

## State of the System Address

### **As delivered by Chancellor Greenstein, January 16, 2019**

Governor Wolf, Chair Shapira, Board members, trustees, university presidents, invited guests; to our students, faculty and staff – all Pennsylvanians – thank you for being here today, and allowing me the honor and the privilege of serving this great public university system and this Commonwealth.

I want to recognize and thank a few special guests in particular:

First, let me echo what others have said and express deep thanks to our friends at Highmark, P.S.E.C.U. and M&T Bank for underwriting today's event. You are great partners.

Also, I want to point out that Dr. James McCormick, the State System's founding chancellor is with us today. He led this System through its formative days and for nearly 17 years thereafter. Also with us is my immediate predecessor, Karen Whitney, who served as interim chancellor last year.

To both of you, Jim and Karen, I am proud to follow in your footsteps. And we all say thank you for your service. (*lead applause*)

My wife Melissa and my son Michael are here too. Along with daughter Anna back at home in Seattle – you are my inspiration, my touchstone. And Anna, if you're listening, you're not in school, baby. You have put up with your husband and your dad who has maybe 4 or 5 times in the last 20 years introduced tremendous uncertainty into our lives so he could chase his windmills, the last couple of lives trying to relieve uncertainty in the lives of others less fortunate than we are. Missy I hope you won't mind my sharing a little secret with folks here. "You want to move where to do what?" is not an uncommon phrase in my household. Thank you for putting up with that, and with me. I love you.

I am **deeply** honored to be serving as the fifth chancellor of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education—fifth months into the job. It has been exciting; challenging; enlightening.

While this is an important day for me personally; it's an important time for our universities and this State System.

Our 14 universities have been around a long time – the oldest for 181 years; the youngest, for 125 – imagine - young at 125.

During that time we have provided life-changing opportunities to millions of students—helping them to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

During that time, we have consistently, purposefully, effectively pursued a singular mission –high-quality, workforce aligned, affordable education to the people of this commonwealth.

Our history is something everyone in this room today can and should be proud of.

So, where are we today? What have we become, and where are we headed?

I had the opportunity in the fall to visit each of our universities. You know, Pennsylvania is a really big state – it's also a very beautiful one.

What I found was an amazing collection of institutions, populated by incredible people – students, faculty, and staff who take quite seriously why they are there and have immense pride in our mission.

- I found universities that provide the kind of engaging experiences you see at the best liberal arts colleges, only at a public university price.
- I found universities that are unique in the educational programs they offer. Their distinctiveness stands out in quiet, confident, defiance of a misguided, inaccurate public narrative that we are somehow all the same. I assure you, we are not.
- I found universities that are responsive to changing societal needs. Again defying a very different public narrative, they offer a broad array of educational opportunities, focused increasingly on those aligning with employer needs – in healthcare, business, STEM, and other areas.
- I found universities that house some of the most innovative practices I have seen in higher education, and I've seen a lot in a 35-year career self-consciously located on the leading edge.

In all these ways, our universities exemplify what public higher education is and ought to be.

But I also discovered so much more during my tour. I discovered a deeply rooted set of core values that speaks volumes about our universities, our people.

As part of my visits, I conducted focus groups with students, faculty, and staff. I started each with a simple question: “Why is the university important?” I followed up that question with, “Why is that important?” And so on, four or five times.

Predictably, the question when asked the first time – they were all over the map; but, on campus after campus— without exception—we eventually ended up in the same spot. Our universities are important in the minds of those who know them best because they are places that prepare students for personal success, and help instill in them the desire to help others succeed, as well.

- To contribute to their communities.
- To improve society; making the world a better place.
- To pay it forward.

No one put it better than a student at Lock Haven University, when he said:

*“We all came here to help people at some point, one way or another. Physician assistants, teachers; they help people. I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but I want to help people too.”*

I didn’t necessarily expect that, but I wasn’t really surprised by it either. These are very special places, populated by very special people.

