



*Remarks of Dr. Lester A. Lefton*

Thank you, Chairman Cowan. I am pleased, proud, and humbled to serve the members of the Kent State University community. I wish to thank: The search committee for your hard work and probing inquiry into me and my background, and for previewing for me the depth and richness of our university community; The Board of Trustees for your confidence and generosity of spirit; Search Chair Sandy Harbrecht, Board Chair Doug Cowan, Trustees Pat Mullin and Brian Tucker, and Board Secretary Char Reed for your extraordinary efforts to help me understand Kent State. Each of you went out of your way to make my wife, Linda, and me feel welcome here. I thank my wife Linda—my partner and friend for 37 years for her continuing support, inspiration, and love. Carol Cartwright, you have guided Kent State University through a period of unprecedented growth and advancement and are a national leader in higher education. I will stand on your shoulders and those of others who preceded you. Thank you Carol, for 15 years of distinguished work

This is a University of which all of us can be proud. Yet, there is a moment in time when institutions are ready to step into the future—to move ahead in new and exciting ways. There are opportunities for new, innovative, path-breaking transdisciplinary programs. There are new constituencies to be addressed. This is a time to dream new dreams, inclusive dreams—dreams of an even greater university.

I am here today because I believe we are at that moment, and Kent State University is ready. Kent State has a solid—rock solid foundation. I see a bright and shining road ahead: one characterized by academic excellence, new chairs and professorships, one of student-faculty engagement in the complex issues of our day. We are poised; we have the faculty; we have the students; we have the facilities, staff, and alumni. I will bring my energy and talents to the table to facilitate our trip along this pathway—our common destiny. Together we will turn our aspirations into reality—a University marked by excellence on all fronts. I know that there are challenges—but none that cannot be overcome.

Last week, I came to campus and took a tour. Melissa, a tour leader from the admission office, guided me; she was what I think of as a prototypical Kent State University student. She is from Stow and is studying special education. She loves Kent State University and its student body and faculty. Her tour focused on academics—she told me that Kent State has great professors who are accessible, and especially concerned about her academic experience and diversity of active involvement. Her faculty advisors want her to experience different communities and school systems to be prepared both academically and practically. What a wonderful experience she is having at Kent State University—one that is being repeated thousands of times every day.

Kent State is a comprehensive research-extensive university with impressive programs dedicated to learning, discovery, and engagement. We are serving in important and distinctive ways the people of Ohio, our local and regional communities, and the world, developing women like Melissa and men who are committed to lead, to serve, and to inspire.

As you know, Kent State University is the largest public multi-campus system in Ohio, in terms of the number of our campuses and communities served. As a candidate in your search I was intrigued by your theme of “Imagine”—both as a metaphor and as an aspiration. With you I imagine a Kent State that is not just a high-quality state university, but an eminent one. I see my task, soon as your president, as helping to turn that imagination into reality.

Together we can dream of a great university, and we can become a national leader, known for scholarship and creative activity, for engaged students and faculty, and for path-breaking ideas. What are just a few of the ways we can get there?

I imagine a Kent State that is a national leader in preparing students for both careers and leadership roles in society. Kent State’s continuing priority on student success has led to expansion of opportunities for undergraduate research, internships and other career-building experiences.

I will work together with the board, vice presidents, deans, chairs and directors, and faculty in enhancing the depth and range of Kent State’s academic excellence.

Together we will continue to place academic freedom at the center of research and scholarship for critical, probing inquiry.

Together we will place special value on challenging the minds of our students and faculty in creative endeavors, in the laboratory, and in the classroom, on campus, and in the community.

We will continue to focus on those we serve; engage with the world beyond our eight campuses; encourage innovation in learning at every level of the University; and sustain the relationships that foster success.

Together let us imagine and offer an aspiration for a Kent State that not only has a world-class faculty but one that continues to grow not only in size, but in prominence.

Ladies and gentlemen, my first priority will be to ensure that at Kent State University academic excellence comes first—because without first-class academics, without high standards for our students, faculty and staff, we will never achieve true greatness for ourselves or others. Learning, scholarship, and creative endeavor that are part of a continuous process of life-long learning is and should be our top priority. This is accomplished not only on the Kent campus, but on each of our regional campuses where a broad community constituency exists.

