

Thank you, Regent Roberts and Dr. Maher.

I am humbled and honored, and it truly is my privilege to serve as President at Northern State University.

I'd like to begin with a few recognitions. Please stand and remain standing and we will hold our applause until all are recognized.

To Stacy Bauer and the Investiture committee, thank you for planning and orchestrating a week that celebrates such a wonderful cross-section of our campus and community.

To our choral and wind ensemble students, Dr. Olson and Dr. Johnson, thank you for adding beauty and joy to our ceremony.

To our distinguished leaders on stage, I am deeply humbled by your presence and generous greetings.

Also attending today are Regent Joan Wink, Regent Brock Brown, President Sheila Gestring from the University of South Dakota, President Barry Dunn from South Dakota State University, and President Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin from Augustana University. We are honored by your presence.

To the lifeblood of any campus, our dedicated faculty, staff, students, and administration – it is truly an honor to serve you and to serve with you.

And to the members of the community of Aberdeen—a community that supports its university like none other—and to all others attending from across the region, state, and beyond—please also stand. We are so grateful you joined us today.

I would also like to recognize several individuals who have had a profound impact on my career and life. Please stand when recognized and we'll again hold our applause until all have been introduced.

From the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Vice Chancellor Jon Watts, Dean Gilbert Hinga and Dr. Beth Hinga, Vice President Lucas Dart, and Professor Emeritus, Dr. Gary Davis.

From Wayne State College, Mr. Brad Weber and a fellow WSC undergrad and lifelong friend, Mr. R.J. Metteer.

From the University of Nebraska Lincoln, attending via livestream, my doctoral advisor, Dr. Glenn Nierman.

And from California State University Long Beach, and winning the trophy for the longest distance traveled, Vice Provost for Academic Planning, Dr. Dhushy Sathianathan.

I am also grateful to have several members of my family with us today.

Teresa and I will celebrate our 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July. She is as driven today as the day I met her, as good a principal and educator as I've known, an amazing Mom, and the best partner I could have hoped for, to share my journey.

Joining us are our daughter, Dr. Rachel Gilles, and son, Graham. You have helped us learn and grow alongside you and have given our lives infinitely more meaning and joy. We are so proud of you. And any days we are together with you, are our very best days.

Also joining us today are Teresa's parents, Ron and Laurie Travis and by livestream, Fern and Dave Francis. We will never be able to repay the support you have given us.

Finally, joining us are my sister Donna Rae and husband Dean, of Evans Georgia, and my brother Richard and wife Sharon from Norfolk Nebraska. As the youngest of seven, you, Dianne, Sharon, Michael, and Maynard, were my first teachers. And we are joined by our cousins Norm and Deb Schulte, who I also consider my siblings. All of you embody all that Dad and Mom instilled in us, and I know they are looking down on all of us with great joy today.

Chancellor Kristensen, it is truly an honor to have you present and thank you for your inspirational remarks. But, I'm pretty sure we experienced a near complete failure in communication when I asked you focus your remarks on the institution and education.

As you can see from Chancellor's bio, he has had a distinguished career; as an attorney, Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature, and 20 years at the helm of the University of Nebraska at Kearney. You will also get a sense of his success in transforming UNK's campus, facilities, and academic profile.

What you may not see is his remarkable vision, political skills, and tenacity. Twenty years ago, others wondered why he was tirelessly advocating for, and investing resources in, a complete overhaul of the campus power plant and all major campus infrastructure. But much of what you will see if you visit UNK today, would simply not have been possible without his vision.

This includes University Village, which has essentially doubled the size of campus and is drawing public and private investment to Kearney. However, nothing can compare to his 20-year efforts to bring programs from the University of Nebraska Medical Center to Kearney. In doing so, he establishing an anchor for rural health care that will contribute to the revitalization of Greater Nebraska for generations to come.

Chancellor, you are an inspiration, as good a person as a public servant, and I am so grateful for your mentorship and friendship.

Abraham Maslow spoke to us individually and collectively in his words: "One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth." Our founders clearly chose the latter, while the challenges were many.

The path to Northern began in 1885 when the legislature passed a bill creating the University of Central Dakota in Ordway. Then, like now, all paths led through appropriations committees.

