Thank you.

First of all, to the UNT System Board of Regents, a heartfelt thank you for entrusting me with the presidency of UNT Dallas. I’m humbled and grateful. It’s an immense honor and an amazing opportunity.

And the opportunity is not merely mine.

Regents, Chancellor Jackson, Senator West, Mayor Pro Tem and District 8 councilmember Atkins, business leaders, community members, distinguished guests, Provost Becker, deans, faculty, staff, students, families and friends of UNT Dallas, members of the greater UNT community, and neighbors, thank you all for being here.

I have the very wonderful opportunity to also recognize and thank my mother, Shirley Kaplan, who has traveled to be here today.

I am so pleased my mother is here. It is after all in her household that the commitment to education took root and grew. My education and the career it has made possible have taken me thousands of miles from that household, and for that she may perhaps have mixed feelings, but I know Mom is proud.

I keep in the forefront of my mind when I see our students on this campus the thought that they also represent the dreams of their mothers and fathers, their grandparents, their caretakers, and
that my responsibility as an educator, and our responsibility as a community, are not only to our
students, but to those who raised them as well.

We answer to them, and we always will.

I remember the day when I brought my son Ryan to school and how proud we are now Ryan for
all of your accomplishments.
Ryan will be graduating from USC this year.

I want to also thank all those from other colleges, universities and professional organizations who
are here at this ceremony.

We share solidarity in our commitment to the nobility of education, and an understanding of the
life-changing benefit of a college education.

I want to especially acknowledge my predecessor, John Ellis Price, the first president of UNT
Dallas, along with all those instrumental in establishing the roots of our growth.
Thank you, John, for helping to build the foundations of UNT Dallas.

To our faculty here today, thank you for your commitment to our students and to our
purpose. Your excellence is an inspiration.

To staff, thank you for all you do--from the logistics of an event like this one today, to the futures
you are helping create for our students.

And to our students, I thank you for sharing today with me. Tomorrow belongs to you.
You know, as early as 1837, pioneer families settled in this area just south of the Trinity River from Dallas. Google it. The Hord family settled in 1845 and opened a boarding house. The farming community in the area became known as Hord’s Ridge. In 1879, the new and Rio Grande Railway passed through Hord’s Ridge and a station was built in 1882, opening the community to national transportation.

This beautiful side of the Trinity caught the attention of two enterprising developers: Thomas Marsalis and John Armstrong. In 1887, with a plan to market the community as a prestigious residential area, they purchased several hundred acres in and around Hord’s Ridge and gave the area a more appealing name: Oak Cliff.

Advertised as the “Cambridge of the South,” the community flourished. However, disagreements apparently led to a split in the Armstrong partnership. As a result, stayed in Oak Cliff and Armstrong went on to develop a community north of the Trinity: Highland Park.

Indeed, Texas was birthed by pioneers. UNT Dallas was as well, by Senator West and others who saw that there could be a university here, of excellence and access. And we, too, are pioneers, as we expand UNT Dallas, and grow it.

We are on this campus today because leaders imagined the possibilities of a great university here. Our beginnings were humble, as most beginnings are. But under that humility was a hunger, and a hope, and an ambition to be more.

UNT Dallas is thriving today, because of the imagination of those before us, and because of the drive to make the possible real. We are here to serve new possibilities, to meet the challenges of today, and to prepare for a future that we see on the horizon.

None of us knows exactly what the future brings, but we know the trends. We also know, and it
is increasingly obvious, that a college education is of unquestionable value, even in an era of student debt.

Indeed, on virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment, from personal earnings to job satisfaction to the share of employed full time—young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education.

More so than ever, a college education is the must-have ticket. As reported in February of this year, a Pew Research Center survey, conducted in October 2013, in an era of economic stress, found that college graduates 25 to 32 --- working full time --- earn about $17,500 more than employed young adults holding only a high school diploma. A generation ago, the high-school graduate earned 77% of what a college graduate made. Today, it’s only 62%.

College is not only of personal value, its practical value is increasing.

Our goal at UNT Dallas is to provide and to be recognized as providing the highest value for this education. To provide the highest quality education, and to have success that can be recognized both by metrics and by reputation.

UNT Dallas is something new. We were born at the new millennium, in the year 2000, when we were housed in a shopping center.

