INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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“A PEOPLE’S UNIVERSITY”
Good morning.
On behalf of the University of Nevada, Reno, I welcome you to our beautiful campus. I’d like to take a moment to note the presence of several guests who are here today.

Members of the Board of Regents, who are responsible for the governance of the institutions of the Nevada System of Higher Education …

Chancellor Dan Klaich, the leader of the Nevada System of Higher Education …

My colleague Presidents, with whom we are doing many things together from creating smoother pathways from high school and community college to the university, to joint degree programs, to research collaborations …

Elected officials and representatives from our partners in public service and in government, who play a vital role in the stewardship of public education in this state …

Our faculty, staff and students who give this University life, and whose accomplishment and determination in the face of adversity over the past four years have been simply amazing, thank you for joining me here today.

I want to thank my family and friends for traveling to be with me today to share in this joyous occasion. Families sacrifice much to support people in leadership positions.

To everyone today, I am extremely humbled and honored to have you all here.

I BEGIN MY ADDRESS TODAY by acknowledging three men.

Two are here with us today. The third is with us in spirit. Their imprint on this institution has been indelible. Their legacy, even today, influences all that we do.

Joe Crowley’s words and actions are everywhere on this campus.

As our 13th president, Joe reminded us of our land-grant roots. He rebuilt and reinforced the bridges that lead from our campus right into our community.

Joe, through his uncommon personal dignity and decency, reminded all of us that a University must always be unified in its common cause. Joe once said the following: “In the end, the University succeeds only to the extent that it unifies around its central purposes.”

John Lilley, our 14th president, was one of our campus’ visionaries.

John always asked what needed to be done for our missions to touch generations of Nevadans who were still to come to this University. He told us not to be timid in realizing our future. John once said: “Some people say that when you get out planning past five years, you’re wasting your time.
That’s not true. You need to be bold.”

Milt Glick, as our 15th president, had a soul that enveloped us all.
The twinkle of his blue eyes brought compassion and understanding to our campus. He unified us around our central purpose: our students.
He told us all that when our students succeed, our institution succeeds, and so, too, does the state that we serve.
Milt was pragmatic. But he was also an incurable romantic.
Milt looked at this University and saw 18,000 brilliant stories … 18,000 incredible personal journeys. Milt once said that, “The best universities have about them a myth which they continually strive to achieve. This myth is the story that we tell and we must keep telling.”
Joe … John … Milt … I am humbled to take the chair which you have previously occupied.
My pledge is to honor your work by building on all that you’ve done for our University. Thank you, to all three of you.

**TODAY, I STAND BEFORE YOU** fully aware that our University is at a pivotal moment.

Indeed, we are at a pivotal intersection in the history of our world. The recent events in the Middle East bear witness to this fact. Good people who work to further democratic ideals and protect human dignity have been killed in recent days. That in itself is a tragedy. It is compounded by the fact that we know that this senseless violence can be avoided. The best remedy for ignorance is knowledge and understanding. Education always has been the most reliable pathway to find them.

Our value as an institution, in this volatile, uncertain world, has never been greater. During the inauguration of our sixth president, in 1939, as the destruction of Europe was beginning, President Leon Wilson Hartman spoke of the challenges of choosing between democracy, communism, fascism and Nazism:

“This is a time when men need to think accurately and discern clearly the difference between the false and the true, between right and wrong, between iniquity and justice. The University still will remain the inner sanctuary of the spiritual and intellectual life of the people.”

Our times are just as challenging today with globalization, world turmoil and economic volatility. It is imperative that this University immerse our students in today’s global challenges to help them think accurately, and discern clearly, the paths they wish to follow if they are to lead future generations.
The challenge of educating everyone hasn’t gotten any easier, either. There is a chasm today in our
country and one that is seen throughout the world. The disparity between the rich and the poor is widening. College affordability is a national issue.

I often think of a trip I took to Pakistan years ago.

My youthful idealism led me into the field of international economic development, working to improve food supplies and distribution systems in some of our least industrialized countries.

In Pakistan, I was working on a grain storage project.

