the March 17, 2026 Town Hall.*

Because of the sensitive nature of the Q&A, this town hall session was not recorded. Below is a summary of remarks, questions, and answers.

### **Opening Remarks**

Robin Parent, Vice Chancellor of Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff, welcomed attendees to the second town hall, noting participation both in-person and online, with more than 150 virtual attendees. Parent reminded participants that the session would not be recorded but reminded attendees that all questions and responses would be shared via UCCS News and the Healthy Campus Initiative website on Thursday. Attendees were encouraged to check the Healthy Campus website regularly, as FAQs are updated weekly based on questions from town halls, governance representatives, and the campus forum.

Parent highlighted opportunities for anonymous online submission and upvoting of questions and acknowledged that not all questions could be answered live. Attendees were encouraged to follow up via email, the website inquiry form, or by reviewing the more than 80 answered FAQs already available.

Chancellor Jennifer Sobanet then addressed the community, acknowledging the stress and uncertainty many are experiencing during this phase of the budget process. She emphasized the emotional difficulty of this moment, expressing that she personally feels the same anxiety, concern, and intensity many on campus are navigating. She reiterated that the purpose of the town halls and other engagement, via Student Government, Staff Council, Faculty Assembly, and additional college /division forums, is to provide transparency, support, and connection during this period of significant change.

The Chancellor then outlined the timeline for ongoing work: the Provost's leadership team met Monday; the ELT met later that day; and SLT would meet the following day to finalize recommended approaches related to unallocated base, vacant lines, and operating budgets. These discussions will shape proposals to be presented to UBAC on March 30, followed by constituent feedback, additional UBAC review, and a town hall on April 1. She closed by asking the community to extend grace to one another, especially during tense discussions, and reiterated the institution's commitment to open communication throughout the process.

## **In-Person and Live Q&A**

**Question 1: Given that faculty and staff are being threatened with firing over a budget and enrollment crisis they didn't create, what are the repercussions for ELT? Why are people still being hired at six-figure salaries while people at 50K are being threatened with losing their jobs? There needs to be some balance in who is bearing the brunt of this economic crisis and I don't see anything happening to the people in ELT that brought us to this point.**

### **Response:**

Chancellor Sobanet began by reframing the terminology of “firing,” stressing that this process is not performance-based nor punitive. Any reduction in filled positions results from financial necessity, not employee capability. She emphasized that the university is committed first to analyzing all possible non-personnel solutions, such as reviewing unallocated base funds, analyzing vacant lines, and examining division budgets before moving to filled positions. This sequence reflects a deliberate attempt to minimize impact on individuals.

Regarding hiring, leadership acknowledged that concerns about newly posted higher-level positions are understandable. They clarified that the only positions currently being filled are those that are mission-critical, legally required, or essential for student services, safety, and operational continuity. Many are interim positions that the campus has repeatedly urged leadership to stabilize. Chancellor Sobanet explained that filling certain vacancies now may actually protect filled positions elsewhere by ensuring core services remain functional and that campus operations do not deteriorate during a turbulent financial period.

The panel also discussed the Position Review Committee, which meets weekly to evaluate every vacancy based on updated data, criticality, and alignment with institutional priorities. They stressed that these decisions are not made lightly and that slowing the pace of hiring is a likely next step. Leadership acknowledged the emotional frustration within the community and agreed that perceptions of imbalance are understandable in moments of institutional strain.

They reiterated that preserving filled positions is a core value guiding the university’s decisions. Leadership stated that they are committed to being transparent, empathetic, and thoughtful as the university navigates its financial challenges.

**Question 2: What efforts is the CU system making to support UCCS as a member of the CU family? Are there active initiatives to provide guidance, collaboration, or financial support as we work through our current challenges?**

**Response:**

The panel emphasized that the CU System is providing robust support across several areas. The Chancellor noted that both the Board of Regents and the System President are fully engaged, with expectations for UCCS to navigate the crisis successfully but also with clear expressions of trust and partnership. System leadership is offering consistent guidance as UCCS untangles the underlying causes of its multiyear structural deficit.

