



East Tennessee State University
Office of the President

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State of the University Address
August 23, 2013 – 9:30 a.m.
Martha Street Culp Auditorium

Good morning, and to all of our new and returning faculty it is my pleasure to welcome you to the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year on the campus of East Tennessee State University. Nothing matches the energy, the excitement, and the sense of renewal that permeate this campus and the region as a whole every August as we prepare for the start of the fall semester. The fall marks the return of our students and faculty and the magic that ensues when those two forces come together in the classroom.

Let me begin by saying thank you on behalf of my wife Donna and our son Jackson. We feel immensely blessed to be part of the ETSU family, and I offer my heartfelt appreciation for the way in which you have welcomed our family into this campus and our community of scholars.

As I shared with you last fall, I am a note-taker, and during the past 20 months I have lost count of the number of notepads that I have filled with the stories of ETSU. In our new video series that we launched last week called “From My Notepads,” I discussed how these stacks of pages contain stories about the accomplishments, the “*what if*” ideas, and the dreams of our students, faculty, and staff.

I plan to share many of these stories in upcoming videos throughout the semester, but this morning I want to take a few moments to reflect on a few highlights from the past year as a way of underscoring three points:

1. Institutions do not dream. The people who comprise institutions dream, and all of us who live and work in institutions like ETSU are better because they do. The highlights I list are not random anecdotes or observations; instead I have tried to select stories that reflect people or groups of people at ETSU who are not deterred by obstacles or threats but who commit themselves to asking and acting on a central question—WHAT IF? I recognize that by selecting some stories and failing to select others I take a risk. To that, I would respond with the obvious—that is, the stories I tell are illustrative in that they are ones I happened to see or hear, and I recognize there is a large ellipsis that all of you could fill with other stories making the same points.

2. The *what if* question I note is really the foundation of the 125 visioning initiative which we have pursued over the past academic year. The *what if* questions we all routinely ask may simply be idle speculation—but, if we choose to assign priorities to the pursuit of some of those speculations, they may become institutional priorities that morph into strategies we all will pursue over time. Our dreams

become our future's realities. In commenting on how we proceed with the 125 visioning process, I will try this morning to describe a transparent and participatory protocol we will follow in the years ahead.

3. Ideas and opportunities—the articulation of *what if* questions—exist in time, exist during periods of challenges and constraints. Certainly we are experiencing those today. Those constraints may result from our current size or enrollment, from our current budgetary processes, or from our current strategies for marketing and advancement. In other words, addressing constraints may challenge us all to pursue opportunities by doing some things differently. This morning I will also address those challenges and constraints and describe an opportunity we all have to work together to address them and create more opportunities to pursue our strategies.

As I reflected upon those stories of inspiration gathered over the past 20 months I draw your attention to our colleges of Nursing and Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences where several years ago our faculty asked *what if* we could create a center that combined our nurse-managed clinics with our other allied health programs, such as audiology, dental hygiene, speech pathology, and physical therapy, as well as other clinical programs at ETSU. That *what if* question led to a \$6.8 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration written by Dr. Patti Vanhook, and last October, the new Johnson City Community Health Center opened its doors. This clinic provides health care services to citizens across the region, many of whom would not have access to health care if it were not for our faculty and staff at ETSU.

Dr. Martin Olsen, a professor at the Quillen College of Medicine, asked *what if* there was a way to incorporate one of the latest technological innovations, Google Glass, into the training of future physicians. Dr. Olsen presented an answer to that question in the form of a poem that he sent to Google, and he later learned that he had been selected as a beta tester for Google Glass. Dr. Olson is using this technology with our simulator, Surgical Chloe, to record simulated surgical procedures and interactions with patients. We are one of only a few medical schools in the nation using Google Glass to train physicians and as a result our students are at the forefront of medical innovation.

