“Hope is Not a Strategy, But It’s Not a Bad Thing to Have”

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Chancellor

Good morning. As you can see from your written program, I’ve decided to entitle these remarks “Hope is not a strategy, but it’s not a bad thing to have.” Now, after having said it out loud, I realize I was a bit ambiguous. Is hope not a bad thing to have? Or is it strategy?

Well, clearly, both are important. I will talk today about both hope and strategy but, at the beginning, I want to assure you that I know that I did not make up the expression “hope is not a strategy.” It has been attributed at various times to football coaching legend Vince Lombardi, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and to the author of a best-selling 2003 book about sales methods. However, in this contentious political season, I also want to assure you that, while I may have appropriated the words of others for the title of my remarks, I wrote every word of this speech and had no help from either Michelle or Melania. Tweet that one!

As I begin my twelfth year as Chancellor, I can confidently report that the state of this University is very strong. In fact, our operating fundamentals are as strong as they have ever been. We have an engaged and influential Board of Trustees. We have an experienced and talented senior administration, sobered by—but strategic in—the institutional choices made to keep us moving forward throughout the Great Recession. As you heard this morning, we continue to benefit from outstanding, collaborative, and thoughtful leadership in our faculty, staff, and student body. We continue to attract outstanding talent at all levels.

This past year, we revised three important road maps to guide our path to the future: the Institutional Plan for 2016-2021; the Campus Plan for Diversity, Access, and Inclusion; and the Strategic Plan for Research Growth. We have benefitted from two years of budgets as good as I’ve seen in my time here, based largely on our enrollment growth but also reflecting the commitment of the Governor, the General Assembly, President Spellings, and the Board of Governors to ensuring access to higher education in the state of North Carolina.

I think it is fair to say that our legislative sessions, like those in other states, tend to generate ample amounts of smoke and heat on a whole host of issues. Those conflicts over policy have tended to overshadow or even obscure one important fact. Within or across political parties or governmental branches, there is virtually no disagreement over the idea that the University should remain accessible and affordable for the citizens of North Carolina. And, in fact, in terms of financial support for higher education, North Carolina remains the fourth-ranked state in the nation in terms of state appropriations per FTE student.
Without question, our elected leaders recognize that ensuring access to a high quality post-secondary education requires modern and functional facilities. That understanding led to approval by the General Assembly and the Governor to place the $2B Connect NC Bond Measure on the ballot for statewide voter approval in March. Approval of that bond measure brought $980 million to UNC campuses for new facilities, including $90 million at UNC Charlotte for our long-deferred Science Building. The fact that the bond measure passed by a two-to-one margin statewide, and with an approval rate of more than 70% in Mecklenburg County, spoke volumes about citizen interest in and support for the University generally, and for this campus in particular. And I should note here the particular debt we owe to Representative Dean Arp of Union County, the bill’s primary sponsor. Representative Arp earned his M.S. degree in Civil Engineering from UNC Charlotte in 1999. Go Niners!

With the support of our elected officials, business and non-profit community leaders, alumni and friends, and faculty, staff, and students second to none in their dedication, energy, and loyalty, our institution continues along its evolutionary path as North Carolina’s urban research university, distinguished by both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

We have added our 22nd and 23rd doctoral programs in Business Administration and in Education Research, Measurement and Evaluation, respectively. We have received approval from the Board of Governors to launch a new master’s program in Cybersecurity, with a number of other new academic programs in varied stages of development and approval, including master’s degrees in Management and Respiratory Care, and a bachelor’s program in Health Systems Management.

Applications for undergraduate admissions at the freshman level this fall reached 17,500, a 7% increase over last year. Applications to the Graduate School increased by 11% to nearly 6,800. Our enrollment management wizard, Associate Provost Tina McEntire, has “staked her claim” that fall enrollment could be close to 28,800—about 800 more than last fall. You’ve probably heard me repeat the statistic that, since 2009, UNC Charlotte alone has been responsible for 61% of the enrollment growth in the UNC system. We’ll have to see how that data point might change after the fall numbers are in. But the good thing to know is that we have not only been attracting more students, but the most academically talented and diverse students in our history—and that’s true at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Externally funded research continues to expand, once again exceeding $40M in a very competitive environment, and our faculty continues to distinguish this institution with their published work and creative activities. Two faculty members—Mark West in English and Bruce Arrigo in Criminal Justice—were recognized with lifetime achievement awards from their professional associations and, generally speaking, we have secured more than our fair share of national, statewide, and regional recognitions for the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, and students.