Together we will continue to provide services and be a source of inspiration and pride for our alumni. We will work together—faculty, staff, and students—to bring honor to all those who have preceded us—our alumni. Together we will continue to remember our past, not only the events of May 4, 1970, but our rich history of service, education, and free speech and as a leader in training of nurses, teachers, designers, journalists, scientists, and so many more.

We will continue to develop our athletic program and ensure that we keep our scholar-athletes winners in the classroom and the sporting arena alike.

There are challenges:

Information technology continues to evolve rapidly.

Closely associated with information technology, distance learning—broadly defined—is shaping a new environment in higher education; students are now being taught in the library, and at regional campuses—anywhere, anytime.

Faculty roles, rewards, and work are changing, and this is having implications for the teaching and research mission of universities, especially public research universities.

The fierce struggle for competitive research grants challenges the university infrastructure to have state-of-art facilities, the best faculty, and an intellectually diverse group of researchers who see past disciplinary boundaries and engage in the multi-site, transdisciplinary work of the 21st century.

The university as incubator of new ideas is being questioned; but today's students—especially students—hold the keys to new biomedical and technological discoveries.

Students and faculty are demanding more in the classroom, laboratory, and in campus facilities; this is creating rising costs as we attempt to improve the undergraduate student experience.

Our world requires an understanding of globalization and the key role a university can play in creating true global marketplaces and understanding.

Providing access to students at an affordable price continues to be a great problem.

Gone are the days when state funds covered more than two-thirds of the cost of educating a student. Nothing can take the place of a strong and growing endowment. Developing a resource base consistent with the aspirations of Kent State University is a core leadership challenge. I am committed to entrepreneurial, academically sound ventures, especially community collaborations, and to raising funds to make them possible. I hope along with our Board of Trustees and Foundation Board of Directors to develop a culture of philanthropy that will raise funds for continued growth in all areas of the university. I will work with our Board of Trustees, faculty and staff to develop fiscally strong resources and campuses that are functional, attractive, and user-friendly.

At the end of the day a university is about academics. To focus on excellence is to develop and nurture first-tier, distinctive, and intimate undergraduate and graduate programs, foster exciting initiatives, and create an intellectual engine for students, faculty, and the community. Like you, I want every student to have a series of life-transforming intellectual moments during their time at Kent State.

Harvard president Charles Eliot argued that within a research university, service to the nation can be and should be pursued, specialized expertise can be harnessed, and that individuals should be encouraged to pursue their “natural bents.” So let it be at Kent State.

To help accomplish this and other goals, I will try much the way Carol Cartwright has to assume a high level of visibility and leadership in Northeast Ohio, statewide, national, and international circles to advance our collective goals. While my office is in Kent, I will be visiting the regional campuses regularly and wish to ensure that *all* of our students and faculty have a place at the table. I will work with our faculty senate, our union representatives, our staff, and our student leaders to ensure that we indeed have shared governance.

Thomas Jefferson wrote that, “Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds.” Diversity in ideas, in the university leadership, in the faculty and staff, and in the student body creates growth, expands our conceptual reaches, and makes for better education and training. Together we must work to enhance intellectual, socioeconomic, and ethnic diversity, because as Jefferson said, “Education and free discussion are the antidote.”

I will work to maintain a positive, clear, vibrant, transparent, and energetic message that consists of a clear image and communication plan for Kent State. The President is the most visible and public face of the university, the person to whom the faculty, students, alumni, parents, staff, community, and the legislature look for leadership, a level head, maturity, a resolute moral compass, and the long-term welfare of the institution. I will work with our Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff to strengthen public awareness and visibility of the University’s high-quality programs. I promise to maintain a laser-like vision on integrity, intellectual inquisitiveness, and student-focused and faculty-engaging initiatives.

Let us imagine a Kent State that is even more focused, further engaged with both students and the community, a symbol of distinction on the playing field and in the laboratory, focused on academic excellence in scholarship and creative activity, and a leader nationally. Now is indeed the time to dream new dreams, inclusive dreams—dreams of an even greater university. *Now, it is our task—together—to turn this imagination, these dreams, into reality.*

I am proud to become a Golden Flash, and a part of your community.

Thank you for your confidence and warmth, and I hope to have the opportunity to personally say hello and greet each and every one of you this afternoon.