

Tom Katsouleas Remarks – Meeting of the Board of Trustees – February 5, 2019

Thank you very much, Governor Lamont, Chairman Kruger, all the members of the board of trustees, and thank you as well to everyone who is here today.

I'm honored and humbled to be appointed president of the University of Connecticut, one of the most outstanding public research universities in the nation, and one of Connecticut's greatest assets.

I want to thank you for placing your confidence in me. I will spend each and every day working to justify that confidence and meet your expectations in the years ahead.

So many people played a role in this search and I can't thank them enough for their time and commitment.

The governor, the board, the university's senior leadership, members of the business community, and many faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

I also want to thank President Herbst for her graciousness and advice. She leaves an impressive legacy and a strong foundation on which we can further build a great University.

From the beginning of this search, I was excited about the prospect of coming to UConn.

And that excitement just keeps growing as I learn more.

What struck me most was that in just about every conversation I had, I found this incredible enthusiasm for UConn and such a deep sense of pride and Husky spirit.

The reverence and affection that people here in Connecticut and alumni across the world have for this university is a defining characteristic of the place.

The UConn story and its rise over recent decades is well-known in higher education across the country: Over a 20 year period, it has arguably been the fastest rising public university in the nation, particularly in undergraduate rankings.

I have been fortunate enough to serve at major universities from California to Virginia, both public and private.

And I hope everyone throughout the state appreciates that what Connecticut has achieved here at UConn is a remarkable story and the envy of so many other states.

A public university can't achieve that success without a supportive state government behind it, as well as great faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

One of the main reasons I was drawn to Connecticut is that I believe that there is a strong bipartisan consensus among many of the state's elected leaders (including Gov Lamont) that higher education is extremely important to Connecticut and its future.

And it is worth investing in.

I know Connecticut is somewhat cash-strapped at the moment. But I also believe that reductions in state funding for UConn in recent years are the result of budgetary necessity, not ideology. That's an important distinction.

Given that, one of the most important facets of my job is making sure that the priorities of the university are aligned with the priorities of the state of Connecticut.

So I look forward to partnering with Governor Lamont, leaders on both sides of the aisle in the General Assembly, and Connecticut's business community as we continue the work of moving UConn forward.

One of my highest priorities is to grow research at UConn. That means making strategic investments in faculty and facilities with the goal of doubling research here over the next seven to ten years.

Research and vibrant economic communities are linked. It's hard to think of a part of the country that is home to vibrant economy— think Silicon Valley or the Research Triangle – that does NOT include a major research university.

An ambitious goal like doubling research isn't easy or cheap, but it can be done. The approaches that have worked at other places I have been, including USC, Duke and UVA, will work here. The state has made a huge multi-billion dollar investment in UConn in capital infrastructure, a great currency in the race to recruit and retain top faculty.

The time is ripe to capitalize on that investment, by investing in people to grow the inventions, discoveries and graduates that become the engines of innovation for society.

Philanthropy will also be a focus. UConn's fundraising has grown substantially under President Herbst. I want to build on that success.

So I expect to devote a great deal of time to working with the UConn Foundation to establish key relationships and make what I expect will be some audacious asks.

Higher Education itself is changing rapidly, arguably faster than at any point in its history. I want to move UConn into the center of a national conversation about undergraduate education and PhD education. And I want to build on existing and add professional masters degrees that meet the needs of our students and their potential employers, while at the same time strengthening the university financially.

I look forward to working closely with UConn Health's leadership team as we continue to provide exceptional patient care while charting a sustainable new course for UConn John Dempsey Hospital.

With respect to Athletics, we have a terrific AD in David Benedict and a world-class group of coaches. It's important to both David and me that we build on the culture of winning at UConn and leverage that culture of success to benefit every aspect of the university, including academics.

As you know, I'm an engineer, but I've always chosen, for my own education as well as my professional career, broad-context research universities.

That broad context, including academics, arts, health care and athletics, is what excites me and what brings extraordinary value to students and society.

A land grant university must prepare graduates in the STEM disciplines, but also the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts. That broad context is not only central to who we are, it is essential for preparing students to solve grand challenges for society, challenges that cannot be solved by technology alone.

I believe the 21st century liberal arts education will go beyond its traditional role of identity -- helping students discover who they are and their place in the world. It will help students develop identity, agency and purpose.

My goal is to capitalize on the amazing success and momentum that UConn has achieved,

So I hope to look around 360, take stock...and to be a driving force to accelerate its ascent, in partnership with all of you.

Good public universities are pillars supporting their state – serving its needs and supporting its economy. Great flagship universities with their satellite campuses and partners, [including state and community colleges,] are the crown jewels of the state – uplifting the mind and spirit not just of their own students, but of the surrounding communities and the entire state.

THAT is what we are here to do.

And I'm incredibly proud to contribute to that mission. Thank you again, and I look forward to working with all of you.

And of course: Go Huskies!

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