

Margaret Spellings
UNC President-elect
Remarks at UNC Board of Governors Retreat
February 12, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I am excited about the work ahead and commend you on the tenor of your conversations. Above all, I thank you for your service to the students of the UNC system—and to this enterprise that is mission-critical to our state.

I appreciate your commitment to our shared success, and I thank the transition committee, chaired by Craig Souza in particular, for their good work. I also wish to thank Chairman Bissette for his wise counsel during my transition. Since you elected me to be your next president, I have developed relationships with you and other key collaborators. I am deeply impressed by the caliber of the talent and expertise on this board and throughout this enterprise.

Each of you brings experience, skill, perspective, and passion for higher education, and I intend to rely on you both as individuals and as a governing body. My assignment today is to frame what I expect from you and what you can expect from me in return. I will share my game plan for how we can work together to achieve an ambitious goal: to make North Carolina the nation's leader in affordability, accessibility, accountability and quality in higher education.

Before I lay out that game plan, however, I must do a little table setting to convey my appreciation for our key constituents and collaborators.

First, I know that not one student is educated nor is one patient served at the system office or in this boardroom. The real work of this enterprise happens in university classrooms, hospitals and research laboratories around this state, and it rests in the capable hands of faculty, staff, and institutional leaders. It is our privilege to join them in serving our students and taxpayers.

I also want to emphasize my great respect for our governor and the General Assembly. They are directly accountable to the voters, and I give them all due deference.

Having spent many years working in and around legislative environments, I know one thing for sure: every bit of authority vested in us has been conferred by these elected officials.

I know that every single taxpayer dollar that is allocated to us, to our institutions, and to students and scholars is the direct result of a deliberative legislative process—a process that we will engage in together under my leadership.

Since its founding, North Carolina has facilitated a visionary approach to the proliferation of higher education, which is what attracted me to my new role. North Carolina was the first state in the nation to launch a public university. Over time, strategic and insightful leaders have enabled that single institution to grow into the premier public university system in the country.

The individuals who founded the University of North Carolina and cultivated its growth have always understood that higher education is the essential foundation of the American dream. It strengthens democratic values, fosters civic engagement, and levels the playing field so that people from every background can develop their potential and contribute to the greater good.

Universities are not only centers of ingenuity and economic vitality—they are the single most effective solution to the thorniest and most intractable problems that we face. And North Carolina offers the very best of them.

In 1776, the same year that the Declaration of Independence was signed and the Revolutionary War was launched, the authors of our state constitution said “all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more Universities.” They knew that higher education would be key to establishing a thriving democracy, a productive citizenry, and a vibrant economy.

Nearly two centuries later, working with the newly formed Board of Governors and UNC President Bill Friday, the General Assembly expanded this university system and defined its mission to provide excellence in teaching, professional education, adult education, and cutting-edge research.

Today, we have the privilege of serving an enterprise that fulfills their dream. As they put it, a system of universities “where the limits of knowledge are enlarged, where new discoveries are made, and where man’s understanding of himself and the world is steadily expanding.”

Our shared charge is to build on this legacy so that every single North Carolinian can succeed at one of our institutions. Our universities are owned by the people of this state, and we can and must do more to serve them.

Let me be more specific: I believe we can lead our nation in providing educational excellence and access to all interested and qualified students. We must excel in affordability as the state constitution calls us to do, and we must provide the best chances for success in employment and in life. These goals must be clear and measureable. And we must be transparent in showing students, taxpayers and policymakers our progress in meeting these objectives and in stewarding their resources.

To help ensure access for all, we must prepare an outstanding teacher corps to educate k-12 students based on research that tells us what works. We must provide financial support to allow qualified applicants to achieve their dreams in affordable ways.

Perhaps most importantly, we must provide opportunity for all. Historically in our country, we have done a pretty good job of educating elites, and we still do. The scholarship and innovation coming from our universities is unparalleled. It has helped create jobs and enhance the quality of life for people around the world, and we must continue to make this quest for excellence a priority.

However, educating elites is no longer the only game in town. It’s simply not enough. In a global knowledge economy, we are required to help many more people – particularly people of color and those

from first-generation and low-income backgrounds – to achieve at much higher levels. We have not done this well in the past, and we continue to fall short even now.

To guide our work, we can rely on four truths I have discovered in my decades of public service.

First, we must be about results above all. While processes are important, outcomes matter most for our students, faculty, and taxpayers.

How do we do this?

We must set clear expectations of institutional leaders and then get out of their way. We must show them the respect they rightfully deserve as managers of sophisticated enterprises.