UCCS is receiving direct support from the system's Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Communications team, expanding institutional capacity during a time when campus leaders are managing unprecedented workloads. These teams are assisting in evaluating financial controls, human resources processes, and opportunities to align UCCS operations more closely with system standards, all of which support long-term institutional stability.

In Advancement, specifically, system resources have been allocated to strengthen strategic fundraising, including initiatives focused on scholarships to increase student access. Leadership emphasized that this targeted support has already enhanced campus capacity to cultivate donors and strengthen philanthropic momentum during a challenging time.

System support also includes one-time financial resources, such as the recent \$3 million contribution from the CU Foundation, which is being used strategically to stabilize key initiatives. Leadership reinforced that the system is offering not only financial backing but emotional and operational support as campus leaders work through complex decisions.

**Question 3: What conversations are happening to help bring the campus community together during a time of heightened tension and self-preservation?**

**Response:**

Chancellor Sobanet acknowledged that the current period, between the initial January 30 campus communication and the March 30 UBAC proposal presentation, is likely the most emotionally difficult phase of the entire process. She explained that uncertainty often fuels fear, self-protection, and a sense of disconnection, all of which are natural human responses during times of institutional stress. Leadership emphasized that this moment is deeply unsettling precisely because decisions are still being formed, and the outcomes are not yet known.

To support community cohesion, leadership is focusing on collective processing, reinforcing the importance of town halls, governance meetings, and informal conversations across units. The Chancellor described the emotional arc the campus may experience in the coming weeks: moving from fear and anxiety into grief about inevitable changes, then gradually into support, and eventually toward generativity and collaborative problem-solving. She noted that this progression is normal and that acknowledging these emotional stages is essential to maintaining trust and humanity throughout the process.

The panel added that while the budget crisis is consuming attention, the campus is also entering a season of profound joy for students, including spring traditions, year-end milestones, commencement preparations, and celebrations of student achievement. The community was encouraged to remain grounded in the university's mission, reminding attendees that supporting students is a shared purpose that can provide clarity and resilience during a stressful time.

The panel affirmed that belonging, compassion, and shared commitment must remain central in the weeks ahead. The Chancellor urged everyone to extend grace, assume good intentions, recognize shared emotional realities, and participate fully in the opportunities for dialogue and connection offered across campus.

**Question 4: Our team is significantly understaffed and many employees are being asked to take on multiple roles without adequate compensation. How will the Chancellor and Chief of Staff support staff moving forward with limited budgets?**

**Response:**

The panel acknowledged that this concern is widespread and deeply felt. The Chancellor emphasized that the university must rethink not only staffing levels but also the nature of work itself. She described a commitment to examining what can be stopped, not just what can be made more efficient. Leadership noted that campus processes have grown increasingly complex over time, and simplifying administrative workflows is essential to reducing burnout and creating a more sustainable work environment.

Examples were provided, including process improvements and transitioning outdated systems into more modern, streamlined approaches. While these changes require short-term effort, they are intended to reduce long-term workload and create more sustainable roles.

The panel also reinforced that divisions are actively questioning long-standing practices, identifying redundancies, eliminating unnecessary tasks, and collaborating across units to share work that was previously duplicated. This includes reevaluating processes when positions become vacant, allowing divisions to rethink structures, update workflows, and reprioritize tasks before rehiring.

Leadership reiterated that while financial constraints limit the ability to increase staffing or compensation immediately, meaningful improvements can still be achieved through redesign, collaboration, modernization, and intentional decisions to discontinue low-priority activities. They affirmed a commitment to empathy, transparency, and shared problem-solving with staff during this period.

**Question 5: Why does it seem that no decisions have been made yet? Last year we were told FY26 would be bad, yet here we are in March without decisions.**

**Response:**

Chancellor Sobanet clarified that significant work has been underway for many months, even if specific reduction proposals have not yet been presented publicly. Since May 2025, the University Leadership Team, which includes vice chancellors, deans, and shared governance leaders, has been meeting regularly to analyze finances, discuss efficiencies, explore revenue opportunities, and examine structural imbalances. These meetings included retreats, working sessions, and division-level reviews.