Overall, I came away tremendously impressed.

And I came away in awe of the profound sense of optimism I encountered amongst people who have experienced deep cumulative budget cuts for over a decade – a desire to hope and to create our future—not only to survive, but to thrive.

I share their optimism. I can’t help myself. I’m an irrepressible optimist.

I am also a realist.

In this job, you have to be.

We are facing significant challenges – challenges that are present across U.S. public higher education, but concentrated in super high doses here in Pennsylvania. Lagging public investment forces tuition increases which depress student enrollments which are tough anyway in a state where the traditional high school population is contracting and where there are more seats in higher education than high school graduates to fill them.

These challenges show up in our finances, on which we’ve run any number of scenarios to project what will happen if we continue down the path we’re on today.

It’s not a pretty picture.

In every status-quo scenario, the financial health of our universities declines, our resources eventually are depleted and our great middle class is left stranded without access to the affordable postsecondary education they need to sustain themselves and their families, to participate in the 21st century economy, and to become leaders in their communities.

You all know this; it’s not new. It isn’t news, and it didn’t just happen overnight.

It took years—maybe decades—to get us to this point.

There are a variety of reasons we could point to - in fact I've noticed a tendency by some to want to blame a single cause. Perhaps that's born of hope that there is a single solution. A silver bullet. There's not.

We are here today because at every level of our organization, we've not been able to align around a shared vision and to pursue it together. We haven't collectively made the difficult trade-off decisions we've needed to make... to set aside our parochial self-interest, to hold one another accountable for our actions, and to act as one in the interest of moving the department, the university, the System forward.

Like our future, our past, and thus our present – our multi-faceted and complex challenges – they are our collective accountability. They demand that we embrace creativity, collaboration, commitment and that we eschew dissent, division, and disparagement

I remember one faculty member telling me:

*“We are so consumed by pointing fingers and blaming others for our problems, we aren't having the discussion we need to have about the things we can actually change.”*

I know we can alter the path we are on. We must. The cost of our not is too high. Measured in the shattered hopes and dreams of real people, the devastation of whole communities, the faltering steps of our state's economy, failing to do so is unacceptable to me, as I know it is to each of you.

And let me be crystal clear on this point... my optimism for the future? It's not fueled by fear of failure. It's grounded in the accomplishments of our history, and the passion, the energy, and the talent of our people.

My optimism is based on the hundreds, probably thousands of voices I have heard through individual and group conversations, focus groups, emails, phone calls. These are the voices of students, of faculty, of university leaders, of trustees, of elected leaders, of board members, and of community members. I listen to these voices. I take notes. I organize my notes. They are the primary evidence of my research into who we are and what we must become. [sort of what you get for hiring a professional historian, cum digital archivist and librarian].

If I pause and listen – and I do – I hear these voices rising up as a chorus. They do not seek merely to survive, they seek to thrive – for our students; for our state.

Listening, I hear a faculty member at California who said:

*“I keep asking myself why we keep doing the same things yet expect different results... To be competitive... it is time to set ourselves apart from other institutions... to look at alternatives to the traditional undergraduate degree.”*

Listening, I hear our faculty and staff demanding that we stop competing with each other; that we stop doing things redundantly 14 times over

Listening, I hear a drumbeat urging us to emerge from our silos, to remove bureaucratic processes, to step out of our oppositional cultures to tear down barriers to greater collaboration at every level—barriers that ultimately drive up our costs while negatively impacting our students.