Our private fundraising has also set another high watermark, exceeding $30M this past year. This includes leadership gifts that have named the Childress-Klein Center for Real Estate, the Robert A. Niblock Student Center for Professional Development, the Hunter and Stephanie
Edwards Promenade inside Jerry Richardson Stadium, the Albert Engineering Leadership Scholars Program, the David and Nancy Hauser Alumni Pavilion, and another transformative gift that will name our College of Education at a ceremony scheduled for November.

Our community engagement activities have achieved new levels of respect and recognition in the greater Charlotte region and nationally, with important and significant positive impacts in helping our community address critical problems with homelessness, social and economic inequality, health disparities, substance abuse, domestic violence, the development of children at risk, and the social and economic status of women and girls in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. That kind of work has brought recognition to faculty member Ryan Kilmer in the Department of Psychology with the Provost’s Faculty Award for Community Engagement, and to Murray Webster, professor of Sociology, who was recently honored with a lifetime achievement award, the Cooley Mead Award, from the American Sociological Association. Provost Joan Lorden herself was also recognized with the prestigious William M. Plater Award for Leadership in Civic Engagement from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). And we recently learned that UNC Charlotte has been chosen as one of only five institutions from more than 100 nominated to receive the Higher Education Civic Engagement Award from the Washington Center. That award will be conveyed at ceremonies in Washington, DC on September 26.

Along the way of serving our students and serving our community, we’ve had some fun to enrich the quality of the campus experience for our students, alumni, and those among us who enjoy competitive athletics. We detected a strong pulse of promise in the men’s basketball program under Coach Mark Price, completed our first year of FBS competition under head football Coach Brad Lambert, saw Coach Cara Consuegra’s women’s basketball team return to the Women’s NIT for the 13th time in the last 14 years, and cheered Coach Kevin Langan’s men’s soccer team as they advanced to their fifth straight NCAA tournament. We achieved full NCAA certification as an FBS institution, launched The Pride of Niner Nation Marching Band, established a safe Tailgate Village for student groups, and hired our first women’s head golf coach (Holly Clark) to establish our ninth women’s sport. And our student-athletes continued to excel as students, with 210 of them earning GPAs of 3.0 or better to be named to the Conference USA Honor Roll, the second largest number among the 14 schools in our conference. Our student-athletes also contributed well over 3,300 hours of community service and recruited about 600 people through the Project Life Movement to register as potential bone marrow donors.

Now, all of these things could certainly mean that we could comfortably rest on our laurels. But if you have been around this place for any length of time, you know that we don’t rest on anything. So, let me tell you what I see for the coming year.

First, we will begin implementing the Institutional Plan and the other plans I mentioned earlier. There are well more than 50 objectives requiring attention in the Institutional Plan alone, some of which I will mention here this morning.

Topping the list of short-term priorities is an allocation of the funds available to us as a result of the recently completed legislative session in Raleigh. You’ll be glad to know that all of our vice chancellors and deans continue their excellent advocacy on your behalf, having requested of me $19 million in recurring and $19 million in non-recurring funding. We will do the very best
we can with the available resources, but I have already made the decision to allocate $2.7 million for salary raises for our non-faculty EHRA employees over and above the 1.5% approved for all employees by the General Assembly. This is another round of what we have called “strategic salary adjustments” that we have made over the years for faculty and lecturers, EHRA non-faculty, and SHRA employees. This year we will also allocate $1.1 million for adjustments in the base pay of our part-time lecturers. All of these adjustments are designed to keep us competitive in the marketplace for recruiting and retaining talent, both instructional and non-instructional.