The Chancellor explained that the university's financial picture was more complex than expected. When Jeff Greene, the interim Vice Chancellor for Finance, arrived, he found major issues that required deep analysis: internal transfers were inconsistent, financial controls had weakened over time, and reserves were being used without clear understanding of long-term impacts. The campus spent months rebuilding foundational understanding of budgets, reserves, and one-time funding commitments before reliable decisions could be made.

Leadership emphasized that January 30 to March 30 is the normal annual budget cycle window for developing reduction scenarios, sharing them with UBAC, gathering feedback, and making final decisions. While this timing feels slow given the stress the campus is experiencing, it aligns with system and state processes.

They also noted that UCCS has spent the past two years evaluating the \$14–17 million dollars in activities funded by one-time money, determining which activities must be stopped, which will end when funding runs out, and which must be incorporated into the base budget. This work has been extensive, consequential, and critical to understanding the structural deficit.

The panel reiterated that decisions are coming soon and that the campus is nearing the point where proposals can be shared. They asked for patience during this final stage of planning and refinement.

**Question 6: How are you looking at the hierarchy and the bare minimum operational needs? Staff fear multiple years of cuts—has worst-case scenario planning been done?**

**Response:**

The panel confirmed that this is exactly the purpose of the multiyear dynamic budget model. Rather than addressing each year in isolation, with repeated cuts and constant instability, the dynamic model provides a comprehensive view of required reductions, necessary investments, and revenue-growth strategies over several years. This allows the university to understand what is needed for financial sustainability and avoid ongoing cycles of emergency decision-making. The model incorporates mandated cost increases, the integration of one-time-funded activities into the base budget, Healthy Campus investment priorities, and realistic projections for enrollment, revenue, and state support. Leadership emphasized that this approach gives a clearer picture of both worst-case scenarios and pathways toward stability.

The panel shared that they received more than 600 suggestions from the spring efficiency survey, which provided insight into redundancies, duplicative work, outdated processes, and opportunities for modernization. Divisions are reviewing these findings and identifying areas where processes can be redesigned, automated, or eliminated.

Leadership also highlighted benchmarking efforts across campus, including examining best practices in Public Safety staffing, OIT modernization, Facilities operations, and academic workflow redesign. Division leaders are reevaluating every vacancy, rethinking structures, and using attrition as an opportunity to assess long-term needs.

The Chancellor also acknowledged that staff anxiety is understandable and reinforced that the goal is not to revisit cuts year after year. Instead, the university is building a transparent, grounded, multiyear strategy that addresses the current deficit while laying the foundation for stability and growth.

**Question 7: How are the Deans thinking about generating enrollment? What are the strategies?**

**Response:**

The deans shared a broad range of enrollment strategies underway across colleges. Several highlighted the importance of flexible learning models, including expanding 8-week offerings, enhancing hybrid and online modalities, and increasing cross-listed courses to improve efficiency and student choice. These changes help meet the needs of diverse learners, including working adults, military-affiliated students, and students balancing caregiving responsibilities.

Multiple colleges are strengthening concurrent enrollment partnerships with school districts, recognizing that many high school seniors now enter UCCS with significant college credit. Deans discussed exploring co-teaching models, combined sections, and new pathways to align more effectively with K–12 systems. They emphasized that the “big blur” between secondary and postsecondary education requires universities to rethink traditional structures and engage more deeply with high school curricula and teachers.

Program innovation is also a major focus. Deans described efforts to create new accelerated pathways, including bachelor’s-to-master’s programs and statewide apprenticeships designed to address critical workforce shortages, such as in K–12 education, where some districts have lacked math teachers for years. Colleges are also exploring opportunities related to AI and the future of work, anticipating that demand for human-centered skills will grow even as workforce needs evolve.

Military and veteran students remain a priority across colleges. Deans commended the strong partnerships with Military and Veteran Affairs and highlighted efforts to develop flexible online and hybrid course options that meet benefit requirements and support student success. Colleges are working closely with admissions to refine messaging for prospective students and ensure clearer, more compelling communication about UCCS’ distinctive strengths.

Finally, deans emphasized that enrollment strategy is not solely about recruitment and that retention is equally critical. Colleges are reducing curricular barriers, revising prerequisites, enhancing advising partnerships, and focusing on supporting students toward timely degree completion.

