Chancellor Lee Lambert  
Transcript on “Wake Up Tucson” Radio Program  
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>> Male Announcer: Wake up Tucson with Joe Higgins and Chris DeSimone on 1030 KVOI “The Voice”

>> Host 1: Alright, 25 minutes after the hour on the Wake up Tucson show. We go right from Doug Ducey to Lee Lambert. He is the chancellor of Pima Community College. Lee, good morning. Welcome back to the show.

>> Lee Lambert: Good morning. Great to chat with you both, Joe and Chris.

>> Host 1: So Lee, a couple quick things. I know we’re just talking about politics and workforce training. Your college which I’m an alumni of, is probably one of the most important economic drivers we could have. One, in particular, that we’d like to talk about is the Aviation Technology Center that Pima Community College is doing. So maybe you can tell listeners a little bit about that?

>> Lee Lambert: Yes. As you know when you look at what’s happening across the U.S. and really across the globe, the aviation sector is a very growing and booming sector with great needs in terms of a skilled workforce. Fortunately here is Tucson we have an Aviation Technology Center that trains up to about 150 individuals a year in airframe and powerplant, structure and avionics so that they can leave us prepared to go into the workforce. Our placement rates are very high, well over 80, 85%, going to work for folks like Bombardier, and Accent Air, and Universal Avionics, and the list goes on.

So yes, we make a huge impact in what is an important aspect of our economy.

>> Host 1: Yes. A lot of folks can change their lives through going to school, getting a little degree and moving forward. I see in it the medical world all the time.

>> Host 2: I just love the fact that we have a section of our education that is actually training and graduating people that is a good fit with our workforce. Hopefully some of the economic drivers that are still here – this makes all the sense in the world so kudos to you guys for what you’re doing.

>> Lee Lambert: Thank you and can I add to that ...

>> Host 2: Please

>> Lee Lambert: another important part of this is we’re not only training those folks but they are going into liveable family-wage jobs. That’s the other important piece in all this, right? We can train you, but are we training you for the jobs of today and tomorrow that you can make a good living for you and your family? And this program certainly fits that bill.
Lee Lambert: For our Fall Quarter for-credit students is probably around 25, 26 thousand. I haven’t looked at the most recent data this morning. We’re fitting right in there. That is still on the lower side or softer side of what Pima has experienced over the last 4 or 5 years. Certainly since I have arrived. The prior year enrollments had been declining.

We have a lot of other exciting things going on. Speaking about workforce, the Trane Company is going to be coming through Tucson as part of their Acceleration Now Tour. They’re going across the country showcasing the latest technology in the HVAC world.

Host 1: You ever try to get an HVAC tech? There has got to be demand in that world. [laughter] To get on the roof in Tucson. It’s so hot up there working that job and talk about a skill that is needed in this marketplace.

Host 2: We’re on with Lee Lambert, chancellor of Pima Community College. If you have questions 790-2040, wakeuptucson@gmail.com. Let’s go back to something that you had to, as part of the Lee Lambert fix-the-place tour here at PCC, accreditation. You had the Higher Learning Commission, just had a recent visit.

Host 1: Oh, are they done?

Host 2: Yes. So what’s the update on all that hub-bub?

Lee Lambert: Well, first of all I just want to thank the community and all the individuals who stepped in to help us to get back on the right track. I believe last week we made a good case for why Pima should come off of probation. We showed the Commission reviewers that we have done a tremendous amount of work to address not only the probation sanctions, but also to address the Core Criterion, the Core Components, the Assumed Practices and all the other aspects that are important to being a higher learning institution. So I think we showed and demonstrated tremendous progress. Now with that said, there’s still a lot of work to be done. We’ve got, I liken it to being in a deep hole and we finally have climbed out of the hole and we can look above ground now. But we’re not out to where we’re truly walking and eventually running. I think the fact that we are now above ground, looking above ground, is going to put us in a great place as they go to make their decision.

Let me just say a little bit about that. So what’s going to happen next, they’re going to submit to us a draft report of their findings, not their recommendations, their findings and then we get a chance to respond to that. That will happen in about 5-6 weeks from now. Then in December, this is important, I will go and take a small group to Chicago to make a presentation in front of a hearings panel. At that point, if I understand correctly from the Commission, the recommendations will be shared from the visit and then the College gets to make one final pitch before this hearing panel, which is a different group than the folks who came to visit us. All of that information will be submitted to the full board which will
meet at the end of February and we should get written decisions sent to us by mail the first week of March. So that just gives you a sense of the timeline and process.

>> Host 1: What are two or three things on your laundry list of things you want to start tackling to ratchet up what’s going on there a couple of notches - whether it’s on the Higher Learning Commission’s list or not. What are some of the things that you have identified that you want to start moving on?

>> Lee Lambert: I think we have to get better at defining what our mission is and then being able to demonstrate how we are fulfilling that mission and then aligning all of our planning efforts with that as well as aligning how we allocate our resources with that. In other words we’re going to be repositioning the organization to align truly in a way we can demonstrate to the public how we are fulfilling the mission that the public entrusts us with. So that’s a big part...

>> Host 1: Is there an occupation that you guys can educate that is under-filled in the Pima County area?

>> Lee Lambert: I think that, if you want to look at it from that standpoint, there are a number of areas I think that we can do a better job of, be more responsive to. So it’s not so much always adding but strengthening what we do. You know, we have a lot of good programs that can be better and part of being better means we have to provide better space, better equipment to our faculty and support them better. For example, I think we can do a tremendous good for the community in the Building and Construction Trade area. As I mentioned earlier, this Acceleration Tour by Trane and the latest in climate control systems and so forth. I think that’s a big opportunity here. But also, you look at mining, if mining makes a come-back, diesel mechanics and all the other kinds of pieces, they will need is something that we can step up, and that would be something that would be new for us. It would also be a wonderful opportunity.

