CU shared governance leaders advocate for continued state investment[1]

Higher education must remain a critical investment for the state of Colorado, even in the face of a daunting $800 million state budget shortfall. This was the prevailing message of CU President Todd Saliman and the university's shared governance leaders who testified last week before the state's Joint Budget Committee (JBC) at its annual hearing on higher education.

Saliman invited CU's shared governance leaders to participate in the hearing again this year – the only Colorado university leader to do so – with each offering brief testimony about the importance of state funding for CU and higher education statewide, and the value CU brings to Colorado. The Jan. 9 hearing preceded Wednesday's start of the 2026 state legislative session.

Joining Saliman at the hearing were Faculty Council Chair Jorge Chavez, Staff Council Co-Chairs Ja'Net Hurt and Kimberly Slavsky, and Intercampus Student Forum Vice Chair Camden Sharkey. CU Board of Regents Chair Callie Rennison also testified before the committee.

"Investments from the state are critical to support our students," Rennison said after expressing gratitude to the JBC for providing funding last year at a level that allowed CU and other institutions statewide to keep tuition in check. "The Board of Regents is focused on student success – in particular, improving student retention and graduation rates for all our students – and supporting our employees to recognize the incredible work of our staff and faculty. This is paramount, as we want to do all we can to ensure that CU reflects all of Colorado's communities and is a top choice for Colorado high school graduates."

The governor's proposed budget request for the 2026-27 fiscal year falls more than $58 million short of covering the base core minimum costs for institutions statewide. The funding challenges for higher education exacerbate issues with competitive salaries and basic cost of living raises for thousands of CU employees, as well as managing tuition increases for students and their families.

"Your support in funding the full base core minimum cost increase will help the university recruit and, more importantly, retain talented and dedicated staff who serve our students and support our faculty," Hurt said. "To remain a competitive employer and economic driver in the state, we must adequately compensate our employees."

State lawmakers ultimately develop and approve the state's budget in consultation with the governor. Initial recommendations for state funding levels are developed by the JBC and must be approved by a majority of state lawmakers before being forwarded to the governor for his final approval.

"It takes people to educate people, and in partnership with university staff and leadership, faculty maintains a core focus on supporting student success," Chavez said. "Faculty face the same inflationary salary pressures that our non-faculty staff face. The university also has the added challenge of competing with the pay offered by peer institutions and outside industries."

Sharkey offered JBC members the student perspective.

"Many students take out loans to afford an education. Your investment keeps college accessible and tuition stable for me, my friends and fellow students," he said. "Additionally, your support helps fund compensation for the faculty we learn from and staff we rely on … who help us pursue our dreams."

Joining Saliman in representing the state's higher education institutions at the hearing were Colorado School of Mines President Paul Johnson, Colorado State University Chancellor Tony Frank and University of Northern Colorado President Andy Feinstein. Each leader thanked JBC members and their predecessors for supporting higher education and Colorado students in previous years and requested sufficient funding to cover their institutions' base core minimum costs despite budget challenges.

"We understand the pressure you're under. Our request is that you consider (higher education) the same way you

consider other state agencies when you're thinking about the core components of operating: compensation, benefits and inflation," Saliman told JBC members. "You know better than anyone that your decisions have a direct impact on us and our ability to keep tuition in check, pay our employees and maintain our facilities. We thank you for your support in the past and humbly ask that you do what you can to dig deep for us again this year."

During the hearing, Saliman and his colleagues noted the significant economic impact their institutions have on the state – the CU system alone generated $12.2 billion in economic impact across Colorado last year – as well as the vital role they play in educating and training the state's workforce.

Saliman and his colleagues reiterated points at the hearing that were outlined in a joint letter sent to the JBC at the start of the year from higher education leaders statewide.

The 2026 Colorado state legislative session began Wednesday and is expected to conclude May 13. For information about CU's State Government Relations Team, the lead legislative liaison for the university, as well as current state legislation, visit cu.edu/office-government-relations/state-relations[2].

CU faculty expand Coursera offerings with AI-powered learning experiences[3]

Faculty members from CU Anschutz, CU Denver and UCCS have launched three new Coursera specializations and one new course over the past year, expanding CU's offerings on the open global platform.

The new offerings cover a wide range of subjects, from the fundamentals of coding with artificial intelligence and health care applications of AI, to agile systems engineering and cultural awareness in professional teams.