This spirit of innovation is coupled with programmatic excellence across many facets of our university. When we asked *what if* our public safety department could become an accredited law enforcement agency, Chief Jack Cotrel, Detective Jennifer Mayberry, and the public safety staff set forth a goal and an action plan that resulted in ETSU becoming the first institution in the TBR system to be accredited by the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police. I also want to congratulate Chief Cotrel, who was honored a few weeks ago by TACP as the “Chief of the Year” for Tennessee’s eastern division. Chief Cotrel, thank you for all that you and your staff do for ETSU.

When Meg and Mike Stone arrived on campus eight years ago, they had *what if* dreams about training elite athletes at ETSU to compete at the Olympic level. They led the effort to help the university earn the designation as an official U.S. Olympic Training Site for Weightlifting, one of only three in the nation. The inaugural class of students arrived here last fall, and the presence of this center has brought students from across the nation to ETSU. Among that first class of students is Shelbie Serpan who earlier this summer qualified to participate in the Pan American Weightlifting Championship in Venezuela. Her dream is to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil and our staff will help her reach that goal. These dreams are made possible because of the world class teaching, training, and research conducted by Dr. Stone and his staff.

For the past 10 years, Dr. Russ Brown from our Department of Psychology has been asking *what if* ETSU research faculty could better understand the underlying mechanisms of smoking and schizophrenia. According to Dr. Brown, 80 percent of patients with schizophrenia are heavy smokers and, as a result, have a shorter life expectancy. This summer, Dr. Brown's *what if* question brought him a \$408,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health to study how nicotine affects the brains of patients with schizophrenia.

From the moment I arrived on campus I started making entries in my notepads, documenting the passion I have heard across the region for a performing arts center at ETSU. This *what if* question dates back more than a quarter-century. This past January, Governor Haslam authorized us to begin the planning process and allocate \$1.5 million to begin the work of developing our new home for the performing arts. Through our Arts Initiative, which we launched on February 14 under the leadership of Dr. Paul Stanton, we are endeavoring to raise \$9.5 million in matching funds, with the goal of receiving the remaining funds in the upcoming budget cycle.

Our proposed performing arts center will yield a \$38 million capital investment, thereby creating a much-needed venue for concerts, exhibits, lectures, plays, dance productions, and film screenings. This initiative is our number-one fundraising priority, and to date, we have raised more than half of our required matching funds. I am confident that the campus and community as a whole will continue to work hard in helping us to reach our goals. I would like to thank Dr. Bach, Jeff Anderson, Anita DeAngelis and all of the members of the steering committee along with the faculty, staff, and countless others who have generously stepped forward and assisted in our steady progress toward our overall goal.

Though the funding for the facility is an immediate goal, our long-term vision is to expand our presence in the arts through the creation of new arts programs, such as strings and dance; renovate our current facilities; increase undergraduate scholarships and graduate assistantships; and bring additional faculty positions, endowed chairs, and artist residencies to ETSU.

The arts help us understand the world. The arts help us define ourselves. The arts challenge old notions. The arts help us better appreciate the beauty of the natural world. The arts, in short, help us live more deeply. Again, the Arts Initiative remains our number one fundraising priority, and I sincerely hope to be standing here next fall, inviting you to our groundbreaking ceremony for the new performing arts center.

This has been a very busy summer across campus, as we broke ground on a number of construction projects. Despite the never-ending rain, we have remained vigilant in our efforts to complete these projects on time. As noted in our convocation video, and I would like to thank Professor Marty Fitzgerald for his masterful production, we often needed one of these but through the determination and hard work of Dr. David Collins and his entire staff, I am pleased to report today that all of our projects are nearing completion. If we were in the business of selling umbrellas or pumping water from flooded basements, this would have been a very lucrative summer. But when it comes to construction, let's just say that we've had to adjust to Mother Nature's timetable and not our own.

A few years ago our campus was besieged by a rash of pedestrian accidents. We asked the question, *what if* we re-routed traffic in a manner that not only made our campus safer, but also made our

campus a more welcoming space for students and faculty to interact. This question led to the development of the new common space that will change the face of the university through the development of an enhanced Veterans Memorial, new entrances for Ball, Brooks, and Sam Wilson halls, as well as the Campus Center Building. The campus commons promises to be an inviting place to relax and enjoy the true serenity of the most beautiful public university in the state of Tennessee.

