[music] (male announcer) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look at how education enriches our community. And now, here's your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff, and I am delighted that you could join us. We have a really important conversation for today's program: redefining Pima's mission given the realities that are floating around within the state. And my guest for this half hour is Dr. Roy Flores who is the Chancellor of Pima Community College. Dr. Flores, thank you so much for making the time.

(Dr. Flores) Well, thank you, and good morning to you.

(Trasoff) Good morning. Um, we've spent the last months on this program really talking about Pima's role in this community. And it is powerful, and it is unique, in that you fill so many niches, or niche, within this community. Pima has 1700 community college, um, Adult Ed students who earned their GED, um, in the last school year. You have, you touch 74,000 students every year; that is a phenomenal number. You have 1 in 3 students at the U of A who have taken a class at Pima at some point or continues to double-enroll. More than 5,000 local employees receive contract training through Pima's Workforce Development program. You produce nurses, aviation mechanics, EMT, machinists, law enforcement officers, auto mechanics, respiratory therapists. Nursing is the best, one of the best in the state, if not the best. So, given all the things that you do, we have a legislature that is cutting back your funding. How do you maintain that mission, that excellence and that breadth, when your funding is being cut so dramatically?

(Dr. Flores) Well, I think it's, it's no longer possible to maintain the same breadth. We're going to ensure that whatever we do will be quality. We want to continue to be one of the best community colleges in the nation, but we simply cannot sustain enrollments of 74,000. The, uh, the reality is that it looks like we're going to have a 55% cut in appropriations from the state, so we quickly had to fill a gap of $9 million, literally, within weeks. Uh, I think it's going to be important for, for all of us to recognize that with those levels of funding from the state, it's no longer possible to do what we have done in the past. What, what it means, just to put it in perspective, the state will now be providing only 3% of our revenue. And they will only be paying $305 per full-time equivalent student when it costs us over $6,000 to educate a student. And in nursing, closer to $18,500, so, it's a long way from $300 to $18,000. We have to find different ways of, of getting that done. The, uh...

(Trasoff) Could we talk about your funding sources? Because I think it's important for people to understand, you have three primary sources of funding.
(Dr. Flores) We do. We have, of course, local funding, local tax revenue, and, uh, that’s a function of the value of real estate, and...

(Trasoff) Which has gone down.

(Dr. Flores) Has gone down. And new construction and such as that, which, of course, has stagnated. So that, that particular piece of it, that one part of the, uh, funding stream, uh, is not going to be robust in the near future. It’s going to be stagnant or grow slowly at best. And then, tuition is the other part of it. Uh, our students are not going to be able to afford the kind of tuition that’s, that they would have to pay at universities, uh, across the nation. So that we need to make sure that, that we keep our tuition levels relatively low.

Now, the tuition increase for next year is going to be high by our standards but not high by national standards or university standards. So again, those two sources of revenue are, are not going to be robust. We’re not simply going to say to students, “We’re going to double your tuition.” And we’re not going to generate that much additional money from local taxes. And then when the state cuts us 55%, you can see that we’re in a situation that requires more than just “business as usual” at the College.

(Trasoff) I mean, that’s really overwhelming when you talk about that, because you have three sources: tuition, state appropriations, and property tax revenue. One is being dramatically cut, cut more than in half, and the other two are, are less than robust.

(Dr. Flores) Anemic.

(Trasoff) "Anemic," good word. So, how on earth can you pull this together, and what are some of the changes that you’re going to have to make? I mean, you already made some changes over the last two years when you got your first appropriation cut of about 30%.

(Dr. Flores) We did. We’ve continued to reduce administration, of course. Uh, we have, uh, 13 faculty positions we’re not going to fill this year; we’re filling about half, half of the vacancies, and half will remain vacant at least for the next year. We’ve suspended, uh, all kinds of, uh, Professional Development, like sabbaticals and, and—and other, other training, which, of course is very important, because when you have fewer people, they have to do more, and they have to keep up with, with changes in technology and changes in the workplace. So that is a bit of a challenge. And, uh, we’re, um, no longer able to support daycare centers or childcare centers. What we have to do is focus on mission-critical activities and programs and services, and we can’t do more than that.

The, uh, we think it’s going to be important, also, to, to look at our, our entrance requirements. Right now, the College will enroll anyone, really. Uh, you don’t need a high school diploma, or a GED, or other evidence that you can actually succeed in college. We can’t afford that anymore. If you don’t have a high school diploma or a GED or can test into college, test and show that you’re college-ready, we simply can’t enroll you, because the choice between that and, and maintaining our, our Nursing program and the other programs is really quite real and stark.
The other thing we’re finding is that some folks are coming to us with, um, with so little preparation, even if they do have high school diplomas, that they’re testing in math and reading and writing at levels that are middle-school levels, where we want to ensure that, that Pima Community College continues to be one of the best colleges in the nation. We certainly are not the best middle school in the nation. We’ve not been that successful with people who need that kind of remediation. We have been successful with those that need a little bit of refreshing and some developmental work, and we’re going to continue to—to, uh, be available to people that, that require developmental math and developmental writing and reading, but not for those that require so much that, that—that our data show that we’ve not been successful in getting them through.