I saw a country of stark contrasts. On the high ridges of the cities were nice homes, where the wealthier, educated class of the country lived in relative prosperity. Beneath the ridge tops of opportunity, in the deep gullies, were the homeless or the nearly homeless, those without electricity or good water, those who had never experienced the benefit of an education.

I thought to myself that the people living in those gullies had a long struggle ahead if they were ever going to climb up and reach the prosperity on the ridge. And some did.

Education was the answer then. It’s the answer now. It can help people overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It can light a fire of determination and hope in anyone.

I tell this story because of who we are at this University.

We have dual responsibilities of being our state’s Land-Grant University and a state-wide liberal arts and sciences University.

President John Moseley, our seventh president, defined these two roles clearly in his inaugural address in 1944: “The University of Nevada is a Land-Grant College, and a state university. This combination presents challenging obligations and opportunities.”

As the state’s Land Grant University, our foremost obligation is to provide access to a college education for all who are qualified, statewide.

Beginning with the enabling language in the Nevada State Legislature, which adopted the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862, we have been “the people's university” for more than 138 years.

In fact, this year is the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Land Grant Act. The act, introduced by Vermont Senator Justin Morrill, the namesake of Morrill Hall which heads this Quad, showed the importance of higher education as a principal pillar of economic development, even back in the days of westward expansion.

Charles Pierce, the Esquire columnist, has written of the Morrill Act that, “The idea behind the Morrill Act schools was simple and fundamentally American. Knowledge belongs to everyone, not just a privileged few.”
The “access for all … knowledge belongs to everyone” nature of the Morrill Act was reinforced by the G.I. Bill following World War II.

Hundreds of thousands of the Greatest Generation swarmed to college campuses, earned degrees, and formed the bedrock of the world’s first truly successful middle class.

Returning veterans from Operation Desert Storm in the 1990s, and again, today, from Iraq and Afghanistan, have continued to come to our campus.

In State policy, the Governor Kenny Guinn Millennium Scholarship, started in 2000, provided the means for Nevada students – many of them first-generation college students – to attain a college education, regardless of their background.

For 138 years, we have embraced all of these students, of all colors, creeds, background and ability. All of the state’s qualified students, who are prepared to succeed in college, continue to form the core of our constituency.

They receive a fine opportunity for higher education … right here in Nevada.

The University of Nevada, Reno has proudly realized the three facets of the Land Grant ethic through impactful teaching, transformational research, and meaningful outreach. We’ve stressed mutual respect, collaboration and understanding.

In addition to our role as “the people’s University,” we are a state-wide, liberal arts and sciences University.

What does this mean, this notion of a “state-wide, liberal arts and sciences University,” particularly at this moment?

One of my first tasks when I arrived on campus in 2008 was to help the University develop its institutional strategic plan.

It was an often exhilarating, sometimes arduous, but always memorable experience as I met with scores of University groups.

I came away with two thoughts.

One, I realized I’d better write fast, because the clock was ticking on submitting our plan to the Board of Regents.

Two was how passionate and how proud of our University our people were.

The University’s strategic plan speaks to these passions, to our institutional strengths, and to our responsibilities to the State of Nevada. The university commitments contained in this plan are aligned with the most critical issues affecting the future of our state.
These commitments include the following:

- This University is an excellent liberal arts and sciences University with degrees across a broad number of fields, yielding graduates with increasing experience in the application of knowledge, which has become a hallmark of this university.

  We continue to grow the number of students we serve, continually adding to the number of National Merit and Presidential Scholars while increasing access for students of limited means, and continually growing the graduation rate and the number of graduates with bachelor’s and graduate degrees.

  We’ve not only transformed the quality of our institution in this way, we’ve improved Nevada’s image nationally as a place where a college education can and should matter.

- This University is a growing research institution with strong ambition to create new knowledge to solve issues relevant to Nevada, the nation, and our world.

  Our research is nationally competitive, with major grants awarded from NIH, NSF, and the Department of Energy. Combined with our research partners, DRI and UNLV, we provide the state with a powerful catalyst to create a true knowledge- and innovation-based economy.

