Good Morning.

It is a privilege to stand before you today as the next President of the University of Southern Maine.

As mentioned, the size and quality of the candidate pool was outstanding and I am honored the USM community selected me from such a distinguished group of applicants and finalists.

I’d like to thank Chancellor Page and his staff for taking the time to meet with me over the past few weeks. Our frank and open discussions have helped me to understand the significant challenges and amazing opportunities that lie ahead of us.

I’d also like to thank Chair Jim Erwin and all members of the extremely dedicated Search Committee; Dr. Terry MacTaggart, the committee’s consultant, and President David Flanagan, not only for their professionalism and expertise, but also the courtesy and hospitality they extended to my wife Lynne and me. From our very first visit, they made us feel a part of the USM community.

Lastly, I’d like to offer my sincerest gratitude to the students, faculty, staff, and friends of USM who took time from their schedules to meet with me over the past few weeks.

You are a dedicated group of individuals, and your caring was demonstrated by your enthusiasm, your directness, and most importantly, your willingness to engage in authentic dialogue.

I have learned a great deal thanks to these meetings and I promise this knowledge will be put to good use in the months ahead.

As many of you know, I come to Maine from a similar institution in New Jersey--Stockton University. Over the past decade, Stockton, and all New Jersey public universities, have confronted many of the same challenges facing USM:

• Declining traditional age students
• Lagging retention and graduation rates
• Budgetary shortfalls, and the
• Reduction of public funding, to name a few.

Stockton has addressed many of these challenges with a variety of approaches: some tried and true, others new and completely innovative.

I am not here to make claims that the successful strategies we implemented in southern New Jersey simply need to be imported to southern Maine.
What I will say is this: the foundation of our success at Stockton was that we always worked together, not just on the ideas, but on the implementation, review, and refinement of those ideas.

More importantly, we always put student success as our #1 priority - this will be the cornerstone of my presidency. If students succeed, we all succeed, and that is our goal.

In my application letter to USM, I stressed that I have spent my entire professional career in an environment that deeply values the concept of shared governance.

It’s the only way I know how to do business. It’s the only way I want to do business.

During my presidency here, there will be times when difficult decisions will need to be made. You can be assured that everything we do, any actions we take, will be done in a completely transparent manner.

I’m not a solo or silo leader. Frankly, if that’s what I thought this presidency was all about, I would not be standing here today.

I am convinced, beyond any doubt, that the USM community wants to work together, that we all want to share in the success.

That’s what I promise to this community today: that we all will part of the solution. We all will work together to ensure that USM - Maine’s Metropolitan University- will successfully build toward, and navigate through, the Carnegie Classification process, and our campus community and region will benefit as a result.

As an example, five years ago Stockton received Carnegie Classification. Since that time, scores on national surveys have shown a more active and engaged student population.

This has contributed to an expansion of faculty/student research, an increase in positive media coverage, more internships with businesses and not-for-profits and, most importantly, improved student retention and graduation rates.

These are the results I know we can, and will, achieve together at USM.

My entire career has been about working cooperatively with others and permitting everyone to share in success.

I believe in commitment, not just to a vision, but to the people connected to that vision.

With each success, large or small, partnerships grow stronger. Relationships deepen. Trust becomes the daily currency.

This is how long-term success is not just achieved, but sustained.
Kesselman Portland Press Conference Remarks
March 11, 2015

The very best days of USM are ahead of us and I am beyond inspired that you have asked me to be a part of this promising future.

We have much work to undertake and notable goals to pursue. We will toil, we will labor, we will sweat. But, we will do so together, pursuing a shared vision that we will have created together.

And, when all is said and done, I promise one thing: we will celebrate. Because: we will be successful in steering USM to its rightful place as the premiere Metropolitan University in New England.

Thank you for sharing in this very exciting day... and I say: “Let’s Go, Huskies!”

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