Perhaps we should date our birth to 1997, when Senator West suggested a feasibility study for a university in southern Dallas County.

In June 2001, the Dallas City Council approved a resolution to provide funds to buy about 200 acres for our future campus. Private donations raised the size of the property to 264 acres.
A 2001 bill signed into law by Governor Perry authorized the UNT System to establish UNT Dallas as an independent university, once enrollment numbers were reached.

A groundbreaking ceremony for the first building here took place in October 2005, and that building was first occupied in January 2007.

Royce West, John Ellis Price, Helen Giddings, others – the individuals who pioneered UNT Dallas imagined the possibilities.

Let us continue to imagine.

Imagine that there’s a UNT Dallas College of Law --- a law school equal to the best, but affordable --- where those who will be excellent lawyers can graduate without the burden of unreasonable debt, and can practice and serve the communities they come from. --- By the way, UNT Dallas College of Law begins educating its first class this Fall, in downtown Dallas.

Imagine a college of health sciences, where nurses are trained. Imagine a cure for cancer developed at UT Southwestern, but with the answer to how to make healthcare accessible for everyone developed right here, at UNT Dallas.

Imagine a program for logistics or supply chain management, sports management, hotel or hospitality management --- niche programs that become recognized as the best in the nation. Imagine students from UNT Dallas competing and winning in nationally recognized scholarship competitions.

Some of it is underway now, and all of it is possible.

In Dallas, Texas, imagination comes with the territory.
After all, we are not here for the ocean. We're not here for the mountains --- at least I haven’t found any. We’re at UNT Dallas deliberately, with a focus and a purpose. And what is going on here today is not simply a change in leadership, but a renewal of hope that this institution will bring growth and even transcendence to Dallas and to this beautiful neighborhood in Dallas, south of the Trinity River.

What kind of opportunity exists here? The kind that allows others to achieve a piece of the American dream.

We are here today as representatives of what could be, and what can be.

We are committed to providing a quality education at an affordable price. And we’re going to be the model for how to do that. We’ll work hard to keep tuition low and affordable, and to keep quality high. And UNT Dallas will not only be an institution of access, but of excellence.

This is our vision:

1. To show Texas and the world that excellence in higher education is affordable and accessible.

2. To be a place of outstanding teaching, where student success will be the hallmark of everything we do.

3. To engage Dallas and the greater community as a laboratory that enables learning for our students, and to bring business to help with teaching. If you’re a health center in northern Oak Cliff, or a Fortune 100 company, you have a role in our success. The community is going to serve as our instructors, as we will embrace the community as teachers.
Diversity is central to us; we embrace it, we celebrate it. We are and will be what our society will be 20 years from now -- Hispanic, African American, Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, European. We are a university of diversity. Walk on our campus, and you will hear four languages in ten minutes. We embrace it, and we celebrate it.

I’m flattered to have you share in my honor at this inauguration. But this inauguration is emphatically about more than Ron Brown. It is about a vision for our institution.

What is core to my vision?

It is for UNT Dallas to be an internationally recognized leader in higher education that provides high-quality low-cost academic programs. It is to be engaged in the surrounding communities, recognized for our distinctive interdisciplinary approaches to experiential learning, and known for our commitment to the well-being and full development of career-ready graduates.

These are our goals:
Growth in enrollment and in academic programs that enrich student life. Growth in graduates.
Growth in reputation and credibility. And growth in relationships with the business community, our alumni, area high schools and the community college system, as well.

Experiential, innovative learning is a goal, by which we mean internships, partnerships, online classes, and classroom credit for relevant experiences.

Efficiency in all of our operations is a goal and a focus. Administrative efficiency. Efficiency in our processes and procedures. Instructional efficiency--- meaning right size teaching loads, class size and the utilization of space.

And we have goals for the culture of UNT Dallas. Culture matters. And ours will be a culture of service. A student-centered culture. A culture that stresses individual empowerment and
responsibility. We will be a place that provides creative solutions to complex problems. We will be risk takers --- responsible risk takers. And we will be a place where there is support for appropriate decisions taken by those who work here.

Ladies and gentlemen, the opportunities that excite me today are emphatically not mine alone. They are yours, too. Nor are they only for those of us here today. The opportunities in front of us belong not just to you and me, but also to those who are not here with us today, to our entire UNT Dallas student body, and to our future students, and to our greater community, our city and our region.