In this instance, we can be thankful that no funding was authorized, because two years later, by the time an appropriations bill did pass both houses, Aberdeen boosters had successfully advocated to change the location from Ordway to Aberdeen. Unfortunately, financial considerations led Governor Louis Church to veto the bill and few votes were mustered to attempt an override.

A full decade passed until in 1899, Senator James Lawson introduced a bill to create a Normal and Industrial School in Aberdeen. It passed the Senate 31-7 and the House 59-21. Supporters were astonished, however, when Governor Andrew Lee vetoed the bill, stating that the state did not need another normal school.

Rather than attempting an override, a few weeks later, Senator Lawson introduced a new bill, calling for the creation of an Industrial School and Institute of Technology. It passed the Senate 38-6 and the House 52-32, but the drama continued.

Governor Lee had 3 days to act on the bill. On the third day, while stories differ, we know that the Senate rather hastily adjourned. As a result, the bill became law through the Governor's failure to act within the 3-day period.

While a new school was born, it took two more years to pass an appropriations bill in 1901. And due to widespread dissatisfaction with the mission of an Industrial School and Institute of Technology, a final bill established the mission and name, Northern Normal and Industrial School. And it only took 16 years.

For just a moment today, try to strip away all your associations with public higher education, and glimpse what is truly profound. And that is, the very concept of public-funded higher education.

It was a bold idea to invest public funds, collected from citizens and appropriated through their legislatures, to provide students with affordable access to both personal and professional development, while instilling in them a sense of responsibility to use what they had learned to contribute to the life and prosperity of their community.

From the beginning, were always two ideals. That education expanded an individual's ability to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, and that they would contribute to the public good of society. Today, Northern is proud that 65% of our students are residents of South Dakota and that 65% remain in South Dakota after graduation.

At the same time, our founders certainly knew that higher education would draw citizens from other states and countries who would also contribute to the life and prosperity of the community.

This too is one of the profound ideas of America. That investments across the nation can uplift the entire nation. It is always dangerous to test a proposition in front of a live audience, but I'll take a chance. Please stand, if you received any portion of your education, primary through post-graduate, in a state or country other than the one in which you currently reside.

Today, let's celebrate public-higher education, and the ongoing support of our citizens, legislators, and Governors in South Dakota and across the country.

The elements that secured Northern's founding are the same as those that secured approval for our Lincoln Hall Project this spring.

It began with an institutional and community vision to both enhance educational opportunities for students and serve vital regional needs.

The Board of Regents elevated the project as a priority and Board Office Staff amplified it and nurtured relationships with the Governor and Legislature.

Governor Noem supported the value of the project for students and the region and identified funding in her proposed budget.

A coalition of community members, businesses, healthcare advocates, and many others, came together to support the project.

And numerous legislators carried the bill, and used their many tools of persuasion, to secure the support and votes of their colleagues.

If you played any part, in any of these roles, will you please stand so we can show our appreciation.

Today, Northern is an economic driver for the region and state. Supporting and sustaining more than 1,000 jobs, generating 180.7 million dollars in economic impact, 33.7 million in student spending, and 6.8 million in state and local taxes. Our graduates, throughout the course of their careers generate \$35.6 billion in direct impact to South Dakota. And our students, staff, and faculty annually make charitable contributions and volunteer nearly 53 thousand hours of community service valued at more than \$1.6M.

Today, I want to thank all of you for a remarkable nine months since I arrived. We again, have chosen to move forward toward growth.

We have celebrated the achievements of faculty, staff, and students. Our faculty are recognized scholars and artists, who are deeply committed to both teaching and mentoring students.

Our dedicated staff maintain our beautiful campus and facilities, provide personalized academic and student support services, health and wellness services, and lead and inspire our students in highly competitive athletics programs.



Our students are our pride and joy—they are bright, engaged, driven, and achieve at a high level, in and out of the classroom, in academic, artistic, and athletic activities and competition, and they volunteer their leadership in Student Government, organizations, and community service.

And, our campus and academic administrators serve Northern with distinction. As situations arise, this service can become a 24/7 proposition. And in the case of Terri Holmes, our athletics Senior Women's Administrator, it became two full time jobs when she agreed to serve as interim Director of Athletics. When I asked her to serve, she immediately answered, "I will do anything for Northern and Northern Athletics." All of you exemplify true servant-leadership.