Collaboration is key to our success, a faculty member told me –

*“It is huge among the institutions, even within our institutions. There are tremendous innovations across the system. We have to have an infrastructure that enables us to share them. We need to talk.”*

And there are so many points of collaboration; so many opportunities that are offered

*“If the System would allow students at one university to take online courses at another, a faculty member told me, they would gain access to myriad courses that aren't available at their home universities”*

*If we could put our resources together across departments across universities, I was told, we could do so much more to help academically at risk students who so often leave college with debt but no degree*

*If we understood how similar academic programs relate – in nursing, biology, business, geo and computer sciences to name a few – we could work together, share resources, direction, courses, to expand opportunities for students and faculty*

*If we worked together, I was told by numerous faculty, we could dramatically improve career advising, develop work-based learning opportunities like internships for our students; we could recruiting more students from out of state; implement better, easier to use student-facing systems for admissions, registration, class scheduling*

The list goes on; recommendations don't come from a few people, but from hundreds.

If we care to listen – and I do – we hear our faculty and staff telling us that only by transforming our universities, our System, can we continue our historic mission. Only by changing fundamentally how we do what we do, will we remain the same. By that I mean continuing to best serve our students and the people of this Commonwealth.

So what does transformation look like?

In a transformed system, our universities stop competing on every dimension. Instead, they organize to leverage their enormous collective operating scale, to utilize their tremendous collective talent in ways that extend and expand opportunities for all.

In a transformed system, every student on every campus has access to the full breadth of academic programming at every other campus across the system.

In a transformed system, our universities overcome emotional attachments to business and administrative functions that are redundantly and expensively operated — so that the largest part of every dollar we spend, is spent directly on what counts most – our students and their success.

In a transformed system, we operate on a multi-university regional or state-wide basis:

- To double down on retaining and graduating the students we enroll
- To do better with students who have historically been underserved by higher education and who are being priced out of the higher education market place in other sectors – for whom the PA State System is the best and often only option;
- To do better with growing number of adults who want to return to college to complete degrees they began years ago or to reskill or upskill so they may continue building sustaining careers.
- To develop new programs that meet high-demand workforce needs;

In a transformed system, the chancellor's office focuses less on compliance and administrative functions and more on strategy, on creating basic connectivity for our universities, on convening communities of practice , on facilitating shared governance.

To future students thinking about where to pursue their degree, hear me on this: in a transformed system, we organize entirely around you and your success, rather than asking you to organize around us.

This kind of transformation requires investment. We're not going to cut our way into a successful future. We've tried it; others have tried it; it doesn't work. And so

- We must reorganize and reprioritize existing resources.
- We must explore a new generation of public-private partnerships, and ramp up and professionalize our fundraising efforts, building whole new revenue streams.
- We must make our case to elected officials—demonstrating the importance of public investment with a prospectus that is too compelling, too critical to the state's economic and social well-being, to ignore.

- We must be willing to look beyond the system for evidence-based practices that return good results.

And we must partner with the state and with Pennsylvania's other higher education providers – the state-related universities, the community colleges, the independents

Why? Because the higher education ecosystem in this state is broken – unsustainable in its current form. Left unattended to, it will fail us – all of us, all of Pennsylvania.

We cannot as a single part of that ecosystem mend it. But we can and we must participate and even lead in an effort to find reliable, lasting, and—God willing—timely solutions – that ensure sustainable, affordable, effective educational pathways run seamlessly for Pennsylvanians from their cradles through their careers.

I recognize the full complexity – the audacity – of everything I've just said.

I'm not talking about making modest adjustments to our enterprise; we won't tweak our way out of this. The challenges we face are too great; the stakes too high.

What I'm talking about is fundamental transformation and redesign.

As daunting as it might sound, this kind of transformation is essential if the universities of this State System are to continue as a critical asset of the commonwealth, as an engine of economic development and social mobility, as a vital and contributing part of communities across Pennsylvania.

This is our mission. This is our collective destiny. And I have no doubt... we will succeed...together.

It will take all of us, working together, with a single vision, to transform this System of universities so that it may move forward—proudly, courageously, effectively.

As an historian, I've studied transformational movements. They require people, ideas, and time.

I believe we are the people, we have the ideas, and that now – now is our time.

I welcome the challenge; I know you do too.

I am honored to work amongst you to take it on and to win.

Now, as your chancellor, I suggest we get to work. We got a lot to do.