

(Remarks as delivered will vary from remarks as written)

## Opening Assembly

August 14, 2019

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What an incredible year you've had! It's beyond impressive. Dennis and I are thrilled to be here and to start a new year as part of such a close-knit and special

Western Carolina University is

I am eager to get to know the campus deeply about -and who works

Allow me to take a moment to thank Provost Carol Burton, and the staff forward during a period of success. WCU continued its incredible

And thank you, Dr. Gomez for working with you, with Ms. Joseph, and the Senate as we carry out the mission of Western.

I have said it before, and I will

Those of you who have been here for a while already know this to be true. And those of you who are like me and are new to your roles, you soon will be convinced of this fact if you have not already reached the conclusion that there is just something special, something unique, something almost magical about this universe.

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A colleague at a previous institution once remarked that I was the only person she had ever met who read The Chronicle of Higher Education from cover to cover. Every. Single. Week.

Now, I don't want you to think that, as a little girl growing up showing horses in the Midwest, I had already plotted out my career trajectory. I don't know many children who grow up dreaming of being a university president. In fact, I never even pictured myself going to college.

But my parents had bigger hopes for me and my two siblings. My mom and dad were adamant that we go to college—in large part because they wanted better lives for us than they had growing up. They saw the value of a college degree and wanted their kids to have it. As kids, we had no choice—we were going to college. So I enrolled in a local technical college and became a dental hygienist.

Realizing there may be more beyond dental hygiene, I worked during the day and went to school at night at the University of Toledo. It was there that I was bitten by the higher education bug, earning

nurture students and all the things that faculty members do when they are down in the trenches

I learned the value of shared governance and those in leadership roles, as well as the importance of staff across the university that kept the university moving forward – housing, facilities, student life, grounds, administrative assistants –

I have met with leaders from some of our region's community colleges, had conversations with local and state elected officials, been interviewed by members of the news media, and enjoyed getting to know many of this university's leaders at my first Chancellor's Leadership Council retreat.

I am attempting to hear from all university stakeholders. I want to know what our constituents like best about Western, what things they think the university does well, and what things they think we could do better.

Western Carolina University and other institutions like us -are where first generation students go to achieve a better quality of life than their parents.

We're the place where students show up on our doorstep, looking for answers to questions that they don't even know they should be asking. We're the place for those who are not sure how in the world they are going to be able to pay for tuition and fees, or who don't know how they are going to be able to juggle schoolwork, a job and a family.

We're the place where faculty and staff take the time to help the myriad of students who walk in and immediately feel lost. We're the likely place of choice for the new majority, the place where a diverse group of students will seek an education, to earn their degrees.

It may seem like a heavy burden, but it is a heavy burden you all have been proudly shouldering for years.

Did you know that 40 percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States in 2018 were awarded by places like Western? Perhaps that's not a surprise to many of you.

Dr. Bruce Henderson from the Department of Psychology almost certainly knew that fact. Dr. Henderson knew the value of public regional comprehensive universities nearly a dozen years ago when he wrote a book on the subject, titled "Teaching at the People's University."

In his book, he describes how public comprehensive universities make college degrees possible for an increasing percentage of American citizens, especially for the children of those who struggle economically.

He explains that these institutions provide practical, job-oriented degrees in a variety of fields that are important to the regions in which those schools are located. Sgn citil7



We must be good stewards of our state funding and the dollars directed our way by students and their families through the tuition, fees, and rates that they pay.

Also among my initial areas of focus is a continued and enhanced attention to diversity and inclusive excellence. WCU must continue our emphasis on diversity and inclusion and, in fact, we must ramp up our efforts and initiatives in this important area. The nation's racial and ethnic profile is changing and we must embrace that change.

One of the things I'm most excited about in the coming weeks is the dedication of Levern Hamlin Allen Hall, named for WCU's first African American student. Allen Hall is the first building on our campus named for an African American.

What a legacy! And Dr. Allen herself will be here on September 5 to help us celebrate that milestone.

In another aspect of inclusive excellence, diversity of thought and experience is broader than ever, yet more polarize.8 (en)1eAH evy (f)-6.3.983 0 Tn9.82Tw [(a)-1.6 (na





continue to be the best partner we can be with our community, region, and our state.

I believe that Western has the opportunity to be a thought leader, a model of how regionally engaged universities can maintain a student-centered focus, with high levels of teaching innovation.

We are already doing well in this regard