I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of the system's chancellors already. I have great confidence in them and in the faculties and staffs they lead, and I know they are capable of delivering on our shared vision. We are also faced with a number of key university leadership vacancies, and one of the most important things that we will do together is to select talented individuals to join us in our important work.

Our job is to set the direction based on the needs of the state. Further, we must recognize the unique strengths of each institution and advocate for the sound policies and resources needed to be the undisputed best. From research to the liberal arts to science and technology to minority serving institutions, each campus has its own distinctive mission.

If goals are not met, we must take action, of course. But we only get in our own way if we try to be a “cop on the beat” by micro managing. This undermines the ability of those at the institutional level to achieve results and allows them to blame us—and others—if the needle doesn't move.

Second, we must do a few meaningful things very well. This is not to say that other tasks do not have their place. But our clarion call must be around our priorities of affordability, accessibility, quality, and accountability. We must also have the discipline and foresight to stop doing things that others can do better or that divert us from our core priorities.

Third, we must leverage the incredible talent, expertise, and vision in this enterprise. As my legendary predecessor Bill Friday rightly said, the UNC system is a “mighty engine,” and we must unleash it to address the greatest challenges of our state and our country.

And last, we must demonstrate that we are trustworthy experts who contribute to the success of this state and its people. While North Carolinians rightly take pride in their universities as a matter of birthright, we must do a better job of reminding them of the many ways this system makes our state a great place to live and work. Our campuses enroll nearly a quarter of a million students—and our graduates go on to serve our state and our country in smart and creative ways. We must tell their stories in accurate, intellectually rigorous, and compelling ways.

So, what can you expect of me?

For starters, you can expect me to engage all our stakeholders—from students and faculty—to legislators—to business, civil rights and faith leaders. Together, we will establish priorities that the people of North Carolina can hold us accountable for. We must listen and communicate often and stand for transparency always. I am excited to kick-off my listening tour of every campus and affiliate in my first week on the job. I look forward to learning:

- What makes the UNC community proud,
- What our stakeholders think are the most important issues we face,
- And where they believe that we have work to do.

You can also expect me to develop a top-notch team. That is one reason why I asked BCG to work with us to assess our organizational structure. I intend to take action on their final report to make sure we have the people and the processes in place to ensure our success, and I will need your support for this important step.

I will be our primary representative to the public, the General Assembly and the governor. I will tell our story and make the case for the resources we need. I will work with our trusted colleagues, the chancellors, to propose budgets based on sound policy, the needs of our enterprise, the needs of our students, and the needs of the state. We must speak with one voice.

I will also partner with the leaders of our k-12 schools, our community colleges, and other colleges and universities.

You can expect me to build on and forge key relationships, and you can expect me to listen to all stakeholders – including you.

I expect to turn to you as a trusted resource on strategic issues. To be respectful of your time as fiduciaries providing oversight – not management – of this enterprise. Just as I expect you to be respectful of my need to allocate the right amount of time and bandwidth to other important constituencies and tasks. I will need you to exercise discipline as individuals and as a board. To do otherwise undermines this institution and the role we each play.

Lastly, and most importantly, I expect you to hold me accountable for my role in meeting the challenges before us. I will hit the ground running so you can see tangible results in the coming weeks and months.

I will, of course, need your help, your trust, and your support. Achieving these goals will require us to take risks and make decisions that may not always make everyone happy. And we will make mistakes and need to course correct along the way. I will need your candor, your confidence, and your ownership of the rightful roles we all play - yours to provide strategic, evidence-based oversight - and mine to lead and manage this enterprise.

You appointed me because of my record of playing to win at the national level. That record stems from my belief that education is the new civil right – and that advancing opportunity is not a task that we can

leave to others. I worked my way through college, and to this day that experience informs my professional career.

Much has been said of the process that has resulted in my selection and about me personally. I must say that after spending most of my career in service to the public, working on behalf of all students—and with people of all points of view—I have been surprised at times by the intensity of the reaction.

I look forward to meeting with, talking to, and learning from those who have questions about my record and my intentions. When you get to know me, you'll see that I am driven to provide education and opportunity for all.

When North Carolina called, I welcomed the opportunity—because I have long admired this stellar university system. Imagine how we could transform this state if we made the very best education affordable and accessible to all. An education that will make all the difference, as it has for each of us, for our citizens and for this place.

The challenges ahead are complex and critical, but together we are called to this time and this purpose. I can't wait to get started in a few weeks. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your President. Let's get to work.