(Trasoff) That’s gotta be hard though, ‘cause that’s one of the things Pima has held proud, is open enrollment of, of anybody can come and make the attempt. Not everybody's going to succeed. But you’re really going to have to be much more discerning, and you’re going to have to revent the Developmental Ed aspects.

(Dr. Flores) We are, and we’re going to have a major effort in these next two years in our plan to really, uh, improve the success rate in Developmental Education. But we also know that there are some that the success, the likelihood of success is just very low, and we have to put our resources where, uh, that will benefit the greatest number for our community. Now the choice between providing an occupation program for someone who’s been laid off, perhaps already has a Bachelor’s degree, but now isn’t working and needs to pay the mortgage and pay the bills and rear the children, and someone who is at the fifth-, sixth-, seventh-grade level, with whom we’ve not been very successful, I think, is fairly straightforward. We’re going to have to continue to maintain our occupational programs, because they are the lifeblood of community college.

(Trasoff) And the lifeblood of the community.

(Dr. Flores) Precisely.

(Trasoff) Because you’re really talking about helping people continue on with their lives and not become an economic burden on the community, but instead, contributing.

(Dr. Flores) Right, precisely, precisely.

(Trasoff) So, I mean, it—it’s hard for me to even grapple with how you begin this kind of an overhaul, because it is a change in mission, or a modification. I mean, your core mission is still there.

(Dr. Flores) The core mission remains the same, but we can’t, we can’t continue [wry chuckle] doing what we’ve been doing when, with—with a lot less money. That’s just simply the reality of it. We have to pay our bills, and, you know, the checks can’t bounce. They actually have to be, have to be paid.

(Trasoff) So you were talking about tuition increases that in the past have been relatively modest, at about 4% a year. So, what is it that you’re looking forward to?
(Dr. Flores) Well, this, in the past, we’ve increased tuition $1.50 per semester credit-hour, $2 per semester credit-hour. We’re going to be looking at at least $5 per semester credit-hour this year and perhaps more next year.

(Trasoff) How does that gap get filled for people who are just barely making it now? Is there, through the Foundation, is that where there’s scholarship assistance? Because the College and the Foundation are separate.

(Dr. Flores) Right.

(Trasoff) And you have to have a balanced budget.

(Dr. Flores) Well, for those individuals who, who are, uh, are low-income, the Pell Grant will cover the increase, because right now, the maximum Pell Grant far exceeds the maximum cost of going to Pima Community College. So for many of those, it’ll simply be a pass-through. Where it begins to be a struggle is for the lower-middle class, the ones that aren’t eligible for Pell Grants that are working, now, fewer hours, and, uh, that might be a little bit of a struggle for them. Although, I—I, I still think that, that when you look at the tuition we’ll be asking for next year, we’ll, we’ll still be among the lowest in the nation and certainly among the lowest in the state.

(Trasoff) So how else are you looking at making up for this dramatic decrease? You’ve talked about, um, not filling some positions, and you’re going to change admissions policies. Does that mean you’re going to have fewer students? You’re not going to be able to do the 74,000.

(Dr. Flores) Right. Uh, within the next few years, we’ll have to reduce the College by at least 10%. And that, I think, is sustainable, at least given our revenue streams over time. But we’ve, we can’t sustain the level where we are now. And the other thing is that we, we have to recognize that the budget strategies that we employ cannot be budget strategies that yield temporary results. Let me point, to drive the point home, if, in fact, we thought the state was going to provide us the funding it did three years ago, then we could take temporary measures and do furloughs and these kinds of things, say, “Okay, well next year we won’t do furloughs, because things’ll be fine.” Um, things aren’t going to be fine, so we’re not going to get that money back. That means we’re going to have to reduce the positions not just keep the position and reduce the number of hours that position works.

(Trasoff) Okay, well we’ll talk about long-term as well as short-term and some of the other challenges that you’re facing in just a minute, after this break. I’m Nina Trasoff. I’m here talking with Dr. Roy Flores on Pima Community College Perspectives. We’ll be right back.

[music]

(male speaker) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives, for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need
to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it, and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500 or visit us on the Web at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

[Music]

(Trasoff) Welcome back to Pima Community College Perspectives. I’m Nina Trasoff having a conversation with Dr. Roy Flores, um, Chancellor of Pima Community College. And, Dr. Flores, we’ve been talking about all the cutbacks, and I understand that there’s really a budget challenge in this state.

