Remark as Prepared:

Thank you, Mitch, and thanks to all of you for participating today in the first ever virtual ACEC Board of Directors meeting.

The past two months have been trying for us all. The coronavirus pandemic will force lasting structural changes not just on the institutions we rely on but also to the way we relate to each other personally and in common spaces, and it will change our work in the built environment.

Just think of how many questions we have both big and small. In an age of social distancing, when will I be safe going back to the office or using public transport? When will I be able to take a flight again or go to a baseball game? Or, how can we use technology to identify the next pandemic before it spreads? How can we help hospital workers be safe on the front lines in the hospitals we design during times like this?

I can say with certainty of thought that moving forward the engineering industry will be part of these conversations. Our work was critical during this crisis and will continue to be critical long after it has passed.

As evidence of that, we were invited to serve on the President’s Great American Economic Revival Task Force. In that role, we can speak on your behalf to help guide the recovery.

There is an old saying that you should never let a good crisis go to waste. In the context of the coronavirus that sounds harsh. But because our industry was deemed essential during the crisis, we were able to continue our work. And because we were able to continue our work, we were able to contribute our problem-solving skills to build facilities and to create infrastructure connections that helped to save lives and keep communities safer.

From the start, our firms have been on the front lines of the pandemic, supporting essential services, keeping workers safe, and innovating solutions to challenges few even imagined just a few months ago.

In New York City, Langan engineers worked round the clock for more than a week to prepare New York Harbor for the arrival and safe operation of the U.S. Navy’s Comfort hospital ship with its 1,000 beds and military medical staff.

WSP staff engineers decontaminated postal distribution facilities with employees who tested positive for the virus—and got the mail moving again within hours.

Our chair Mitch Simpler’s firm, JB&B worked on two temporary hospitals that were turned over to FEMA, increasing New York’s capacity by 2,000 beds.

AECOM is designing a temporary hospital in a vacant retail space in a Memphis shopping center.

I could go on and on. But when this has moved on, there should be no lingering doubt in anyone’s mind about engineering’s essential value to modern society.
Associations like ACEC always work to support members and add value. But its times of crisis like what we are experiencing now that give associations a unique opportunity and an obligation to shine.

This occurred to me as I watched the debate among lawmakers in Congress over the most recent assistance package, and the fact that so many of America’s small businesses miss out in the initial round of loans.

Some of that was due to the fact that the funding ran out – but I wonder if, for many of those small firms, they didn’t have an organization standing behind them. ACEC National and our MOs were standing behind our firms during this crisis and as a result of that engineering firms were a major recipient of programs like the PPP loan program.

A recent survey showed that of the participating firms, 84% applied for a PPP loan and 74% were approved.

So a success story that may come from this experience is that ACEC really stood up and shined at a time when our members needed us most.

Some of the MOs have actually gained members because those firms saw the value of having an organization supporting during a time of crisis.

Moving forward we are focused on advocating for an infrastructure-based recovery agenda focused on three core components:

- FAST Act reauthorization with more money to meet the growing challenges short and long term;
- Authorizing more funding under WRDA for new Corps water projects, as well as traditional water and wastewater projects; and
- Regulatory reforms to streamline project delivery, incentives for vertical projects, and expansion of energy markets

These messages will be part of our virtual legislative fly-in which will include online meetings with lawmakers, a letter writing campaign and social media advocacy.

In times like this, in addition to information and advocacy, our members have a strong need to connect. To know what their colleagues are facing and how they are facing down common challenges. And they need that connection to be able to make the best decisions. So, in a crisis, communication becomes fuel for action.

We have provided that through webinars and roundtables in what we are calling our Rescue/Rebuild/Recover series providing detail on things like the CARES Act, the Paycheck Protection Program, working remotely, leading through crisis and other topics. More than 3,000 Council members have participated in these online classes and more than 800 have joined in on the roundtables.

And we created the online Coronavirus Resource Center; ramped up frequency of our Last Word newsletter and began publishing weekly CEO messages. Our podcasts – which broke the 10,000-download mark last month – included weekly government affairs updates and interviews with industry leaders to discuss their response to the crisis.
Our MOs have stepped up like never before. They rallied together and have been on calls with ACEC national twice each week to stay connected and informed and to share their updates about how the crisis is hitting home in their areas. I really want to acknowledge the caliber of the leadership of the MO executives across this country. They have worked tirelessly on your behalf and throughout we have planned, plotted, and commiserated as a team and I believe the Federation is stronger for it.

Before I conclude I want to take a moment to talk about a couple priorities that were priorities before the world turned upside down and will continue to be priorities when it rights itself.

Earlier this month, we formally announced the launch of the ACEC Research Institute. I am confident the Institute will help to position the Council as a base for thought leadership in the built environment. This has been a priority we have touched on since I came on board and a central focus in our strategic planning. As Mitch mentioned, John Carrato will take the podium a little later to tell you about the organization and goals of the Institute.

And of course, the strategic plan remains a priority for us even though to think strategically in a world experiencing such uncertainty is a complicated task.

We came together almost two years ago and crafted an ambitious plan that allowed us to be bold and think big. The good news about all of the work that we have done is that if you look at the pillars of the plan, they are all strong underpinnings for a strategy to push forward even during the assault from this pandemic.

The goals of the plan will remain priorities for our industry and this organization...Leading in business strategy, embodying inclusion and diversity, expanding our influential membership, communicating our essential value to society, and pursuing vibrant member engagement.

We will be working with NAECE, the Planning Cabinet and our Executive Committee to ensure the plan stays focused and current in the new normal.

We’re already doing a lot to make the plan come to life. A few examples of initiatives that are already underway include:

- Web seminars and model contracts that focus on risk and value-based contracting; and
- Critical research from QBS to Design Build as Institute Chair John Carrato will share with you later.
- We have also begun work on setting up a young professional’s group;
- We’ve added a diversity and inclusion module to our leadership training programs; and
- We’re continuing to reach out to the Private Market including work currently underway on programming to share insights into how the private market is fairing in the pandemic as all reports are indicating that this sector is taking a big hit.

So we have our marching orders and we are doing our best to continue to push forward the agenda that we know will strengthen the industry in the long run while trying to shift and adapt with the changing times to be certain our focus remain true to the unprecedented real and pressing needs our members are facing under the pandemic.
I hope the nation learns from this crisis. And I hope federal and state governments learn from this crisis because this will happen again.

But one very powerful lesson that was reinforced for me is how valuable the ACEC family – everyone on this call – is to this industry.

We have a lot of work to do still in supporting the industry, supporting our MOs and pushing a growth agenda with Congress and the Administration, but I hope down the road when I look back on this time, we will see ACEC at its best.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my report.