Coursera learners can experience new generative AI-powered features such as a virtual assistant with personalized support and resources, a role play tool for practicing soft skills with an AI persona, as well as AI dubbing and academic integrity tools.

Since the CU system began offering courses on Coursera in 2013, faculty across CU Anschutz, CU Denver and UCCS have developed 143 courses and 34 specializations. Together, they have drawn more than 2.2 million unique learners and 3.2 million total course enrollments worldwide, underscoring CU's leadership in accessible, high-quality online education. CU Boulder also offers open content and degrees on Coursera through a standalone contract with the platform.

CU students, faculty and staff may take any CU-created Coursera course for free through CU on Coursera. Instructions for enrollment are available on the university's Employee Services website[4].

New offerings

Vibe Coding Fundamentals
Instructor: **Scott Reed,** Ph.D., associate professor of chemistry, CU Denver
Designed for beginners, this course introduces learners to building AI-driven applications – no prior coding experience required.

Team Success Through Cultural Awareness
Instructor: **Brenda J. Allen,** Ph.D., professor emeritus of communication, CU Denver
This course helps professionals deepen their understanding of cultural dynamics in the workplace, fostering inclusive teamwork and effective collaboration across differences.

Agile Systems Engineering
Instructor: **J. Morgan Nicholson,** Ph.D., lecturer of engineering, UCCS
Focused on early career systems engineers and technical leaders, this course outlines traditional Systems Engineering methods and tools to guide the creation of complex systems.

AI for Health Care Systems
Instructor: **Jiban Khuntia,** Ph.D., associate professor of business, CU Denver
Aimed at health care professionals and others interested in AI's role in health systems, this course explores how artificial intelligence can improve care delivery, efficiency and innovation.

Faculty interested in developing new Coursera courses or specializations can contact jaimie.henthorn@cu.edu[5] for more information.

Excellence in Leadership Program builds skills and knowledge for senior CU leaders [6]

Buffaloes enjoy record-setting academic fall semester [7]

UCCS ranked No. 1 in Learfield Directors' Cup fall standings [8]

With rural Colorado needing teachers, Valerie Sherman and T-PREP are answering the call [9]

'A second chance at life': CU doctor helps patients in underserved communities get liver transplant care[10]

Federal update: FY26 appropriations, H-1B visas, more[11]

From Jan. 9, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on FY26 Appropriations, H-1B Visas, NIH Court Cases on F&A and Canceled Grants, NCAR Letter, DOJ ED Opinion Memo and CDC Vaccination Recommendations.

Click here to read the post.[12]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[13] page.

Cina joins CU Department of Surgery as Division Head of Pediatric Surgery[14]

Chopra wraps 35-year career at CU Denver [15]

Allen named UCCS Employee of the Quarter [16]

Central High School enters new STEM partnership with CMU, CU Boulder Engineering[17]

'People want to look good': Researcher hopes redesigned walker will remove stigma[18]

Weekly Wisdom | Chancellor Jennifer Sobanet, University of Colorado–Colorado Springs[19]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/cu-shared-governance-leaders-advocate-continued-state-investment[2] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/state-relations[3] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-faculty-expand-coursera-offerings-ai-powered-learning-experiences[4] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/professional-growth-training/training-services/coursera[5] mailto:jaimie.henthorn@cu.edu[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/excellence-leadership-program-builds-skills-and-knowledge-senior-cu-leaders[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/buffaloes-enjoy-record-setting-academic-fall-semester[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-ranked-no-1-learfield-directors-cup-fall-standings[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/rural-colorado-needing-teachers-valerie-sherman-and-t-prep-are-answering-call[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/second-chance-life-cu-doctor-helps-patients-underserved-communities-get-liver-transplant[11] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-fy26-appropriations-h-1b-visas-more[12] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-1926[13] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[14] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cina-joins-cu-department-surgery-division-head-pediatric-surgery[15] https://connections.cu.edu/people/chopra-wraps-35-year-career-cu-denver[16] https://connections.cu.edu/people/allen-named-uccs-employee-quarter[17] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/central-high-school-enters-new-stem-partnership-cmu-cu-boulder-engineering[18] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/people-want-look-good-researcher-hopes-redesigned-walker-will-remove-stigma[19] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/weekly-wisdom-chancellor-jennifer-sobanet-university-colorado-colorado-springs