For decades, we have asked the question, *what if* I could find a parking space at ETSU. By mid-October, that question will be answered in many respects as our students begin to access our new parking facility. In addition to providing over 1,200 parking spaces, the facility will house a new Welcome Center that invites potential new students and their families to campus, and will also be the home for our award winning Department of Public Safety. Last but not least, it will enhance food service options when we open a new Subway restaurant that will be located in the facility across from the Dome.

Last week, we began putting the finishing touches on a \$7 million expansion of the Basler Center for Physical Activity. This project adds approximately 20,000 square feet to our current facility and provides a new multi-purpose court; an extended weight and cardio room; and studio space for martial arts, Pilates, and yoga. Across the tracks from the CPA is a new field house and multi-sport synthetic field. With these efforts, we believe that by the year 2015 we will have increased participation in campus recreation programs by 25 percent, which provides the culmination of a *what if* question asked by our student affairs staff when they dreamed of a new home for recreational sport and intramurals at ETSU.

The past academic year was a time of collective dreaming about the future of ETSU as we launched our 125 visioning effort. This initiative challenged us to look ahead as an institution to where we might be in the next five, 10, and 25 years. Hundreds of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the community participated in our visioning initiative. Let me take this opportunity to thank each and every person who served on one of our 125 task forces, attended a town hall meeting, workshop, or roundtable, as well as those who submitted an idea via our 125 website. Thank you for your energy, vision, and willingness to dream collectively about the future of our great university.

Earlier this week, Louis Gump, who chaired the 125 effort, presented me with the committee's final report. At the conclusion of my address, this report will be posted on the 125 website. This visioning process has provided us with rich opportunities, opportunities that are far-sighted and innovative, yet mindful of our history and our mission. The 125 report is structured so that it is a committee document provided to the university for our review and consideration; it outlines a vision of possibilities that emerged from our people, but it does not prescribe a calendar or action agenda. That process, making visions actionable, is what a strategic planning process should be.

During the 2013-14 academic year, the university will take the next steps in our TBR prescribed strategic planning and implementation activities, and as part of that process, I will look to the university's strategic planning committee to develop growth targets, metrics, and key performance indicators related to enrollment, endowment, community relations, cost structures, asset utilization, research productivity, and student outcomes. As the strategic plan is more firmly defined, we will review and assess our activities annually through adaptive implementation. This approach will allow us to stay the course and make timely and opportunistic adjustments.

Most importantly, as the university moves forward with future planning in a “culture of transparency,” we will make a dedicated commitment to implementing the policy priorities outlined by the Committee for 125, coupled with the development of strategic partnerships with civic and business leaders and a focus on new revenue generation to support the objectives of this vision to further advance the university.

Across the policy spectrum, decisions that advance ETSU’s goals in areas such as student access and success, faculty development, facilities utilization, K-20 partnerships, and economic and community development must be examined and explored. We must ask *what if* questions regarding the potential for administrative review and redesign that promote greater efficiency, growth, and innovation. Many of these *what if* questions are centered in key areas such as budget and finance, institutional advancement, university marketing, operations and planning, and student affairs.

Given our current enrollment challenges, we must examine *what if* questions that yield enhanced student success through a comprehensive first year experience, increased student financial support, the development of an integrated student advising system, increased academic support strategies, and expanded student-centered services both physical and virtual. This work will generate the development of access-oriented enrollment management programs directed toward a sustained enrollment of more than 18,000 students by the close of this decade.

One of the core recommendations of the Committee for 125’s report calls for us to continue our demonstrated and visible responsibility for a “stewardship of place” across our region. From the richness of the health sciences to an enhanced focus on our foundational mission priority to educate and prepare teachers to meet the needs of the modern classroom, the report calls for the development of concerted partnerships with local school districts, thereby yielding innovative policies to expand the college-going population and number of Tennesseans with college degrees.