(Dr. Flores) Indeed, there is.

(Trasoff) But there’s a vicious cycle, it seems to me, here, because some of the very things that are being cut back in Pima are elements that assist in economic development that can help the state get out of the recession.

(Dr. Flores) I don’t know if you know this, Nina. I’m from the Midwest. So, Indiana has a lot of folks who plant crops and farm and so on. And, uh, there’s an adage; the adage is that, “You don’t eat your own seed corn.” And here, I think, what we’re doing, uh, we’re focusing so much on the present and the hole that we’re in, that we’re, I think we might be forgetting that we have to lay the foundation for the future. And for future growth, you have to have a productive workforce. You have to have scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and all of it, and those folks do not produce out of ignorance. They have to be trained, they have to be educated, and there has to be an environment that fosters ideas. And it’s a competition of, of ideas, as much as anything, that drives economies forward.

And it’s not just, uh, tax cuts, although they might be important in certain circumstances. Businesses do not necessarily locate where you have the lowest tax rates. If that were the case, Bangladesh would very prosperous. They locate where they maximize their profits or maximize the net worth of the company, that is, the stock of the company. And, and they do that, uh, oftentimes where, where they find workers the most productive, and—and where the, uh, where the education systems K-12 through the university level are—are the best. And I think we have to ensure that we have the best education system K-12 through the university and graduate school and beyond in order, in order to survive in, and—and thrive in an evermore complex and competitive world.

We’re not just competing with Colorado and New Mexico and California. We’re competing with emerging countries, China, India, and others, that are growing much, much faster than we are,
developing, uh, many more engineers and scientists and trained workers than we are. So that’s, that’s what we need to look for. Uh, we—we can’t cripple our ability, our ability to compete in the future. Oftentimes, people talk about mortgaging our grandchildren’s future with decisions we make today. I think we will cripple the future of our, curtail those American dreams of our grandchildren if we don’t have good education systems for them.

(Trasoff) And that’s certainly something—Joe Snell’s been a guest on this program, of, of TREO, Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities. And Southern Arizona Leadership, uh, Conferences, uh, Shoopman, Ron Shoopman, has been on and have said the same thing.

(Roy Flores) Yes.

(Trasoff) That, uh, a good, educated workforce is the determining factor when companies are deciding where to work—where to relocate. Um, and Pima, you have a unique ability, and perhaps this is something that isn’t going to be impacted. I don’t know if the companies pay for this, but you have, for example, you created a Logistics and Supply Chain Management degree program within 60 days working with 27 local firms. Is that something that those companies fund in order to assist you in creating this program that benefits them by producing good workers?

(Dr. Flores) No, that was funded as part of the stimulus package.

(Trasoff) Ah-ha!

(Dr. Flores) That was deficit financing at the federal level, so...

(Trasoff) But yielding economic impact at the local level.

(Dr. Flores) Yes, of course it does. It yields economic impact at the time. And I’m not advocating for deficit spending in the federal budgets and all that kind of thing. All I’m suggesting is that we need to carefully calibrate. We don’t want to swing the pendulum too far one way or the other, sacrificing the competitive environment in the future. And I’m not, I’m not an oracle. I can’t tell you where, exactly where that is. But I think, I think we have to have recursive data and studies, and I think that’ll help decision makers and policymakers make those decisions. I do know that if we don’t have robust education systems, you’re going to know it. There, there’s not a state that’s prospering because, because of its education systems are bad. Not only in the United States, anywhere on Planet Earth.

(Trasoff) Well, that raises a question. Um, do you, is there an—I know this is a financial issue on the state level, but is there also an issue of how much value legislators are putting, or put, on education? And is there an ideology behind that, or is it...

(Dr. Flores) Well...

(Trasoff) Awareness? What is the issue?

(Dr. Flores) You know, I’m not sure. I know that legislature has to set priorities, as you and I have to set priorities in our personal budget, and as we at Pima Community College have to set priorities. We were
just talking about some of the things we can and can’t do. So I don’t know if it’s ideologically driven, but I—I do know that I would be more comfortable if the state had multi-year planning and—and, in fact, had some, some of those discussions, uh, where more people would participate and understand that, that there are trade-offs. You know, it’s one thing to focus on tax cuts for business, which is perfectly fine. But if that comes at the expense of, of better education, then, then you need to know that. I’m not the one making the decision, but I think that all these decisions have to be informed decisions with some idea of what is impacted next year, the year after, the year after that.

(Trasoff) So, going back to tuition increases and some of the things that you’re doing to try and adjust to this new reality. You’ve spoken in the past about differential tuition. Could you explain that a little?