Our university is literally built on a rise, on higher ground. From here to the horizon is a beautiful sight. We can see and be inspired by the towers of downtown Dallas, a few miles away, one of the great American cities and a beacon of opportunity. And we are a university on the rise.

For our students, opportunity’s here for you, and there’s even more opportunity, on the horizon. Rise to it.

Some of you may know that in addition to being an educator and an administrator, I’m also a psychologist. But even those who don’t know my resume may know this old joke:

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? ---

The answer of course is one. But the light bulb has to WANT to change.

The joke is old. But it relates to many new students I’ve met at UNT Dallas. They really want to change. They want to improve their lives. They may want to transcend their socioeconomic opportunities. They are extremely motivated. I have met a student who had no place to sleep but
in his car, but who was committed to his education at UNT Dallas, to gaining the skills, the prestige, the earning power that only a college degree can predictably bring.

UNT Dallas is truly a city university, with a commitment to serving many who are among the first in their families to go to college. Many are working as they attend school, or have children of their own. They expect value from their educational experience, and they receive it here. We are about access, access to excellence, and excellence that is within reach, with a tuition rate more favorable than at any comparable university in our city.

The fact is many of our students could never afford to go to distant universities. UNT Dallas offers them the opportunity to succeed.

Faculty and staff, my colleagues, together we have the opportunity to not just make a living at UNT Dallas, but to make a difference. I have never met a faculty more committed to helping students succeed. Scholarship is important, but the priority here is teaching. Student success is our number one goal, and the number one way we measure our own success.

Our teachers are the best. Thanks to you, our students have access to excellence. In our classrooms, our students will expand their horizons. In the opportunities for real-world experience that UNT Dallas will provide by our engagement with the greater Dallas community, our students will explore their personal paths to success. With our teaching, mentoring and support, our students gain the skills they need to be excellent at UNT Dallas today, and the skills they will need to become excellent professionals in their chosen careers tomorrow.

Faculty and staff are working together to refine a core curriculum that will be the foundation for student success. We are a university on the rise. Faculty and staff, the opportunity is here for us. Seize it!
We have a new campus with outstanding resources and technology. Our buildings, with solar panels and rainwater collection systems, are designed to minimize impact on the environment. We also have the opportunity, on this acreage with room to grow, to grow our physical plant, to expand, to serve, to innovate, and to lead. And in that growth we have the opportunity to positively impact the economic growth of our neighborhood.

We are and will be good neighbors. Our interest and the community’s interest are one and the same.

UNT Dallas is a unique institution, the one and only public university entirely within the borders of the city of Dallas.

We are positioned to make a big difference in Big D.

You know, great cities need and deserve great universities. And conversely, great universities need and belong in great cities.

The robust economy of Dallas and the greater DFW region needs trained talent to continue to thrive. It needs accountants, teachers, nurses, social workers, IT professionals, nonprofit leaders, entrepreneurs and more. It needs doers and dreamers. UNT Dallas will provide them. Business leaders, you can hire right here. And the graduates you hire will be ready to contribute right away.

UNT Dallas isn’t an ivory tower. We are a listening post, in conversation with business and city leaders, and responding to public needs. I am meeting with CEOs and other leaders across the area to help us develop a curriculum that responds to reality, that supplies what the market demands, still maintaining the underlying bedrock of academic skills that will adapt our graduates to any market cycle.
At UNT Dallas, we provide not only the opportunity for personal growth, but we are a wellspring of growth for Dallas as a whole. We have a focus on niche programs that are in tune with the needs of our city, in areas including Business, Education, Public and Human Services, Technology and Information Management, and Health and Life Sciences – programs that fit well with the future demands of Dallas, one of the most successful and envied economies in the nation.

The city is also our laboratory – where our students gain real-world experience—and the community is our partner in educating our students. Education is a partnership of learning and doing, and the offer of experiential learning – through internships and a variety of other mutually beneficial experiences – is central to our purpose.

We will be reaching out to you for internships, business leaders. Because experiential learning is a cornerstone of a UNT Dallas education.

UNT Dallas graduates will be known by their practical know-how, and UNT Dallas will be known as the source for well-trained, highly motivated graduates, who are ready to contribute.

We are a university on the rise. The opportunity is here, and we are inviting the business community to rise to it.

