

**Elizabeth City State University Chancellor Nomination Statement
by UNC System President Peter Hans
May 15, 2025**

Elizabeth City State University has a proud history of resilience and perseverance, and the last few years have been a particularly inspiring chapter of renewal for the Vikings. At a time of deep struggle for many smaller university campuses — especially those in more rural areas, and those focused on the life-changing work of accessible, affordable education — Elizabeth City State has defied the odds. With focused leadership and strong backing from this Board and state lawmakers, ECSU has seen growing public investment and growing enrollment, serving as a vital outpost of opportunity for students in northeastern North Carolina, across our state, and beyond.

There are a great many things to be proud of in North Carolina's landscape of public higher education, but Elizabeth City State represents an especially clear commitment to the ideal of putting a quality education within reach of all North Carolinians. From its origins in the legislative advocacy of Hugh Cale in 1891 to the recent investments in NC Promise and its \$500 tuition per semester, ECSU has earned the trust and support of people across our state by delivering on its core mission of offering opportunity to all those with the drive to pursue it.

That trust has been strengthened over the last several years of exemplary leadership. You can see the impact of the Karrie Dixon era the moment you step onto campus, with hundreds of millions of dollars in expanded capital investments; in a larger student body; in the growth of marquee programs like aviation science and business administration. You can see it in the energy and excitement of the alumni, in the sense of optimism among the faculty and staff, in the confidence of the students.

It has been wonderful to undertake the search for Chancellor Dixon's successor with a distinct spirit of possibility and momentum, and I have no doubt that bolstered the work of our search committee and encouraged the high-quality applicants we had the privilege of considering. It was clear to all of us that the ECSU story has resonated in the wider world of higher education among all of those who share a commitment to thriving public universities of all shapes and sizes.

Elizabeth City State needs a leader who can maintain that trust and bond with the state of North Carolina. It needs someone with a genuine enthusiasm for the close connections and spirit that comes with serving on a smaller campus in a tight-knit community. It deserves someone who can balance the twin imperatives of maintaining strong enrollment and improving student outcomes, ensuring that ECSU has a vision and top-to-bottom commitment of seeing students through to successful graduation. It needs someone with a profound respect for the historic mission and cultural vitality of a proudly public HBCU.

I believe we've found just such a person. A talented manager and academic administrator; an experienced leader with strategic vision; someone who knows the unique challenges and strengths of a small HBCU with ambitious plans. Today, it's my honor to nominate Dr. Keith Hargrove as the next chancellor of Elizabeth City State University.

He holds degrees from Tennessee State University, the Missouri University of Science and Technology, and the University of Iowa. Dr. Hargrove is an engineer by training, and a rigorous and disciplined thinker by disposition. He's been a professor, a department chair, a dean and a provost, steadily building a resume of growing responsibility and a reputation for careful and effective planning. He's also a Certified Manufacturing Engineer who learned management at GE and forged extensive private sector partnerships during his time in higher education, showing a deep understanding of the university's role in strengthening a skilled workforce and the economy.

As the immediate past provost at the prestigious Tuskegee University, he oversaw a strategic planning process that focused on growing enrollment, improving the student experience, and supporting faculty development. His appreciation of the close link between academic performance and operational excellence helped drive an increase in enrollment and graduation rates, which will be key priorities for ECSU's next leader. In the proud tradition of the Tuskegee Airmen, he developed an aviation program there and launched an innovative data science effort – both promising areas for Elizabeth City State.

Prior to his arrival at Tuskegee, Dr. Hargrove spent more than a decade as Dean of the College of Engineering at his alma mater of Tennessee State University. Like ECSU, Tennessee State is a public HBCU with a mission of welcoming students from all walks of life and equipping them to thrive in a fast-changing economy. The experience of being an undergraduate there, in that supportive and encouraging environment, has been key to Dr. Hargrove's educational philosophy ever since.

As engineering dean at TSU, he forged closer ties with industry partners; improved academic outcomes for students; and helped grow new programs in computer science. His ability to balance day-to-day operational improvement with long-range vision and planning speaks to a patient drive for institutional excellence, an awareness that higher education is always a balance between what's tried and true and what's new and innovative.

Dr. Hargrove is also a leader with a clear appreciation for how the different pieces of the educational system must work in harmony. Across his career, he's shown a consistent focus on building K12 pipeline programs to help support enrollment and expand opportunity; in community college transfer success as a critical part of the institutional mission; and in making sure students don't simply graduate but find promising careers in expanding sectors of the economy. All of those are vital interests for Elizabeth City State.

And, of course, as a two-time Tennessee State graduate, a professor at Morgan State, and a leader of Tuskegee University, Dr. Hargrove knows the responsibility and legacy that HBCUs carry; the energy and depth of commitment among their alumni; and the importance of offering a welcoming home for all students to realize their ambitions.

A man of his accomplishments, background, and evident enthusiasm for the cause of higher education will command the respect and affection of the Viking community and earn the trust and goodwill of colleagues across campus and across the state. He already has my attention and enthusiasm, and I am enormously hopeful about his plans for Elizabeth City.

I want to extend a deep thank you to Dr. Catherine Edmonds, who has offered steady and reassuring leadership through this time of transition at Elizabeth City State. I have a special admiration for those who answer the call to service with a genuine sense of duty and devotion to North Carolina, and that is exactly what Interim Chancellor Edmonds has shown this past year. She's kept pushing forward with exciting new

partnerships and continued momentum while being a healing presence for students when violence from community members recently spilled over to campus. I'm grateful to her for agreeing to serve, and excited that she'll serve in another role within the UNC System once Dr. Hargrove arrives.

I also want to thank the members of the search advisory committee – led by trustee Chair Dr. Stephanie Johnson – who worked diligently to attract a stellar pool of candidates and hone a shared, optimistic vision of where ECSU needs to go next. The Viking community can take pride in the breadth of talent drawn to Elizabeth City, and the depth of commitment that so many people feel toward this institution and its students. There are glorious days ahead for Elizabeth City State University, and I look forward to celebrating them with all of you.