The report also notes that we must make dedicated investments to support faculty and staff in areas such as professional development, training, research, and faculty recruitment and retention. Last year we initiated a multi-year commitment to addresses faculty and staff salary inequities across the university. While we are currently faced with temporary budget challenges due to our enrollment situation, we will not waver on our commitment to the equity agenda.

Although we are making temporary reductions to our budgets and freezing some positions, our commitment to improving faculty and staff salaries remains a top priority. I am pleased to announce that we have submitted our equity plan to the TBR, and it will be considered at the September meeting of the Board. If approved, our equity plan will provide an increase that represents 4.25 percent of your equity difference. Of course, this investment will be in addition to the 1.5 percent across-the-board increase that went into effect on July 1.

A number of new initiatives that emerged during the 125 process proved to be low-hanging fruit that we are currently pursuing. For example, the concept of our new OpenBUCS program originated within 125. OpenBUCS begins this fall and allows anyone the opportunity to take free online courses but also provides an optional path to earn college credit. Two general education courses will be piloted during this first semester. I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Karen King and her staff for the countless hours they have given to developing and launching OpenBUCS.

Another item that grew out of the 125 process is anticipated to yield significant increases in the number of students who are veterans or veteran-dependents at ETSU. Through our new BUC HERO program, we will provide a tuition discount to veterans. We have a rich tradition of service for our Veterans through programs such as Veterans Upward Bound and our long-standing partnership with the VA. The BUC HERO program deepens our commitment to those who have given their service to our nation.

The decision to relocate our Welcome Center to the parking facility was another result of the 125 process. The current Welcome Center will vacate its presence in the Culp Center, thereby making room for a new Multicultural Center, which was also a 125 proposal. I have asked Dr. Joe Sherlin and Mary Jordan to assemble a team to develop our new center, with the goal of opening its doors by the fall of 2014.

In the upcoming weeks you will see a number of initiatives from our Division of Student Affairs aimed at enhancing student engagement. This fall, we will increase the number of activities offered on the weekends, including Family Weekend on Nov. 1-3. We are also adding staff to our Housing and Residence Life office who will coordinate diverse initiatives within our learning communities and explore opportunities to work closer with academic colleges.

The coming academic year will also see a renewed examination of our visual identity. We presently have over 120 logos that are used on campus, which indicates a sense that we have lost track of who we are from a visual standpoint. We must create a visual identity that brings us together and reinforces our values as a university with caring people, world-class academics, natural beauty, a sense of history, and a feeling of family. Our lack of a defined visual identity is a solvable problem, but it will take all of us – faculty, staff, and students – working together. During the upcoming year, many of you in this room will be invited to participate in a series of focus groups to discuss the need for a unified visual identity. I thank you in advance for your participation with this initiative.

Many on campus have asked why we are making such investments and taking such actions in the face of budgetary pressures. The intent for such investments is to better position us to be a more attractive option for students as they make their college choice decision and to grow and diversify our enrollment. As noted in a recent report by Moody's, institutions such as ETSU compete in a modern higher education landscape that offers multiple choices and enrollment alternatives. We must take definitive steps to enhance our mission, grow our programmatic strengths, and make clear to students why their future should include ETSU as their institution of choice and ultimately, their alma mater.

While our budget challenges are real, I believe that they present us with an opportunity to revisit the nature, structure, and process of budgeting across the university. Later this fall we will begin the work of developing a new budget process, coupled with a potential revision to institutional governance, that will yield a more open, transparent, and inclusive ETSU. This work will take time, and it will span multiple academic years. Our conversation must be inclusive, and we must be judicious to ensure that the outcome yields a process in which all stakeholders realize their role in our strategic growth agenda. This agenda entails a focus not only on attracting new students to ETSU, but in ensuring that more of our students walk across the stage and receive their degrees.