**Question 8: For those faculty and staff who will be laid off, will they receive payout, insurance coverage, etc.? How will they be supported?**

**Response:**

Leadership affirmed that any employee or faculty member affected by reductions will receive a formal separation package, which is currently being finalized in collaboration with Human Resources and the system office. This package will include financial support, a clear transition timeline, and guidance to assist with future employment. The goal is to provide individuals with the stability, time, and resources necessary to navigate the transition.

One of the most important commitments leadership emphasized is that no one will be abruptly terminated. Employees will not be called into an unexpected meeting and asked to leave immediately or lose access to their accounts. Instead, notifications will occur in person, with supervisors and HR present, and employees will retain access through June 30. This runway is designed to allow affected employees to plan for their next steps, explore new opportunities, and make informed decisions.

Leadership acknowledged that in past years, separation processes may not have reflected the university's values. Staff Council requested a more compassionate approach, and leadership has responded by designing a process grounded in respect, transparency, and dignity. This includes a more humane notification structure, dedicated transition support, and coordination with sister campuses to share job opportunities across the CU System.

They reiterated that the individuals affected are valuable employees whose positions are being eliminated due to financial realities, not performance issues. Leadership expressed empathy for the fear and disruption these changes bring and emphasized their commitment to supporting people fully through the transition.

## **Question 9: Since the censure vote, what has leadership done?**

### **Response:**

Leadership began by acknowledging the seriousness of the censure vote, noting that it reflects deep concern, frustration, and emotional strain across the campus. The Chancellor emphasized that rebuilding trust requires consistent action, transparent communication, and increased opportunities for dialogue. She reiterated that she and the ELT are taking the feedback to heart.

Before the vote, leadership had already been engaged in extensive shared governance work, including weekly meetings with UBAC, retreats with shared governance leaders, and the development of detailed FAQs to increase transparency. However, since the censure vote, they have taken additional steps to strengthen engagement and ensure that the university community is more fully informed.

These actions include deeper budget conversations with shared governance chairs, division leaders, and faculty representatives; increased opportunities for small-group meetings; and more direct conversations about communication gaps and areas for improvement. Leadership has also invited faculty members to “stress test” the budget explanations to ensure clarity and accuracy, and to provide feedback on how to communicate complex information more effectively.

The Chancellor explained that feedback from governance leaders has directly influenced planning decisions, though leadership recognizes they have not always communicated those impacts clearly. She committed to doing better in acknowledging how faculty, staff, and student input shapes decisions in real time.

It was shared that they have provided detailed budget reports to deans and division heads, including operating budgets, unallocated base analysis, and vacancy data, while reconciling all financial information to ensure accuracy. These improvements represent an intentional effort to restore financial clarity and rebuild confidence in institutional processes.

**Question 10: Are the reverse-engineered targets or college-level expectations going to be available after March 30?**

**Response:**

Leadership clarified that the university is not returning to across-the-board percentage cuts or predetermined division targets, which campus feedback clearly opposed. Instead, the university is using a more collaborative, iterative, and comprehensive approach that considers both institutional priorities and division-level impacts. The March 30 UBAC meeting will include formal recommendations developed through SLT and ULT discussions. These recommendations will be shared with UBAC representatives, who will then bring them to constituents for feedback before final decisions are made in the second week of April. Leadership emphasized that this timeline aligns with the system office's release of budget scenarios and is necessary for aligning campus planning with Board of Regents and state legislative processes.

Chancellor Sobanet reiterated that this approach ensures recommendations are grounded in data, informed by shared governance, and sensitive to the unique needs and structures of individual colleges and divisions. The goal is to create a transparent, equitable process that strengthens long-term stability rather than repeating past patterns of one-year fixes.

**Closing Remarks**

The Chancellor thanked attendees for their engagement and acknowledged that the town hall ran slightly over time. She reiterated that a recap of the town hall will be posted on UCCS News and the Healthy Campus website, and remaining unanswered questions will be addressed through updated FAQs. Attendees were reminded that questions can be submitted at any time through the online feedback form. The next town hall is scheduled for April 1, with details to be shared on March 30 following spring break.