(Dr. Flores) Yes. You know, not all programs cost the same, and not all courses cost the same. When I was teaching economics, uh, I think, probably the cost of economics was average, because it was, you know, it didn’t require a lot of instrumentation or, or a lot of equipment. In, in our Nursing Program, the state requirements are that you, you can’t have more than 10 students in the class, something along those lines. And in economics, you can pile in 35 and 40 students and have this wonderful lecture, hear Flores expound on his theories, uh, for better or worse. But the point is that it costs us a lot more to have, um, our aviation programs and our occupational programs than it does to teach psych, and soc, and econ, and English, and math. So what we’re doing here, in order to ensure that, that—that, um, we, we—we maintain our, our occupational programs, because they are so very important, is we are going to ask students to pay a little bit more for the course, those courses that are a little more expensive. And, uh, we think that that’s a, that’s the smart move, quite honestly.

(Trasoff) So it costs more to produce those courses.

(Dr. Flores) Oh, sure! You know, I’ve said the average, the average, uh, it costs us $6,000 to educate a student, on the average. And it, and it costs about $18,500 to educate a nurse. So that’s a huge differential if you’re looking at grand averages.

(Trasoff) Do you also factor in the fact that people who go through that level of professional training also will garner greater income throughout their lives?

(Dr. Flores) They get jobs. Sure, sure. Yeah, absolutely. Because they’ll be in a position to actually recoup. Now, I don’t know how many failed economists are out there looking for work, [chuckling] and, um, maybe we ought to give them a tuition break [both chuckle].

(Trasoff) Um, let’s switch subjects a little bit, because it’s a little, a—away from education, but it has an impact on education. There is uh, a senate bill that I know has caused concern among police chiefs at all of the universities, as well as the community colleges, certainly Pima, and that’s SB-1467, which is allowing, um, carry permits onto campuses. What, what is your view on how that will impact education?

(Dr. Flores) Well, I’ve sent out a release to the local press. For, for one, let me point out that the Faculty Senate is, is, uh, strongly opposed to, to that legislation. My own perspective, I—I don’t want to get
into, uh, arm wrestling about the Second Amendment and these kinds of things. You know, my job is to implement policy. And there are some, there are some things that I think should be considered. I think our local board should be the body that makes a decision regarding safety of the students. And it shouldn’t be the proverbial “one size fits all.”

So if our local board determined that, that everyone over age 21 should be armed, that’s, that’s fine. But, you know, we also have high schools within some of our campuses, Aztec Middle College, and we know that, that they’re under age 21. And we know that K-12 is going to be exempted from it; they’re not going to allow 6th and 7th-graders to be armed with concealed weapons, we hope. So for us, uh, I’m concerned about having, uh, some students with the capacity to have guns and others not. Because the average age at the College is 27. So everyone 21 and over, in Arizona, can, will be able to carry a concealed weapon, but those under 21 will not. So this is not a homogeneous group, and I don’t know exact—exactly how one implements that.

(Trasoff) Well, in the few minutes that we have left, and we have a couple of minutes only, we’ve talked about the problems confronting the financial issues and then this more recent issue that’s—that’s come, that’s come to the fore. But I’d really like to wrap the program up with something about, Pima fits a unique role in our community. You said “mission-critical.” That’s your focus. I would love to have that restated, about what Pima’s role is.

(Dr. Flores) Well, our mission is to develop our community through learning. Uh, it’s as simple as that. And that means working with the University of Arizona to help them, uh, graduate more people with Bachelor’s degrees, and—and providing opportunities for folks to have Masters and Doctorates. That’s why we’ve expanded our 2 + 2 programs. That means working with local business so that we’re able to educate 5,000 more of their employees; working with hospitals to educate their employees to become nurses. And really, that’s—that’s what, that’s what Pima’s about. Regrettably, we won’t be able to, to have the—the wide reach that we had, but it’ll still be wide. It’ll still be deep, and it’ll still be quality education. That’s not going to change.

(Trasoff) And Pima does have the reputation of being one of the best community colleges in the country.

(Dr. Flores) You can ask the Chancellor of the College, and he’ll say, “Of course!” And you can also go on the internet and find out from people around the country that, that they do, uh, uh, agree. They, themselves, are saying that Pima’s one of the best colleges in the nation. They, they’ve said it for some time.

(Trasoff) Well, Dr. Roy Flores, you’re facing many challenges as Chancellor of Pima Community College. I appreciate your being here today and helping the community better understand Pima’s role in this community. I’m Nina Trasoff. Thank you for joining us.

[music]

(male announcer) Local talk at its best.
(male speaker, with a drawl) What are you talkin’ about?

(announcer) Local talk at its best.

(male speaker, speaking distinctly) What are you talking about?