



# ILLINOIS

## Remarks of Chancellor-elect Robert J. Jones As prepared for delivery, July 20, 2016

### **Opening Acknowledgements**

Thank you President Killeen for your thoughtful introduction. Allow me to begin by saying good morning UIUC. Thank you President Killeen and the members of the Board of Trustees for offering what really is the “job a lifetime” for someone who has spent his career in public higher education. And thank you as well to Professor Antoinette Burton and the members of the search committee for their confidence.

I also want to recognize all the alumni, friends, donors, legislators and members of the local community who are here. What happens here really does have impact direct and indirect far beyond the campus so your support is always a vital piece of Illinois’ success.

I want to acknowledge all of the faculty the faculty and staff who have taken time out of your day to welcome me this morning. I know you have a particularly vested interest in finding out a bit more about who I am, where I come from and what I’m thinking for the future.

It is great to see my fellow chancellors Koch and Amiridis. I look forward to working with you both to advance the system goals and objectives.

And, thank you to Chancellor Barb Wilson who, as all of you know, has demonstrated outstanding leadership, a steadying hand and a unifying voice throughout a very challenging transitional year. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the work she and interim Provost Feser and their teams have done and the foundations they have laid that will make my own transition smoother. Thank you.

And finally, and most importantly, I want to say hello, officially and for the first time, to the 45,000 (or so) students who are the reason all of us are here. You are, without exaggeration, among the very best and brightest, the most sought after new hires each year, the future of the professorate and the academic and public sector leaders of the coming decades. And you all chose Illinois because you believe this is the university that will give you the best chance to realize your ambitions and dreams. And that’s a value proposition I will sustain and advance in the months and years ahead.

### **Being Here**

On a personal note, there is one more person I want to thank today – my much better half, Dr. Lynn Hassan Jones, for her unwavering ongoing support.

I am sure she will attest to a well-known fact, and that is behind every successful university chancellor/president is a very surprised spouse or partner. They do know us best. I am going to make you two predictions here this morning. Here’s the first one – in my time here as Chancellor I you grow to tolerate me and some of you will actually grow to like and trust me. But I promise, you’ll love her. I’ll get to the second promise in a few minutes.



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So, I'll say it is great to finally be standing here again at UIUC after than 20 year hiatus. I'm not a complete stranger to Illinois. I've worked with or become acquainted with several colleagues here in the College of ACES and IGB over the years. And as someone who holds all three of his degrees from land grant universities and who spent more than 30 years of my career at the University of Minnesota, I have more than a curser notion of what to expect from a Midwestern, world class public research university with a land grant mission and local and global reach.

So although this not my first time here, arriving here yesterday as the presumptive chancellor of UIUC, I became even more excited about the future. For example, flying in from Chicago yesterday, I was reminded of how beautiful section lines are from 20,000 ft. and how the different shades of green create the beautiful mosaic. And, driving up from Willard Airport yesterday afternoon, even with the corn getting high, I was reminded of just how far I could see and how flat is here.

And as a passionate cyclist and an avid down skier my first thought was, "this really is a dream job." Cycling is going to be great here ... downhill skiing? Not so much.

## **Why Here**

But in all seriousness, this is an awesome leadership opportunity that has nothing to do with cycling or skiing. But everything to do with my passion for education.

I grew cotton and peanut fields of Southwest Georgia. So today I reminded that it is long, long road geographically and chronologically from the share-croppers shack in Ga. to leading UIUC.

But, I feel strongly that everything I have done since that time has prepared me for this moment and this opportunity. And it is at the heart of what I believe is the responsibility and challenge of public higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Through public education – through land grant mission – that sense of curiosity sparked in at about years old in the cotton and peanut field was eventually combined with the opportunity to explore, learn and discover. It led me to a world I never even imagined existed at that time.

We need to find ways to make my story possible for everyone – no matter where they start, what their parents do, or how fast the technological, economic and political changes come at us. We need to find ways to make that story one that isn't limited to four or five years of life, but to the educational needs of a whole lifetime.

In a lot of ways, we need to reinvent or redefine what a public land grant university – an invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – is and should do for the citizens of a 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

That's not a challenge to be lightly undertaken, nor a model to be easily nor happily disrupted.

And that is why I am so excited to be here at Illinois. It is a rare thing to be at both a time in history where great change can be made and also at a place with the power to make it happen. I'm proud to be standing at that intersection for higher education and this juncture in the history of this University.



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This is a place has got quite a track record of shocking the world with innovation, research and discovery.

- Special education
- Disability, access and opportunity
- A third form of life

You thrive on forcing the world to rethink and redefine what is possible, what is right, what is equitable and what we should be doing for one another.

It's perfect timing as we approach the Sesquicentennial year at Illinois that we turn our focus on our own academic future. How will we must remain a pre-eminent research university with a land grant mission and a local and global reach. In a time of financial uncertainties, demands for greater accountability and when questions around social equity and social justice are forcing fundamental reevaluations of everything from our admission policies to our investment strategies, we have an opportunity to demonstrate different paths forward.

These are issues that are too big for any discipline and too complex for any individual. Solutions, ideas and models require broad, comprehensive collaboration that lead to collective impact. That's the potential of a university like this one.

And as chancellor, my job is to find resources, and put in place structures and programs that let you all come together to translate great ideas into real practice. We have to respond the realities on the ground here – but no one says we have to do so in ways that are expected or “status quo.” This is a time for educational innovation. And this is place that knows more about innovation and invention than any other.

I'm pretty good here at raising questions and problems. I don't arrive with any set answers or a grand plan and vision. That's what I believe we can, and must, do together.

So, for the first 100 days of my arrival on campus, I'll warn you that you should expect to see me a lot – and hear me a little. I have a big learning curve ahead of me and I know I won't address it by talking.

This is a truly once in a lifetime professional and personal opportunity for me. I recognize and embrace that – and I am truly grateful for this chance. But I fully understand that this kind of trust comes with the highest expectations from every one of you on this campus and from the four hundred fifty thousand proud alumni around the world.

This is a place that doesn't spend its time bragging – but instead focuses entirely on results. And I know that is exactly what you demand of every person that has had the privilege to serve as chancellor. This is too important of an institution at too critical of a juncture in our history to accept anything less.

I told you I would be making two promises today – here's the second one:

I won't have all the answers. I'm sure some decisions I make along the way some you will not agree with but you will respect the process as being fair and transparent.



# I L L I N O I S

I will always work hard on your behalf.

- I will be a ready collaborator and colleague.
- I will listen to those who disagree with me and I will be skeptical of those who never do.
- I will be a tireless advocate for the faculty, students and staff who are the heart of this place.
- And I will be fierce protector of the reputation and integrity of this great university.
- And trusted partner with President Killeen and the trustees to move this university and the system to the next level of excellence.

And I promise every one of you that you will always have my best and my all.

I am proud, excited to serve as the 10<sup>th</sup> chancellor for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Thank you so much for the opportunity and I can't wait to get started!