These strategic adjustments have been vital, particularly since recurring salary increases funded by the General Assembly have occurred in only three of the past eight years. But using a portion of our enrollment increase funded to address salary adequacy, we have done a reasonably good job of keeping staff and faculty salaries pegged to the marketplace. For instance, among our almost 1,700 classified SHRA employees, 77% are now at or above the market reference rates established by the state. Turnover among all classifications of staff is 11%, about two percentage points lower than the average in higher education. Among the faculty in the tenure track ranks, most of whom received adjustments last year, 66% are now above the median salaries paid to faculty members in the same discipline and at the same rank in public doctoral research universities. Turnover among faculty is just 3.6%.

So, we will get about these budget and salary decisions right away. Assisting me in that effort and many others will be our new Chief of Staff, Kim Bradley. Kim replaces Krista Newkirk who was recruited away to be the President of Converse College in South Carolina. As much as we miss Krista’s considerable talents, we are delighted to be able to bring Kim to UNC Charlotte and into the Chancellor’s Office. Kim is the former chief of staff to the superintendents of schools in Syracuse, NY, and Providence, Rhode Island, where she also served as Chief Communications Officer. Kim brings us a rich background and skill set in administration, communications, community relations, and public engagement. Please welcome her.

We also welcome Jesh Humphrey as our new Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and General Counsel. Jesh has been at UNC Charlotte since 2006 and is the ideal replacement for David Broome who retired in July. Jesh and his colleagues will continue the excellent work initiated by Dave to build a modern compliance function for the University, particularly in terms of ensuring that we have established “best in class” policies and procedures necessary to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual assault.

Within Academic Affairs, you have already heard the impressive list of priorities for the time and attention of the Provost, the deans, her staff, and the Faculty Council. Provost Lorden also chairs the Council on University Community which is the principal group responsible for implementation of the revised UNC Charlotte Plan for Diversity, Access, and Inclusion. This process is timely and of critical importance. Recent tragic and violent acts and a fairly bizarre political scene have led to a sense of tension and unrest for many among us. I want to make it crystal clear that UNC Charlotte will continue, as always, to be a place where all points of view are tolerated, diversity is embraced, and constructive engagement is valued.

I will also be working closely with Joan and the Charlotte Medical Education Task Force composed of representatives of the UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine, the Carolinas
HealthCare System, and the Charlotte Medical Education Expansion Committee to develop recommendations concerning the future scope and organizational design for the education of physicians in the greater Charlotte region.

Vice Chancellor Bob Wilhelm will continue to advance the execution of the Strategic Plan for Research and Economic Development, with a particular emphasis on developing industry partnerships in the PORTAL Building and supporting the role that Ventureprise, our venture development organization, plays in promoting the work of innovation-driven entrepreneurs, faculty researchers, and university students interested in entrepreneurship. Bob and Paul Wetenhall, the President of Ventureprise, will be working closely with me on important recommendations contained in the recently developed regional strategic plan created by a Task Force jointly appointed by the Charlotte Chamber and the Charlotte Regional Partnership, including the appointment of a community-wide Entrepreneurship Council as a joint effort of UNC Charlotte and the Chamber.

Vice Chancellor and CIO Mike Carlin will continue to lead the implementation of the Campus Master Plan for Information Technology, the most important elements of which relate to the capacity, reliability, and long-term funding of our infrastructure; data security and security education; disaster recovery; strengthened communications and customer service on campus; and the efficient deployment of our information technology professional staff. Mike, of course, is the guy who brought you Google calendaring and Google mail, but I can assure you he isn’t sitting around thinking up ways to irritate you! As we learned the hard way from our recent payroll security breach, we have a lot of work to do to get our employees to be far more attentive to their role in maintaining the security of our data systems. Mike and his staff will also be moving mountains to help design a new data center that will be constructed as part of the new Regional Utility Plant that we need to support the new Science Building.

Vice Chancellor Beth Hardin will continue to lead the talented team in the Division of Business Affairs on a host of important initiatives including the implementation of the Five-Year Capital Plan that I will speak about in some detail in a moment. Beth’s team is also taking the lead in helping us to regain some of our muscle memory in the areas of crisis and emergency management, with a particular focus on crisis-related communications. Beth will also be actively engaged in the recruitment of a new Internal Auditor as Tom York moves on into retirement after 11.5 years with us, all but one year of that serving as Director of Internal Audit. Some of you may know that I often talk about the fact that “Details Matter” in the operation of a University. Tom is the poster child for “Details Matter” when it comes to ensuring that we operate efficiently and at the highest standards of integrity. He will be difficult to replace.

Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Art Jackson also recently announced his retirement but, fortunately, he will be here through June of 2017 as we seek his successor in a national search we will start later this fall. Art has been talking about retirement for some time, but he decided that he just couldn’t leave until the most important things on his plate were either completed or nearly complete. That included the construction of the beautiful Levine Hall at the entrance to campus and several other projects that I’ll mention in a moment, as well as the restructuring of the operations of the office of Conference, Reservations, and Event Services. As a result of some work completed last year by a campus-wide task force, we have decided to enhance the staffing and
restructure the funding model for this critical function on campus so that we can better support the needs of campus departments as well as the many thousands of visitors we welcome to campus each year. I have also asked Art and the senior leaders in Student Affairs to develop protocols to guide our response to demonstrations or assemblies of the kind that we saw so commonly on college campuses last year. Our first commitment at UNC Charlotte is to ensure robust free expression and assembly, while ensuring that critical University functions are not disrupted and that the personal safety of all persons on campus is protected.

Finally, our Division of University Advancement and Vice Chancellor Niles Sorensen will have a very busy year, but particularly in the fall as we lead up to a set of activities under the umbrella of a Founders Celebration. Now, you may say to yourself, “I don’t recall a Founders Celebration.” And that would be astute because we have not had one before now! But last year it dawned upon several of us that 2016 was an important year, marking the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina, established in 1946 to provide access to higher education to veterans returning from World War II. As it turns out, September 23, 1946 is the date of that opening and will henceforth be the date around which we organize our Founders Celebration.

Now, to be sure, we are not entirely certain at this point about what a Founders Celebration will look like in future years, but we do have some excellent plans for the week that ends this year on Friday, September 23. On Tuesday of that week, we plan to seal and dedicate a time capsule that will eventually be placed in the renovated Belk Plaza. On Wednesday, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates will be on campus for an afternoon public symposium and then will be the featured speaker in the evening to invited guests at the Chancellor’s Speaker Series at our Center City facility. On Thursday, we will launch our annual “Giving Green” fundraising campaign, and we’ll also name the Student Union in honor of two very generous alumni donors, both former student leaders. And that will also be the day that we “go public” with the specific goal we hope to reach by 2020 in terms of raising private dollars to support UNC Charlotte. And on Friday the 23rd, we head to the beach!

Finally, let me spend a few minutes talking about some things on campus that will touch virtually every administrative division and nearly every faculty member, staff, or student. And that’s campus construction.

Anyone who has been around for a while knows that we have built and renovated a lot of facilities and improved our physical infrastructure over the past few years. In fact, considering all funding sources, we have invested more than $1.2 billion since 2005 in building new academic facilities, student service buildings, residence halls, dining facilities, roads and, yes, even bridges. I didn’t think it would be possible for us to continue that robust level of investment, but it is absolutely critical that we do so. Everything we know about the expected growth of the greater Charlotte region and the demands for higher education suggests that we need to make investments today that can serve us well over the next 25 years.

So, over the past year, a talented team of folks from Financial Services, Facilities Management, Academic Affairs, and a host of other areas has taken quite seriously my charge that
we spend the next five years making additional improvements in our facilities and infrastructure, with a healthy mix of new construction and the renovation of older buildings.

The plan we have developed, which we call the “Five Year Capital Plan,” will commit over $400M to these efforts. About a quarter of this total—$90M to be precise—represents the state bond funding that was approved last spring in the Connect NC Bond Campaign and that will allow us to construct the new Science Building. The rest is a mix of funds generated by self-sustaining auxiliaries, like our residence halls, or other dedicated funding streams, including some student fees, our federal research cost reimbursements, state funding for repair and renovation, state funds we can carryforward from year to year, and private donations.

