

Good afternoon. Thank you all for the warm welcome. Over the past five months, I've had the opportunity to meet and spend time with so many of you. I see plenty of familiar faces in the audience, and it will be my pleasure to get to know more of you as we interact in the days, weeks and months that will follow today's address. First, I'd like to start with some words of appreciation. As you will hear, the state of the University is good, despite the significant visioning, planning, and work we will undertake during the months ahead. I can give a speech with a positive tone today because of the excellent work colleagues throughout the room and across campus have already done.

As you've probably heard me say on numerous occasions, The University of Akron is home for me. Not only is it my educational home—the place where I received excellent in-classroom instruction, participated in the professional development opportunities that shaped my professional career, and ultimately granted my two degrees, but it's also been my “work home” for the past three years. To that end, I stand before you today extremely honored and also humbled to speak to you as the 19<sup>th</sup> president of The University of Akron. I'd like to recognize and thank the members of the UA Board of Trustees who are here today. I'd also like to thank all of you for the investment you've made in our students, in the institution and in the University's story.

As one of the very few presidents at institutions across the country who actually have the opportunity to lead at their alma mater, the concept of my alumnus status has been something I've been thinking about with some frequency. During those thoughts, my mind returns again and again to the *people* I've encountered because of this great institution. In homage to that fact, my address today will be largely focused on people who are the heartbeat of The University of Akron with two significant underlying questions: how do we best take care of our people, and how do we best keep our commitments to our students?

For 154 years, The University of Akron has been shaped by many contributing factors into the great institution that it is today. As president, I view it as my responsibility to lead us from where we are currently into an even greater future. The University of Akron in its present day is a 218-acre insular campus in the middle of a thriving city. Our geographical footprint extends via branch campuses and centers in two additional counties. We have online and remote programs that do not require travel. Steps from our main campus perimeter are hundreds of corporations and nonprofit organizations, industries that drive technology and transportation, cultural opportunities that rival the offerings of much larger and much more populated urban centers across the nation, and much, much more.

All of these statistics and highlights mean nothing, however, without people to enjoy the benefits of this world-class institution and people to be shaped by the first-rate education we offer. Indeed, The University of Akron *is* much more than our 218-acre footprint. We are the intellectual center—a youthful and unique lifeblood—of the surrounding city that relies on us to educate the future leaders of the corporations, nonprofits, industries and cultural gathering places I mentioned before. We are the collective stories of nearly 200,000 alumni. We are the groundbreaking research of our brilliant faculty. We are the four-year, or more, investment of our current students—students to whom we owe the product we've promised.

How do we do this? An excellent place to start is with a review of our organizational values—flourishing people, lifelong learning and social impact. Since these were developed over the course of the strategic planning process of the past two years, we've learned to repeat them again and again, but, in our repetition, we cannot forget to dig deep for their meaning and how they define our contextual role. Each

value is a purpose-driven, person-centered recognition that The University of Akron is an instrumental bastion of intellect and community engagement.

We have connected our in-class learning to a variety of community-based opportunities where our students consistently gain hands-on experience and develop professionally. Simultaneously, under the guidance of faculty researchers and scholars, students are given countless forums to harness their creativity and implement their ideas, all to better the lives of people far beyond the edge of our campus. Considering the variety of academic projects and partnerships with nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, and more, UA has perfectly paired with numerous sectors of the greater Akron community. Dozens of Akron community-engaged scholars have committed to shaping students who will leave this institution career ready and deeply appreciating their involvement and contributions to the bigger picture.

This is the type of social impact we promote at The University of Akron. As I mentioned earlier in the semester, our UA people flourish better with a sense of both internal and external community. A large percentage of more than 600 survey respondents described the current UA and the future UA with the word “community.” We thrive as an institution that cares about its own and about the surrounding people, their cultures, and the needs and desires of individuals outside ourselves.

Beyond our community-focused spirit, we are consistent contributors to contrasting industries. We are benefiting from and reciprocating back partnerships across the Polymer Cluster. Federal and state grants ensure our continued role in the third Ohio Innovation Hub.

In manufacturing and health care, we are making waves and opening new facilities that increase our experiential learning and student research opportunities. We are doing our part to streamline processes of learning and assist in the efficiency of production, precision and care. This is lifelong learning.

