

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM

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**Remarks prepared for delivery by
University of Illinois President Tim Killeen to the Board of Trustees
July 13, 2017**

Thank you, Chairman Koritz.

Now that the state's budget impasse has passed, so to speak, and we have been promised funding for the fiscal year 2018 that started July 1, and for the balance of what we were to have received for fiscal 2017, I'd like to reflect for a moment on where the University of Illinois System stands ... and to express my deep appreciation to the many people in this room, and across the state, for their exceptional support.

None of us has ever witnessed circumstances like those the state just endured for the last two years, and hopefully we never will again.

I will admit that from time to time in the last 24 months I took it personally. After all, the budget stalemate has marked the entire period of time that I have been with the University of Illinois. That is not a fun coincidence!

There is no doubt that the impasse has caused a good deal of stress in our system and across our three universities. Yet I am continuously inspired by all the amazing things we have accomplished under less than ideal circumstances.

Witnessing the resiliency of this university system and working shoulder to shoulder with those of you who are its heart and soul—the board of trustees, faculty and staff, students, alumni, donors, and, yes, some key elected officials in Springfield—has been a remarkable experience.

We have weathered the storm, and I extend my sincerest and deepest thanks to all for your persistence and patience. A winning strategy on the gridiron is to bend but not break. The University of Illinois System was not broken by the budget impasse.

The board of trustees has been unstinting in its support and had our back every step of the way. The same can be said of our faculty. Shared governance worked throughout this period. It demonstrated how essential this unique collaboration is, especially when crucial decisions and changes must be made—together.

Staff, students and alumni joined forces with trustees and faculty in raising our advocacy to new heights.

We reinvigorated a bipartisan legislative caucus of lawmakers with U of I ties. We organized a statewide coalition of higher education, labor and industry because there is strength in numbers—and in mutual interests.

The U of I office of governmental relations and the U of I Alumni Association grassroots network, Illinois Connection, coordinated regular and creative advocacy blitzes—via letters, phone calls, and frequent personal face-to-face meetings with lawmakers and staff in the state Capitol.

One evening last month we spent an hour with 4,000 alumni from across the country in a telephone town hall meeting—answering questions, imploring their advocacy on behalf of the U of I and connecting them to the offices of legislators and the governor.

It was an exhilarating new tool in our advocacy arsenal, and we will use it again.

Returning to the gridiron analogy, bend-but-don't break can be a winning defensive tactic but there also needed to be a game plan for the offense—a proactive message of the immense beneficial impact the U of I has in Illinois and beyond, a valuable state investment for 150 years.

Following the direction of the Board of Trustees in 2015, we spent a year developing a Strategic Framework—with the active participation of every stakeholder group in our university system—to guide our trajectory for the next decade.

From that sprung a number of strategic initiatives, the major one being the Investment, Performance and Accountability Commitment, or IPAC, a 5-year outlook for performance accountability by the U of I system in return for predictable, reliable state funding and regulatory reforms.

The University of Illinois had a plan. Frankly, there weren't many of those in Springfield the last two years. But IPAC is viable and now has the bipartisan sponsorship of two-dozen lawmakers. We will continue to pursue IPAC, with an amended version next year that hopefully will cross the goal line.

On an even more positive note, the procurement reform piece of IPAC passed in both chambers and now awaits the governor's action, and we are confident he will sign it.

This is good news not only for day-to-day purchases of supplies and equipment, but especially for acquisition of highly specialized instruments and materials necessary for our faculty to conduct world-class research.

It is a good example, I think, of why the U of I system can transition out of the two-year budget impasse and move forward with confidence. We have retrenched where possible and taken stringent measures to responsibly steward our resources. In the past two years, we realized efficiencies in utilities, staffing, and processes that will help set us up for continued success as a leaner, more effective organization. I believe our shared experience has made us stronger—internally and externally. And our administrative savings will allow us to place even more focus on students and faculty.

I have a reputation as a bit of cockeyed optimist. I don't apologize, but I'm also a realist. There is no question that the state of Illinois' relationship with every public institution in Illinois is changing, the future is uncertain and more challenges lie ahead.

Will our state appropriation be there for fiscal 2019 and the years to follow? What about public pension funding changes? And will there be reforms of public higher education in Illinois?

Fortunately we have the leadership of the board of trustees, our administrative team of chancellors, provosts, vice presidents and deans and our incredibly talented faculty to guide us.

As I said in a system-wide message last week when the budget stalemate ended, our three universities have remained strong ... and now stand ready to accelerate quickly and purposefully toward the high aspirations of our Strategic Framework. Our collective goal is to make the U of I System a global model for education, innovation, public engagement and economic development.

I was reminded recently of some 13th Century wisdom from Saint Francis of Assisi, who said: “Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

Stay focused, work hard, exceed expectations. That is what this institution has been doing for 150 years. It is how we responded to the historic fiscal crisis of the last two years. It is how the U of I System will sustain its greatness for the next 150 years.

Thank you.