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Navigating the Sea Change

GREETINGS! IN THE WINTER ISSUE of *Trustee Quarterly*, I discussed the importance of expressing support and concern for one another, listening attentively, and doing what we can to offer support. This issue addresses the “sea change” in the higher education landscape presented to the 2026 Community College National Legislative Summit attendees back in February. Any major change of this nature is disruptive, and often this can demand so much attention that we neglect taking care of one another. Before you read this issue, I want to ask you to read it with care — with care for your fellow board members and especially care for your college president or chancellor in mind. The best way to navigate a sea change is to make sure the ship’s infrastructure and the crew are secure and ready to take on whatever challenges may rock the boat.

It is imperative that as we lead our colleges through challenging and inspiring transitions, we remain focused on why our colleges exist. They exist to give students the knowledge and other resources and opportunities they need to live up to their potential. They exist as continual providers of talented people who keep our communities thriving. Our colleges are engines of care that operate in the common good. We should always remember this, no matter what demands our attention, and we should remain rooted in care.

This is why our 2026 ACCT Leadership Congress theme is “Driving Change, Leading with Care: Where Vision Meets

Compassion.” It is uncommon to pair change and compassion, and that is exactly why the association is doing it. As our colleges adapt to changing federal and state policies and regulations, we must figure out how to apply artificial intelligence in ways that are beneficial to students, the community and the college staff alike, all while navigating so many other changes. We not only have an opportunity but a responsibility to do so. That way, we can move forward with mutual trust.

As I wrote last winter, we are all friends and colleagues in pursuit of a common good — and that includes potentially disruptive changes we make. College CEOs bear the brunt of pressure and criticism during times like this, and board members are affected, as well. By supporting one another, and by remembering even in busy times to communicate to our communities that what we do is out of care for them, we will all rise together.

Carol Del Carlo
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