Last fall we officially celebrated a transformational period of philanthropic investment in Northern. In the past 10 years, generous donors and supporters have invested over 150 million dollars to transform our campus facilities and enhance scholarships and programmatic support.

Capital projects included two modern suite-style residence halls, the Harvey C. Jewett Regional Science Education Center, Dacotah Bank Stadium and Thares Field, Koehler Hall of Fame Softball Field, and the NSU Pavilion and Athletic and Recreation Fields in addition to a renovation of the Johnson Fine Arts Center. Donors also provided partial funding for the School of the Blind and Visually Impaired, as did Governor's Noem and Daugaard, and the City of Aberdeen contributed 5 million dollars. Avera Health and

Sanford Health have donated to many projects while providing ongoing support for student health and athletic trainers.

If you have ever given a donation to support Northern, in any amount, will you please rise so we can express our sincere appreciation.

Today, I can proudly say that Academics are strong at Northern.

Last August, the Higher Learning Commission confirmed that Northern had successfully completed its Year 4 Assurance Review with no recommended monitoring.

In January, Northern was welcomed to full membership in the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, joining 29 colleges and universities that are recognized for providing transformative education through an integrated curriculum in the Arts and Humanities, Natural and Social Sciences, and Mathematics, commensurate with that offered by North America's finest private colleges.

We have refined our mission as a regional comprehensive university and moved forward with a new approach to strategic planning. Our current priorities focus on expanding student access and success, enhancing our campus culture for students and employees, building collaborative public and private partnerships, and aggressively pursuing philanthropic support for student scholarships and programming. A fifth, academic priority, is emerging around expanding experiential learning.

Regarding our priority to expand student access & success, among other initiatives, I appointed an Enrollment Management Council last fall. We are partnering with a national enrollment consultant and will be engaging the entire campus in developing Northern's first comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.

Deans and faculty are revising and creating new programs. In fact, since 2020, at least 24 new or revised programs have been introduced to meet evolving regional needs. We are also increasing collaborations with fellow Board of Regents Universities and updating articulation agreements with the Technical Colleges.

Since our Academic Deans play a demanding role in all our priorities; and will play an increasingly vital and external-facing role in building partnerships and pursuing philanthropic and external funding; last week we announced that we will reinstate distinct Deans for the School of Business and Millicent Atkins School of Education.

Moving forward, we will redouble our efforts to recruit teachers, counselors, and administrators for our schools, to ensure that our high school graduates are well-prepared for rigorous undergraduate programs in all education and career fields. And our Lincoln Hall Project is driven by our commitment to meeting critical regional and state workforce demands in Business Administration, Finance, and Accounting as well as Nursing. South Dakota State University has delivered its Accelerated Nursing

program on our campus for nearly a decade, and the new facility will expand the program's annual cohort capacity by 50%.

Regarding our priority of enhancing our campus culture, last fall we implemented the Board of Regents Opportunity for All to ensure that we are providing individualized support for students' diverse needs, for example – academic, first generation, financial, cultural, social, and physical and mental health needs. I also formed and charged the President's Campus Culture and Climate Taskforce to collect and assess comprehensive faculty, staff, and student data and to provide actionable recommendations to enhance campus culture and climate for all.

Moving forward, we will make every effort to remove any barriers to collaboration between Northern and the community and region we serve. To provide just one example of an emerging collaboration, Northern, the Aberdeen Development Corporation, and the Center for Rural Innovation are partnering to introduce a digital ecosystem and entrepreneurship space in Aberdeen, which will spread across all of northeast South Dakota.

Key elements include new and updated curriculum, space for tech entrepreneurs to launch their ideas, education to prepare tech workers, and connecting entrepreneurs and workers to grow businesses, the economy, and career opportunities in Aberdeen and the region.

Finally, our NSU Foundation is thriving under a dedicated Board, new President Zach Flakus, and the outstanding team he has

assembled. While continuing to develop a comprehensive portfolio, the Foundation's primary focus has shifted to increasing support for scholarships and programming. Both will be critical to expanding affordable access to our quality programs for more students.

Northern, Aberdeen, and supporters across the region and state, are once again choosing to move forward toward growth, by capitalizing on historic strengths, imagining new possibilities, and nurturing a culture that embraces and leads change.

Please accept my sincere appreciation for attending today's ceremony, and GO WOLVES!