You’ll see the most tangible evidence of this Plan in new buildings, including the new Science Building emerging across the street from our existing Greenhouse, a new recreation and activities center to be located on the parking lot next to the Student Union, an Admissions and Visitors Center located across the street from the South Village Dining Complex, and a new Student Counseling Center adjacent to the existing Student Health Center. What will be less visible to most of us will be key upgrades to classrooms and laboratories, particularly in the historic campus core in all of those buildings named after the friends of Bonnie Cone (i.e., Denny, Macy, Barnard, Garinger, and Winningham), in the Colvard Building, in Burson, and in Bioinformatics. We’ll continue to make renovations in our oldest residence halls, including our Soviet-era high rises. Once the Counseling Center is complete, the space being vacated in the Atkins Building will be renovated for an expanded University Career Center. We will also make some important investments in managing our electrical power, in strengthening the reliability of our information technology systems, in responsibly managing our environmental assets, and continuing improvements to our road system.

As light rail comes on line, as it is expected to in April of 2017 for testing purposes and in August of 2017 for full service to the public, you’ll also notice a host of related changes on campus. These will include a bridge from the station platform at J.W. Clay Blvd. to our side of North Tryon Street, new sidewalks to facilitate getting to and from the stations, and an improved campus shuttle service to facilitate access to light rail by our faculty, students, staff, and campus visitors. Think about this—a light rail train will arrive on campus at each of our two stops 103 times every day of the week, every 15 minutes during non-peak hours and every 7 minutes during peak hours. Light rail service will dramatically improve access of the community to us, and our access to the many amenities of Center City. Imagine how much our students will enjoy their “internships” in Center City on Friday and Saturday nights!

Once all of this is done, we will construct a welcoming new campus entrance on North Tryon Street at Institute Circle that will mimic the towers we have at our entrance on University City Blvd., and we may be in a position to build the hotel-conference center we have long talked about. For the past several months, we have been in focused conversations with potential development and management partners who are advising us on the market for, financing, and operations of a 225-room full-service Marriott hotel with 15,000 square feet of conference space. Such a facility would be located on land owned by the UNC Charlotte Foundation immediately adjacent to the light rail stop at J.W. Clay Blvd. at North Tryon Street and just south of our
PORTAL Building. We expect that the Foundation will be in a position to make a decision on whether to move forward by the end of this calendar year.

I don’t think I would surprise any of you to say that the combination of our enrollment growth and ongoing construction has made it more difficult to move around the campus during the peak hours of the day. For that reason, one of the things we will circulate for discussion early this fall is the report of the “Campus Congestion Task Force” which worked throughout last year racking their brains over ideas on how to reduce traffic on campus and the waste of time and energy which accompanies people stranded in their cars or on shuttle buses. Chaired by Associate Dean Richard Buttmer of the Belk College of Business and containing 13 of your colleagues representing a wide cross-section of campus, the Task Force has come up with 34 specific recommendations that address the physical layout of our roads, the parking system, campus transit, and campus operations (including the scheduling of classes and dismissal times for employees). I’ll let you draw your own conclusions, but I think it is fair for me to say that the Buttmer Report challenges us to think differently about managing our daily lives on this growing campus. Hoping things will get better without doing anything differently, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, is not a strategy for success. The discussion will move your cheese, so be prepared!

Before I leave you, I feel compelled to address a rumor that that seems to be circulating. Over the past few weeks on campus and in the community, several folks have congratulated me on my upcoming retirement. Now, although I know that what I’m about to tell you may be cause for dismay among some, there is no truth whatever to the rumor about retirement. As long as Margaret Spellings, the Board of Trustees, and most of you still want me here, I’ll be around for a good long while. We still have to open the light rail line, finish our fundraising campaign, and build the new Science Building and the other facilities I mentioned. Besides, I am absolutely certain that Lisa does not want me hanging around the house at lunch time. She is definitely not ready for having twice as much husband for half the income.

Lisa and I have really enjoyed our time here and we look forward to several more years. In fact, this summer we noticed more and more people driving up to Bissell House to wave hello and, fortunately, they have been using most of their fingers. We were basking in the glow of our newfound popularity only to learn that our house is a Pokemon Stop. Such is life.

Thank you very much.