While I have the honor of announcing and introducing Dr. Harvey Kesselman as the next president of the University of Southern Maine, the credit for his selection to lead this institution belongs to the greater campus community, ably supported by representatives of the Portland and Lewiston-Auburn regions. This national search for a new leader at USM was a model of engagement and collaboration.

The selection process began last summer with the selection of student representatives by their peers to a Search Committee that also included a cross section of staff, faculty, community leaders, and members of the Board of Trustees. In the fall the Committee started its work identifying the required leadership qualities and characteristics, beginning a national search that drew interest from 80 highly qualified and skilled applicants.

The summer start of the process seemed a very long time ago by February when campus visits for finalists were scheduled and rescheduled around snowstorms. Despite the logistical challenges, there was strong campus and community engagement and feedback that was extremely valuable as the selection process narrowed.

On behalf of the students and communities we serve, I want to thank Trustee Jim Erwin for leading USM’s Presidential Selection Committee, all the members of the Committee who lent their time, energy, and ideas to the process, and every member of the campus and regional communities who contributed to our reaching this milestone.

I also want to thank President Flanagan and his team for their support of the search process as well as the conscientious and often difficult work they have undertaken on behalf of this university and the communities it serves. USM is a stronger, more sustainable university than it was a year ago, and President Flanagan deserves our thanks for laying the foundation for a successful future for our new president and for this university.

Working together, we have chosen Dr. Harvey Kesselman to lead the University of Southern Maine. It is my pleasure to introduce him today and speak just a little more about why he is the right leader for this university, its students, and for Maine.

It starts with Dr. Kesselman’s impeccable and extensive credentials as an academic and administrative leader. For nearly five years he has been the Provost and Executive Vice President of the Stockton University in New Jersey, overseeing a $75 million operating budget, 800 employees and 8,600 students.

Over the course of Dr. Kesselman’s 35-year career at Stockton University he also served as a Dean and Professor in the School of Education, an Interim Vice President for Administration and Finance, and a Vice President for Student Affairs, among several other positions. And he also knows the classroom, having taught courses in education and mathematics.
Qualifications and credentials matter, but there is much more involved in choosing a leader for a university in transition like USM. To make sure they got it right in the end, the search committee had to get it right at the start. In the initial job posting, the search committee listed five key tasks for USM’s new leader.

The first task is to build undergraduate and graduate enrollment. Dr. Kesselman has been a leader at Stockton University for thirty-five years, making significant contributions to that institution’s many successes including three decades of sustained enrollment growth. A telling example of Dr. Kesselman’s innovative leadership is his work establishing their Bachelor of Sciences in Health Sciences, which has grown to 1,100 majors in the three years since its inception.

The second task for USM’s new president is leading the successful implementation of the Metropolitan University initiative, including attainment of the relevant Carnegie Classification designation by 2020. The USM community chose the Metropolitan University model as the focus for its strategic direction because it is centered on community-based learning opportunities for our students, jobs for our graduates, and service to Maine. It is the right fit for a public university serving Maine’s two largest urban and economic centers.

Dr. Kesselman’s work establishing the Stockton Center for Community Engagement demonstrates the kind of experience and leadership needed to lead the Metropolitan University effort. The Stockton Center has been a focal point for hundreds of community-based initiatives and serves as an example of why Stockton University has earned the Carnegie Classification as a community engaged institution.

A third task is to engage in collaborative leadership with faculty, staff and community members. We know Dr. Kesselman is strongly committed to campus and community engagement as confirmed by a 2014 faculty job satisfaction survey for Stockton University that highlighted Dr. Kesselman's commitment to open and transparent communication, a willingness to work together to set priorities, and acceptance of an enhanced pace for decision-making.

A fourth task for USM’s new president is to innovate. At Stockton University Dr. Kesselman recently developed an articulation agreement with Philadelphia University, a private institution in neighboring Pennsylvania, to offer a 3+2 Physician Assistant Program. Stockton houses the program and provides the undergraduate course work with its partner institution providing the graduate programing. A second example is Dr. Kesselman’s work to secure a grant establishing one of the largest voluntary K-12 professional development providers in New Jersey, with more than 12,000 teachers enrolled in its annual workshops. We need this kind of innovation to reach Maine learners and serve Maine communities.

A final priority for the new leader at the University of Southern Maine is to be an active and collaborative leader in Maine’s public higher education system. We are in a time of great fiscal, demographic, and competitive challenges that requires systemic change to our traditional operating model. As a skilled and committed collaborator who has embraced the obligation and
opportunities of our One University model, Dr. Kesselman will be an invaluable member of our leadership team.

It is a great privilege to welcome Dr. Harvey Kesselman as the next president of the University of Southern Maine.