- This University provides not only applied research and innovative ideas, we work directly with Nevada’s industries in mining, agriculture, manufacturing, gaming, media, health care and renewable energy to ensure that these key areas have the educated workforce needed for a successful, competitive, modern Nevada economy.

- This University adds greatly to the quality of life of this community, so essential to business attraction, by contributions to arts and culture, to great speaker series, and to Mountain West Conference athletic contests.

- This University cooperates with public school districts and community colleges to build aspirations and clearer pathways for Nevada youth to attain the highest possible level of education for each individual.

  I’m proud of the central role this University has played, as counselor, connector and collaborator, to ensure that more of Nevada’s young will one day earn a college degree.

- This University provides education for the health care workforce of doctors, nurses, and public health officers, research for disease diagnosis and cure, and public education and services for healthier living.

- This University maintains regional leadership and cooperation in environmental issues to keep Tahoe Blue and steward the utilization and protection of the sensitive Great Basin Region.
These University commitments are firm, but challenging to fulfill. I will mention three tensions which we must deal with.

First, public financial support for higher education and research remains a challenge. The symptoms are reduced state budgets coming to this University, increases in student registration fees exacerbating the college affordability dilemma, and a more competitive federal research environment.

This challenge must be met with adoption of a true entrepreneurial spirit, critical decisions about directions for growth, and public education about the public returns to higher education investments.

Second, there is substantial pressure to increase the quantity of graduates with few new resources. This is reminiscent of the inaugural address of President N. Edd Miller in 1966 in which he noted the great pressure to educate more and more people with mass education. President Miller said the following: “The needs of our society cannot tolerate anything but the highest quality.”

Our administration, our college leaders, our faculty and staff leaders, our student leaders, all have committed themselves to the mission of growing an even higher quality University experience. You see this in a quality residential campus experience.

You see this in the wonderful interaction between our professors and our students.

You see this in the experiential, “hands-on” learning that our faculty has come to embrace and our students have come to expect.

You see this in the great pride our staff takes in the work that they do. On a daily basis, our staff makes this a beautiful, operational university. It’s a welcoming place our visitors always remember, and our faculty and students always rely on.

We must continue to stress personal, human interaction between students and experienced mentors if we are to remain true to the heritage of this University and to foster lasting critical thinking and discernment that I mentioned earlier.

If economic development is to succeed, it will only be realized through the development of these educated citizens who are thoughtful, creative, and innovative.

Our challenge is to assess the effectiveness of new learning methods and technologies and adopt those which maintain the character and quality of the University of Nevada, Reno brand.

Third, this community has the opportunity for transformation to a university based community. This will be characterized by diversity, opportunity, and excitement.
I speak often of how we are becoming a “Community-based University” and why it is important that we also must become a “University-based Community.” Without one, the other cannot succeed. It is my intention to ensure that the barrier lines between our community and this campus will continue to fade. We will continue to reach out to the community to serve our community’s needs.

NOW, THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO moves forward.

We have forged this sense of mission during one of the most challenging periods in our 138-year history. Our University has shown its true character during this time. The resiliency shown by the faculty, staff and students during this toughest of times has been remarkable.

As we have seen at this University over the past several years, when people choose to contribute, to plan and work together, to dream and hope together, the results are amazing.

As we move forward, it is our institutional pride and abiding sense of teamwork that excites me.

As your president, I promise all of you that I will devote myself to caring for our University.

I promise to work with my fellow presidents to ensure we are a cohesive, collaborative force.

I promise to work against the loss of efficiency and effectiveness that comes with regional conflict. We must follow a path of common agendas.

I promise to protect our proud heritage.

I promise to honor each and every person who believes in, or is influenced and informed by, this University’s important mission.

I promise to pursue a course rooted in the decency, strength of spirit and the unbounded potential of knowledge that has characterized this institution since our founding in 1874.

I promise to make you proud – proud of this University, and proud of all the people who make our University so special.

I am humbled by this moment. I am honored to have your trust and confidence. Thank you all for being here today.