Working together matters. Increasingly, we are challenged to meet the needs of a society that is diverse in ethnicities and cultures. We must ensure that our graduates are multiculturally competent – meaning, prepared to function well in a diverse workplace, and a diverse society.

We will move beyond educating students in the classroom. We are not in the study abroad world at this point in our young history at UNT Dallas. But might we not be providing all of our students a passport to the city of Dallas, with its world-class cultural venues and experiences, its
opportunities for service, internships, and other opportunities for experiential education?

We are offering our students a passport to Dallas, a city so rich in culture and ideas, where a UNT Dallas student can visit the CEO of AT&T, or the CEO of Mary Kay, or visit the Bush Museum, to gain a deeper understanding of decision-making and service.

Constructive partnerships will be a hallmark of our offer.

We will also make use of technologies to serve our students. Online learning is no longer a new idea. It is simply another way to extend education beyond the classroom.

Our relationship with the community is a win-win. Alone, we may not have the resources to do all we want to do. Together --- with local government, with business, with not-for-profits, with other institutions --- UNT Dallas and our students can achieve anything.

We love where we are. How perfect that our campus is off of a boulevard called Wisdom.

And we want to be great neighbors. I don’t just work here. I live in Oak Cliff. Many faculty and staff live nearby, and we will be encouraging others to do so.

Imagine that someday we might even be able to provide financial incentives to encourage our faculty and staff to live in our neighborhood.

Today, we aren’t a residential campus. But, on the horizon, our students will live here, too, bringing energy and optimism – and bringing the businesses needed to support them into the neighborhood.
Strong universities help attract businesses. They spur developments and enhanced infrastructure. They motivate newcomers to the area, with an appealing quality of life, cultural events, and new resources. That process is already underway. DART rail is going to reach our campus, connecting our community more conveniently with the rest of Dallas. We will be working with area businesses and leadership to stimulate further development.

We are a university on the rise. The opportunity is here.

From our campus, we enjoy an eyeline view to the skyline of Dallas, as if from here one can see the current aspirations of our students and the future achievements of our graduates.

I’ve been in Dallas less than a year. Many of you have grown up here, and perhaps have been here for generations. It is probably easier for you than for me to recognize that the magnificent Dallas skyline wasn’t always there, because much of it was developed in your lifetime or your parents’ lifetimes.

But even for you it may be hard to realize there was a time when Dallas, indeed all of Texas, was frontier. It called out to pioneers. To people looking to rise in the world, on the strength of their hard work. To people with the optimism and the hope to succeed in a new environment; indeed, to create that environment.

UNT Dallas is a very young institution. I am only its second president. Together, we have the opportunity to be pioneers of what will be a great urban university. I view UNT Dallas as an adolescent. We’re just beginning to form our identity, and that’s exciting. We get to make independent decisions, create the traditions, define our culture and determine our course and meet the needs ahead of us. You don’t get to be a teenager twice – and many parents might say, thank God. But it’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I hope you are all as excited about it as I am.
As we grow, we will be guided by our core values:

Integrity, Civility, Reasoning and Responsibility.

UNT Dallas may change over time, but our core values will remain the same. These values will guide us through the challenges and hard work ahead.

UNT Dallas is a university on the rise. We can see farther. See more possibilities. More potential. More promise.

The horizon is where earth and sky meet, and UNT Dallas is where down-to-earth skills and lofty aspirations come together.

I pledge as president to do all I can to support the success of our students, our university, our community, our city and our region. I need your help. With your help, the horizon is a place of promise and richness and high achievement. The opportunity is here. Let’s rise to it.

Last November marked the 50th anniversary of the death of President John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy once said: Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

President Kennedy challenged us to look creatively at our future, and to imagine what could be.

So, imagine the possibilities.

Let us not be judged as one who set our sights too low.
Today is a time to celebrate our university, and renew our commitment to the purpose of our university.

As young as UNT Dallas is, we have the foundation for excellence.

This institution provides hope to our citizens. Hope that they may transcend a life of economic hardship, and achieve prosperity.

Success will be determined by metrics and by our brand -- by our reputation, but also by measuring up to objective criteria.

We will set our sights high. We will look to the horizon, to the vibrancy of our vision. Dallas and our region need us to strive and accomplish. Southern Dallas needs us to have positive impact, indeed, to be transformative.

Let’s work together. That is our challenge, and that is our opportunity.

Thank you.

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