As a double alumnus, former dean and now president who is continually learning each day in the role, I do have institutional memory of this place. I know, however, there are many individuals here with far more. There are innovators who have shaped our identity. There are learners who crave the intellectual focus of the academy. There are fierce competitors in athletics and arenas of the mind. And there are both students and colleagues who simply “stuck it out” for the promise of a brighter future. The idea of a brighter future is what I’d like you all to keep in mind for the next few minutes. A brighter future on many levels—personally, professionally, institutionally and more—is a hope many of us have—a hope I am confident we can achieve. We can do this because The University of Akron is a storied institution—a resilient, student-centered pillar of this great community.

Our mission states, in part, “The University of Akron...strives to develop enlightened members of society. It offers comprehensive programs of instruction...pursues a vigorous agenda of research in the arts, sciences and professions; and provides service to the community. The University pursues excellence...and distinction...inquiry and creative activity.”

Our approach equips us with the tools to continue our multi-faceted endeavor for a better campus, a better culture and a better community.

With areas that are objectively struggling and key financial alignments to be made, we are at a crucial juncture where minor retooling makes sense. There is perhaps not a single enterprise at any university that does not, at pivotal points, undergo revisions. The time for us to revise is now. As the University of

Akron's leader, my passion for changing our organizational narrative has deepened immensely. The passion I speak of is not simply for our great institution and its many moving parts. It is also for our fantastic city, the state of Ohio which our university represents, and, like our people, spreads far beyond this place. We will continue to assess our financial situation to ensure the proper alignment of our revenue and expenditures. As we transform into an even greater university, through careful visioning and strategic planning, much of which we've already initially introduced, we will maximize our institutional stewardship.

In past messages, as is so often also done in State of the University addresses, I've highlighted specific programs that distinguish The University of Akron and demonstrate to outside entities the breadth of outstanding work being accomplished here. I am not choosing to do that today, because I would inevitably and inadvertently leave out success stories worthy of mentioning.

We have dynamic academic departments across our colleges; they offer state-of-the-art education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Approximately 300 student organizations help students find a niche, a sense of belonging, and the information and specialized insight that will transform their Akron experience. Academic teams are competing in numerous forums; their excellence transcends their scholarly disciplines and affords them an additional role as institutional ambassador for their nationally renowned, globally recognized university.

On the athletics front, our UA student-athletes continue to excel in the classroom and also in the sports arenas—they represent us well on the field, court, and pool of their respective sports. Throughout Akron Athletics, participants are exemplifying the meaning of "student-athlete" while investing the hard work and dedication required to vie for MAC championships in all sports.

Every facet of this place demonstrates in some way the University of Akron's ties to industry, commitment to disseminating information, and history of spreading culture and sport. Faculty and staff across campus are engaged in rigorous research programs that complement their in-class and co-curricular instruction. Our colleagues develop solutions and groundbreaking thought leadership in industry, human behavior, health and more. Truly, our students and all UA colleagues share their intellect with the world. What does this all mean? The current state of the University indicates positive implications for our future.

Vision 2030 is already underway, and the strategic planning we engage in now will set us up for the future—not just five years from now, but for generations to come. Earlier, I mentioned 154 years of UA tradition. None of us was present for the first state of the University of Akron address, and, spoiler alert, none of us *will be* present for the address 154 years from now. However, The University of Akron *will be* here.

*What is The University of Akron?* This entire speech is a mere snapshot discussion of our identity. It gives us a basis to talk about this incredible institution through the lens of a unified organizational narrative. The storytelling we engage in now—whether that involves internal stakeholders like our students and each one of you—or our many friends all over the globe—the storytelling we engage in now will define the next chapter for this celebrated university.

Together, with all of you, I am committed to the process of generating buy-in. Love for this institution already abounds; the rally cry of "Go Zips" means something unique to each of us and symbolizes

passion turned into practice. I invite you all to take part in the process of Vision 2030 and beyond as we revise our institutional story.

The task of compartmentalizing all that makes The University of Akron great *is certainly daunting*. The process of developing a state of the university address requires honesty, self-reflection and, in this case, a reality check. While UA is stable and exuding positivity throughout our community and into the far reaches of the world, there are still challenges to be solved and necessary retooling to build a better, even greater, University of Akron for the future.

I say “for the future,” not “of the future,” because the future *depends* on our commitment to continuing our tremendous work. In the spirit of allowing each of you to make an imprint on that future narrative, I look forward to working together with all of you to address our current challenges, including financial. I commit to each of you that your concerns and ideas will be heard and considered. To that end, I’d love to answer some of your questions at this time.