

(chancellor names—Chicago: Paula Allen-Meares...Springfield: Susan Koch (pronounced “Cook”...Urbana: Phyllis Wise)

Chairman Kennedy, Distinguished Trustees, President Easter, Chancellor [name], Professor Beck and Search committee colleagues, faculty colleagues, University of Illinois stakeholders one and all...

And you students – especially you students...

I feel so deeply honored and privileged to have been selected by the University of Illinois Board of Trustees to serve as your next President.

Roberta and I are in awe of the University, its history and standing as a world leading exemplar of public higher education and scholarship.

The opportunity to contribute to its noble mission and help chart its course into the future as president, is still dawning on us as a new reality – and is both astonishing and very humbling.

I commit every ounce of my energy in supporting the Board, Chancellors, provosts, faculty and staff to advance the health and vitality of the University of Illinois and its future...

And I want to dedicate my presidency to you students, those now present on the three wonderful campuses, and those to come.

The U of I has “tremendous assets”—a fabulous faculty, talented students, brilliant researchers, loyal alumni, generous donors, rich diversity in people, outlook, and approach.

The university began nearly 150 years ago as a charter land grant institution, successfully connecting higher education with the agrarian economy of its day.

We now have a more complex, global knowledge economy, and public higher education institutions must turbo charge efforts in support of the public good here in Illinois and globally in the 21st Century.

We do this by building human capital, - well educated people connected with opportunities, with skills that include flair, discernment and critical thinking.

This must be done at a time of significant cumulative stresses—budgetary, for example.

And significant disruption-forcing functions—the advent of distance education methodologies.

But by focusing on human capital--our students, faculty, and staff--higher education can partner with other sectors and also create needed social capital and economic capital for our common future.

Where else can all these ingredients come together?

There is no place better than at a comprehensive, diverse public university that excels in teaching, discovery and innovation.

So, I believe that the University of Illinois can define and exemplify what public higher education must become in this century.

It can be the best. Not by simple ratings, but by meaningful and substantive contributions; firing on all cylinders, with excellence and integrity painted through everything we do.

So, I am particularly delighted to be not just a team leader, but a member of THIS team and the University of Illinois.

In stretching for this brass ring, we should act like the “heavyweights” we are, engaging shaping and leading agendas with academia, foundations, industry, governmental and international partners.

We are conducting world-class basic and applied research and scholarship across all disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains.

I see part of my role in supporting the campuses through external outreach and advocacy while always remembering--in case you thought I didn't mean it!--that it is “all for the students” and “all by the faculty and staff”.

So, what do I bring to the table?

First thing to say is that I am a genetic optimist (and that's not a science field, it simply means that I have only one gear: forward with optimism).

I believe that with hard work, shared vision, (and there is nothing more powerful than a shared vision), and with excellence and commitment, we can succeed and that success breeds success.

And I embrace shared governance and have been part of it.

Certainly, there are challenges and pitfalls to navigate and there will be difficult times perhaps, but often the Tour de France is won on the uphill legs!

The next thing to know about me is that I have helpful and relevant experience in many different sectors.

In the classroom, university administration, research, funding agency, government, industry, non-for-profit, professional society, international, and so on.

I have made a lifelong career commitment to excellence and service to the public good that fits well with the University of Illinois narrative.

I won't go over the list here, but in retrospect, I now see my various past career steps as simply being steps toward and circling the University of Illinois!

Along the way, I have learned that collaboration is the key - and collegiality and respectful listening are critical to good decision making.

Facilitative leadership in the central office must add value to the campuses.

We will work across boundaries, drive interdisciplinary and basic research, to do things at larger scales and with greater synergy and impact.

In particular, I want to work with Trustees and all of you to embrace the twin challenges of economic revitalization and diversity – at scales commensurate with our historical setting and place, and - as with everything - with excellence and integrity painted throughout.

And we must think of higher education as an ecosystem to be tuned and optimized for impact, not simply as a sector.

It is, in fact, a major part of the overall K through life-long learning public education enterprise in which we must also play a key leadership role – with student diversity, affordability, preparation, accessibility, completion and career success, faculty recruitment and support, and new knowledge generation and dissemination all key components.

In all of this shared governance will be essential!

Campus remarks—

Chicago campus, or UIC—

I'm thrilled to be here on the near west side of Chicago this morning—one of the great cities of the world—and beginning this journey at the University of Illinois at Chicago—one of the great urban research universities of the world. Your diversity, your energy, your excellence are part of an upward trajectory I want to help turbo-charge.

The biggest, most comprehensive university in the global city of Chicago, one with an urban focus, and an indispensable medical education and health care mission. This is what I mean when I talk about “heavyweights,” and we're going to perform like one.

I look forward to working with the next UIC chancellor and vice chancellor for health affairs in 2015 to fulfill the aspirations of this university. Thank you, Chancellor Allen-Meares, for your service to the U of I and your leadership of this campus.

Springfield campus, or UIS—

I'm getting to see a lot of the Land of Lincoln today, so it's fitting to be here in the great man's hometown and the home of this great University of Illinois at Springfield.

UIS is an important part of our collective musculature when I say the U of I must perform like a heavyweight of American public higher education.

Its size and location here in the state capital; its expertise in subjects not just of Lincoln, but in public and government affairs; and its pioneering work in online education, make UIS an important and integral part of our university. Indeed, "leadership lived" is a motivating aspiration.

I'll be spending a significant amount of time in Springfield, making the rounds at the Capitol and spending time here on campus. Chancellor Koch (pronounced "Cook"), thank you for your leadership.

Urbana campus, or UIUC—

Nestled here on the wide Midwestern prairie, I feel that the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is like one of the great cities of the world—there is so much to it that it can't all be taken in in a day, a month, a year or perhaps a lifetime.

150 years in the making. 22 Nobel laureates. Nearly 3,000 faculty, many at the top of their fields. 40-some thousand of the very brightest students. A handsome campus infrastructure for research, teaching, the arts, athletics, and student life. One of the preeminent universities in the world. It is awesome.

Talk about a heavyweight of American higher education, you are one and we're going to continue to perform like one. Chancellor Wise, thank you for your leadership of this exceptional U of I campus.

Finally, I recall telling the Board during the interview process that there has to be a higher level of optimism; people in higher education are perhaps a little too hunkered down.

There needs to be an outbound feeling of reaching for the brass ring. A shared vision that is realistic feasible and collectively forged.

This is what I think.

I would simply add again – for the students, by the faculty.

Thank you all for being here today and for welcoming me to this wonderful university.

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