Let me hit on another point, this is important, the state has been cutting its support to higher education and really has cut its support to community colleges significantly, to a point where Maricopa and Pima, we receive just a fraction of a percentage of our budget from the state. The promise to the community colleges was that the state would pick up you know, about a quarter to a third of the cost of education. We’re down to about four percent of our general fund budget. What that means is we have got to start to look at the financial health of the institution and start to project how can we move into a new world where we have to be more self-sustaining, self-supporting. Where we’re not as dependent on what the state is going to be able to provide us. That’s going to be another big area of focus going forward.

>> Host 1: Got’ca. Got’cha.

>> Host 2: Well and there is never enough money, no matter how you say it. So Pima Community College, there is a line item on our property tax bills, right? How much of that, how much is coming from there versus tuition?

>> Lee Lambert: Well that’s where the lion’s share of our budget comes from is through property tax so going in to this year, and I could be off by just a little bit, I think, we’re going to be sitting at about one
hundred million dollars coming from property tax to support the institution. Here’s another important piece, and it’s not something that is talked about enough, and that there is this notion of the expenditure limitations. Regardless of the revenues the College, any of our community colleges receive through public sources (property tax, state aid, etc.), there is a limit to which we can expend to that may be below what we are actually receiving in revenue. That is in part tied to enrollment. This is why the enrollment is important. If we don’t maintain a certain enrollment level we run the real potential that we will hit that expenditure limitation and not be able to access the revenue that is available. So that’s another aspect of this financial health piece that we have got to be mindful of.

>> Male Announcer 1: Got’cha. Just for the listeners, about 34 percent of the budget comes from property taxes, about 20 percent comes from tuition and fees, and about 28 percent or so comes from grants, financial aid and contracts.

>> Lee Lambert: Right and then the state aid makes up a small percentage of that.

>> Lee Lambert: Here’s another important piece I should mention as we look at the financial health. We’re in the process of developing a strategic enrollment management plan. This is not only about bringing more folks through the door, it’s also about how do we make sure we keep folks with us until they reach degree completion. That becomes an important element. That means we really have to take a closer look at what we’re doing. Are we making it easier for students to come in and be a student and get through us or do we make it difficult? Are we offering things that they want to take? Are we providing those services that are critical to their success outside the classroom? There’s a lot of work being done that goes well beyond what the Higher Learning Commission will require of us.

>> Host 1: Got’cha.

>> Make Announcer 2: I’ve got one last one for you. A lot of the hub-bub had to do with the board raising kind of the levels, the basic levels of what you need to know to matriculate through Pima. They were talking about the amount of remediation and things like that. Have we seen a reduction in the amount of remediation over the last couple of years?

>> Lee Lambert: So let me clarify. When you think about this whole notion of open access, that’s what the issue really evolved around, was whether the college was an open access institution or not – and we are an open access institution. That’s very important to recognize. The question is, as a result of being an open access institution what types of systems and infrastructure do you have in place that are going to support students who find themselves in pre-college level, pre-occupational level programs due to gaps in their learning - whether it’s in math, whether it’s in reading, whether it’s in writing and the like. Unfortunately that number is still up in the seventy percentile in many cases for us. This is a nation-wide problem, you can’t lose that overall context. This is a nation-wide problem. I don’t think that is going to be solved by Pima Community College or the community colleges any time soon in terms of where someone might start. The real challenge for us is how do we make sure we take those individuals who end up below college-level and occupational career-readiness back to the levels that they need to
be so that they can be successful in getting their degree or that certificate that’s important to their future.

>> Host 1: They need help from the K through 12’s and that’s a whole other episode, Lee.

>> Lee Lambert: Right. It’s a holistic piece, right? It’s not just K-12. We can’t just look at it and isolate it and say it’s a K-12 problem. It’s a systemic problem. If it was just a K-12 problem it would just be why is it happening all over the country. It’s not just a K-12 problem in the sense that it’s Tucson or Arizona. It’s systemic.

>> Host 1: Well you could say it’s a nation-wide K-12 problem. That they’re not getting them ready to...

>> Lee Lambert: Right, but I think it’s larger than that.

>> Host 1: So societal – is that where we are going? Family units and that stuff

>> Lee Lambert: Yeah. It’s a societal issue. I can go back, I grew up in three continents and I traveled a lot to Asia. My mother’s Korean. The value that society places on education is a lot different in a place like Korea. You are expected, and your parents provide you the support. Parents will work to make sure you succeed educationally even if it means sacrificing buying that Beemer, buying that Mercedes. So it’s much deeper. I’m not trying to knock families that buy those cars, that’s not my point. My point is it is deeper than just the K-12 or the community colleges or the universities. It’s much more systemic and if we look at other countries maybe it gives us a sign because you know we are slipping.

>> Host 1: We agree with you.

>> Host 2: I agree. Lee, thanks for calling in as always. We will catch you very soon and best of luck with the rest of the school year

>> Host 1: and stabilizing ... 

>> Lee Lambert: Thank you and take care.

>> Host 1: Good job in what you are doing over there.

>> Lee Lambert: I appreciate it.

>> Host 1: Alright, Chancellor Lee Lambert, Pima Community College. We’re going to pay bills, we’re running a little late. Joe Higgens, Chris DeSimone 790, 1030 kvoi.com for streams, podcasts and pictures of Ed Alexander in funny pants.

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