Good morning. Two months ago I stood here and thanked the entire USM community and representatives of the Portland and Lewiston-Auburn regions for so ably contributing to a highly successful and collaborative presidential search. It was remarkable then, and it is fortunate now, that the national search for a new leader for the University of Southern Maine produced multiple candidates from 80 applicants ready to lead the resurgence of this university.

That responsibility and opportunity to inspire and lead now belongs to our friend Dr. Glenn Cummings, a long-serving USM faculty member, proven public servant, a first-generation, four-year college graduate, and a twelfth-generation Mainer whose native roots run deep and strong.

While not particularly important in the selection process, I will add that I take comfort knowing that Glenn’s family home is less than two miles from where we now stand.

Though Glenn is ultimately responsible for the revitalization, success and growth of this institution, no one person can achieve a university’s promise on his own. It will take collective engagement and inspiration to move USM forward. This is especially true when one considers the innovative work required to implement the Metropolitan University model successfully.

With campuses in Maine’s two largest economic and civic centers, USM must lead in public service and community engagement. Working hand-in-hand with service organizations, civic groups, and businesses, USM will create learning and employment opportunities for our students and attract new learners to our classrooms. The Metropolitan University Initiative is a path to success for all our students and our communities.

With more than fifteen years spent in USM classrooms teaching economics and education, Glenn has a firsthand appreciation for the needs of our students and the workings of this institution. Just as important are the first-name relationships Glenn has with many of our dedicated faculty and staff.
President Cumming’s charge is to build upon the financial stability achieved under President Flanagan to move this campus and the entire community forward. It takes the type of credibility and commitment President Cummings brings to USM to build the bridges, partnerships and coalitions necessary to achieve and sustain long-term success.

We have an astounding capacity at the University of Southern Maine and across our entire system. We must unlock this collective potential, deploy our intellectual assets and energy, and find new ways to serve students, their families, and taxpayers who have invested so much into public higher education in Maine.

When I appointed Glenn Cummings to be the interim leader at the University of Maine at Augusta I made the point that he was the next but not the last proven Maine public servant to join the leadership ranks of Maine’s public university system. Sue Hunter at UMaine, David Flanagan at USM, Joyce Hedlund at Machias, and Eliot Cutler at the new Professional and Graduate Center, along with Glenn, are examples of tried, tested and talented Maine leaders who understand our challenges and see our potential as a public service institution. The optimism and resolve these leaders bring to public higher education is inspiring and transformational.

During his tenure at UMA, President Cummings has established himself as a collaborative campus leader, a proven innovator, and a valued and respected member of the public university leadership team. The institution, its students and our state are the better for it.

Glenn played a crucial role in shepherding through a new strategic plan for UMA. He helped complete UMA’s accreditation self-study and advanced a capital campaign that has generated the largest gift in the history of the university.

Glenn has also demonstrated a keen sense for identifying service and learning opportunities. When Verso Paper workers in Bucksport were notified of the mill closure, Glenn and his team responded with a plan to offer an expedited path to a Bachelor’s degree for displaced workers. When he learned that Jackson Labs was unable to fill well-paying positions, he worked with his faculty to strengthen UMA’s Vet Tech program and moved it from an Associate Degree to a Bachelor’s degree program.

The campus and community engagement we expect President Cummings to initiate must achieve two immediate and tangible results. As I mentioned moments ago,
successful implementation of the Metropolitan University model is a top priority. Secondly, we must reverse the downward trends in enrollment at the University of Southern Maine. Our tuition freeze, now sustained for an historic fourth year, gives us the nation’s strongest commitment to public higher education affordability and makes the University of Southern Maine the region’s most cost-competitive path to a bachelors or graduate degree. We must capitalize on these advantages by improving how we recruit, serve, and retain our students.

We must also work in collaboration with our K-12 educators and the community colleges to make sure all Maine learners have ready access to our classrooms and programs. For too long, barriers between our institutions and public systems have been obstacles in the path of advancement and opportunity. It is not where our students start that matters, it’s where they finish. We must pursue all opportunities to help Maine learners succeed.

I have always said that Maine must have a vital, committed, successful University of Southern Maine. I know that USM’s best days are ahead and I have every confidence that President Glenn Cummings will be the leader to build on USM’s existing strengths and to realize the enormous potential and promise that is the University of Southern Maine. Thank you.