

Appalachian State University Chancellor Nomination Statement
by UNC System President Peter Hans
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Appalachian State is one of the best-loved universities in the country. Mountaineers are proud of their campus, proud of their history, and fiercely proud of what a once-small mountain academy has grown to become. And well they should be. It has been exciting to see Appalachian State grow into a powerhouse for the region and the state.

And it has been a joy to contemplate its next era alongside many thoughtful, hopeful, committed supporters of the place over these last few months. Appalachian needs a leader who can welcome the earnest enthusiasm that so many people feel for this campus; someone who can embrace a growing community with an open and generous spirit; someone with the experience and hard-earned expertise to strengthen this vital engine of economic growth and upward opportunity. I am happy to say that after a comprehensive and encouraging search, we have found that leader.

Today, it's my honor to nominate someone who knows this university top to bottom; someone who loves the mountains and cherishes App State's service to the region; someone with the patience and steady temperament to build relationships and unite the Appalachian community behind an ambitious vision for one of the country's most inviting public universities. It's my honor to nominate Dr. Heather Norris as the next chancellor of Appalachian State University.

Dr. Norris has been a widely respected leader and scholar in the Appalachian community for more than two decades, and her service as interim chancellor since last April has been exemplary. Since coming to App State as a professor of finance in 2003, Dr. Norris has risen steadily through the ranks of academic and campus leadership, showing a deep capacity for aligning institutional incentives to student success in a way that has strengthened her university and benefitted a generation of Mountaineer graduates. Everyone who has worked with Dr. Norris praises her ability to take on complex problems without losing sight of the university's core mission of service.

Her breadth of experience across Appalachian State's academic programs, operational needs, and external relationships gives Dr. Norris the capacity to hit the ground running as chancellor, to channel the momentum and enthusiasm of the Mountaineers as the campus and the wider region continue to expand and confront the challenges of responsible growth.

I also believe you learn a great deal about a person's heart and their commitment during a crisis. And Interim Chancellor Norris has been a steady, healing presence through the very difficult months following Hurricane Helene. Just seeing the news coverage of this university in the weeks after the disaster, you got a clear sense of a community coming together, leaning into the mission

of serving the wider region, and drawing strength from a shared ordeal. That's evidence of real leadership, and I am personally grateful for the grace and goodwill that Dr. Norris and her team have cultivated since last fall. Every time I've visited Boone since the storm struck I've heard about Dr. Norris' reassuring approach to working with the community and welcoming involvement from across campus. That confident and healing approach to leadership is exactly what this moment demands, and it's been wonderful to witness during these last few months. We need App State to be open to all and serve all.

Dr. Norris also brings a wealth of finance and operations experience to a role that will demand a great deal of both. Appalachian State is an enormous enterprise and growing larger still. The university is a keystone for the entire region, supporting one of every 14 jobs in the five surrounding counties and serving as the cultural and economic anchor for one of the fastest-growing areas in North Carolina. Responsibly managing the challenges of growth and investment is one of the most important tasks for App State's next leader, and it gives me a great deal of confidence to know we have a finance expert, former business school dean, and proven campus leader at the helm.

Dr. Norris has shown a profound appreciation for App State's role in our state; its service to the mountain region; and its unique place within the UNC System. It's hard to believe when you visit Appalachian's beautiful and bustling campus today, but this university began as a small teaching academy to help reach students in the "lost provinces" of the mountain west, a way to bring quality education to what was an isolated and almost entirely rural corner of our state. It's that and so much more today.

That sense of mission remains in the DNA of App State, and it shines through in the work that Dr. Norris has championed as a faculty member, the business school dean, provost, and interim chancellor. In every role, her commitment to delivering value for students has been clear, and it has already made a difference at Appalachian. She not only embraced the work of assessing outcomes and value for students but has pushed to make that a core metric for program review. She knows this institution exists to educate the nurses, teachers, business owners, and civic leaders that we need to thrive, and she has been creative and open-minded in finding innovative ways to cultivate talent and serve the needs of this region. Amid shifting demographics and a fast-changing economy, Dr. Norris has embraced online education to support high-demand fields, championed the university's working adult-focused campus in Hickory, pushed relentlessly for improvements in retention and graduation, and will soon launch an overdue capital campaign.

And she has shown a genuine excitement about tapping the energy of Appalachian alumni, near and far, to help drive the next era of achievement for the Mountaineers. This is a university that inspires intense devotion from those lucky enough to have studied here, and all of those who relish an afternoon game at The Rock or a show at the Schaefer Center. Welcoming the enthusiasm that people have for Appalachian and finding ways to put that passion to good use on behalf of students and the wider region will be crucial for shaping the university's next era.

With a sense of unity and shared purpose, I believe Appalachian State can be among the strongest, best-performing public universities in the nation, a place celebrated for balancing academic rigor with the kind energizing, uplifting college experience unique to the mountains. Heather Norris has already proven that she's the right person to bring the App State community together, and to deepen this university's 125-year-old legacy. I am eager for the good work and changes ahead.

My sincere thanks to the members of the search advisory committee, who succeeded in making this an exciting and optimistic moment for Appalachian State. I am especially grateful to Deanna Ballard for chairing our efforts and demonstrating her devotion to serving North Carolina. I believe all of us came away from this process with a newfound appreciation for just how beloved and admired Appalachian State is across North Carolina and across higher education nationally. Our public universities are doing an excellent job at both attracting talent and cultivating our own, and it's gratifying to see how our steady commitment to higher education is making a difference in the trajectory of our institutions.

Thank you all and go Mountaineers!