Budgets are moral documents, and I believe that budgets should align with our institutional values. Our institutional value statement declares that people come first, and I firmly believe that through opening up the process we will position the university to continue our commitment to salary equity, as well as to identifying opportunities for revenue growth that will yield strategic and prioritized investments in our research infrastructure, expand the strength and reach of the curriculum, and support the evolution of teaching and learning methodologies, technologies and best practices.

If your schedule allows, please take time to attend our New Student Convocation Ceremony today at 3:30 in the Dome. This is the first year we are hosting the event, and it will be a great opportunity for the entire university to welcome our incoming students to ETSU. As we saw in our convocation video, the class of 2017 is very different than the students who enrolled here as the classes of 1977, 1997, or 2007. That being said in many respects they are the same as the classes of students that each of us were part of at our respective alma maters.

I contend that they are more like us than we will admit. Like the class of 2017, we all began college with a fair degree of trepidation about the journey to that laid before us. Many of our new students, just like many of the faculty in this room, were the first person in their family to go to college. Many, just like us, borrowed to offset the cost of college. Many, just like us, come to college uncertain not only of their futures, but of themselves and their ability to compete on a grander stage, and a larger scale.

Each of the students in our incoming class will find their passion at ETSU, and that passion will be defined by all of us in the room. I ask that each of you to take a moment to reflect back upon your undergraduate and graduate experiences ... what comes to mind? I am confident that the images that come to your mind are the faces of faculty. Faculty define universities, for faculty are the heart of the college experience. My college experience as an undergraduate and graduate student was defined by Dr. Robert DiClerico a presidential scholar, a consummate gentleman, and a great leader, someone who put his students first. This past spring I sat in my office at Dossett Hall and watched through the power of technology the venerable Dr. DiClerico give his last lecture. As he spoke I was overwhelmed with emotion for he took me back to his classroom and reminded me of what it was like to be a young student, full of hope and dreams.

When I speak with alumni across the nation and asked them about their memories of ETSU, their faces light up when they talk about their former instructors. I recently had dinner with an alum in Memphis who shared the impact that Dr. Joe Corso had on his life. In Knoxville, I heard from an alum who talked about Jack Higgs. With great passion I hear the names of Festus Adebajo, Michael Marchioni, Tom Jenrette, and countless others.

Earlier this week I welcomed a group of new students to campus. I listened to them as they searched Rate my Professor.com and shared advice given to them from fellow students about faculty who were "awesome." If we were to be a collective fly on the wall in Centennial Hall or the Culp Center over the next few days, I anticipate that many of you would hear your names called when students talk about faculty members who poured their passion for learning into the classroom and were provided the title of "awesome."

Finally, earlier this summer I had the honor of participating in an event for the children of migrant and transitory workers across Tennessee. In thirty years when those young students reflect upon their time

here we will hear how Dr. Ardis Nelson and her staff changed their lives. The relationships with our students are the true power of ETSU, they define us as individuals and are the reason that we pour our souls into this university.

I could not be more proud to serve you than I am at the current moment. This will be an exciting, challenging, and difficult year. This is the year when we will begin to face the realities of the changing financial landscape and complicated pressures emerging across higher education. This is the year when we must look inside ourselves, question who we are as scholars, and examine where we want to be as a community of scholars in 25 years. This institution will be defined by our reflections and the conversations that ensue, conversations dominated by *what if* questions.

We will work vigilantly to address our temporary budget situation. I am confident that each of you will roll up your sleeves and work together to address our enrollment challenges. I am certain that together not only will we define the future for ETSU, but we will change the lives of our students who are touched on a daily basis through your teaching, research, and service.

I thank you for all that you do for our students, your fellow faculty members, and the region as a whole. I also want to thank you for your patience with me. I realize that there have been decisions made that were not universally popular, but those decisions will help to provide a foundation of excellence as we move forward and define our role in an increasingly competitive academic marketplace. May the coming academic year be productive, rewarding, transformative, and provide a sense of renewed engagement with your ETSU.
Godspeed and Go Bucs!