



**51st Chancellor's Council Annual Meeting & Symposium
Friday, April 27, 2018**

**State of the System
Chancellor William McRaven**

Thank you, John, for that kind introduction and for all your leadership as Chairman of the Chancellor's Council.

Georgeann and I have loved getting to know you and Peggy and really appreciate your support and friendship over the past year.

My task today is to give you an update on the State of the UT System. But I can sum that up in a few words.

The State of the System is strong—very strong!

We are strong because we have great presidents making tough decisions that advance their institutions.

We are strong because we have magnificent faculty who are passionate about teaching the next generation of American leaders and equally magnificent staff who are tireless in their quest for campus excellence.

We are strong because we have students from all over Texas, the nation and the world who come to our institutions determined to make a better life for themselves.

We are strong because we have parents, alumni, civic leaders and donors who believe in the power of education, research and clinical care.

We are strong because we have a board of regents who value each man and woman who cross the threshold of our institutional doors.

And we are strong because we have a UT System Administration that understands our role as servant leaders—helping the institutions be better today than they were yesterday.

The state of the system is very strong.

But, more than anything else, I wanted to take today to say thank you.

The decision Georgeann and I made to come home to Austin and join this incredible System will undoubtedly go down as one of the best decisions we ever made.

That's largely because from day one we have been embraced and supported by a galaxy of people who care deeply about Texas, and the UT institutions that serve her so well.

And of course, I am most appreciative of all of you, my swim buddies on the Chancellor's Council.

You are a big reason why these last three and a half years have been so terrific.

I simply can't thank you enough.

I have said it countless times, but it's worth repeating.

What has surprised and inspired me in this job, aside from the incredible students and faculty, is the generosity of the people of Texas.

Without your support, the great discoveries, the lifesaving cures, the life changing opportunities, would be non-existent.

Think, just for a moment about what this remarkable UT System brings to the world.

Anything and everything that is of importance to humanity is being studied, researched, taught or confronted somewhere in the UT System.

Are you concerned about Cancer? Well you should be.

But know that no academic health systems in the nation are contributing more to the fight against cancer than MD Anderson, UT Health Houston, UTMB, UTSW, UT Health San Antonio and UT Health East Texas.

Likewise, in terms of the neurosciences, whether it's the Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute at UT Southwestern ...

the Brain Performance Institute across town at UT Dallas ...

or the many other initiatives across the System, we are leading the charge when it comes to treating or preventing Alzheimer's, strokes, PTSD, concussions, addiction, and dementia.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

If you're concerned about diabetes, as we all should be ...

Researchers at UT Health San Antonio are working on a potential cure for Type 1 diabetes – a novel approach that increases the pancreatic cells secreting insulin.

If physics is something you're interested in, scientists at UT Rio Grande Valley played a major role in detecting gravitational waves, confirming one of the major predictions in Einstein's theory of relativity.

Meanwhile, 600 miles to the northwest, at the McDonald Observatory, UT Austin astronomers are using some of the most powerful telescopes in the world ...

and will soon have access to the most powerful optical telescope in the world ...

to look back in time, and unlock some of the greatest and most fundamental mysteries of mankind.

Turning to the here and now, and light years closer to home, the indomitable professionals at UT Health Houston are working overtime to expand treatment to the many thousands of residents traumatized by Hurricane Harvey.

Let me add, I will never forget the heroic performance of everyone at UT's three Houston-area health centers in the aftermath of that terrible storm.

If you ever needed a reminder of how important we are to the communities we serve, Harvey is that reminder.

As I think you all know, we are also playing an increasingly important role in the security of our nation.

The Texas National Security Network we launched is off to a fast start ...

Led by the folks right here at the UT Austin's Clements Center for National Security and Strauss Center for International Security and Law ...

but tapping into, and uniting the expertise and resources of all fourteen UT institutions ...

we are creating the premier university system in the country for national security work.

Because we believe we have a role, a big role to play in helping keep America safe from all the things that threaten her.

That certainly includes infectious diseases, like Zika and Ebola.

Our Galveston National Laboratory at UTMB is the only operational BioSafety Level 4 national lab on a university campus in the United States.

It also includes cyber threats.

At UTSA, which is partnering with the Department of Homeland Security, and other UT institutions, we are training the generation of cyber warriors our country is going to need in the years to come.

Turning to another issue affecting us all, climate change.

Just a few miles from here at the Texas Advanced Computing Center, climate scientists are using Stampede 2, UT's newest supercomputer ...

the largest at any university in the United States ...

to analyze massive amounts of data from around the world.

Doing the sort of computation that would have been impossible not that long ago.

And, if you believe, as I do, that clean water will be one of the biggest issues shaping global health, political stability, war and peace...

Then you'll be glad to know that some brilliant minds are working this issue hard at the Cockrell School of Engineering.

Right here on the 40 acres, they're developing a cost-effective and compact technology that can enable the production of safe drinking water from any source, even the ocean or contaminated supplies.

Talk about changing the world.

And if you like that, how about an innovation that makes cities cleaner while creating new sources of sustainable energy?

That's what the researchers at UT Arlington have developed, and it's already helping transform communities from Irving, Texas to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

I occasionally come across articles about how we don't make anything in the United States anymore.

I wish the authors of those articles would visit the W.M. Keck Center for Innovation at UT El Paso.

There they'd see the revolution taking place in additive manufacturing.

More commonly known as 3D printing, it is radically changing how objects get designed and created.

Just as important, it is training the young men and women of UTEP for great paying jobs on the edge of technology.

And what about the role the UT System plays in the lives of the millions of Texans who don't live in the big cities.

Who love their communities and want to stay, raise their families and build their careers there.

We can never lose sight of the role our comprehensive universities, UT Permian Basin, UT Tyler, and UT RGV play in the lives of these young people, their families, and their communities.

Did you know that the admission rate for UTPB students applying to medical school is 70%? That compares to the state average of 45%.

And UT Tyler's online graduate nursing program was recently ranked best in Texas, and fifth in the nation by U.S. News and World Report.

And UTRGV students just won the National Chess Championship, beating out all the perennial favorites.

Our comprehensive universities provide students with a world-class education close to home, so they can stay and become the generation of doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, engineers, accountants, musicians.

Of course, we also play a critical role in keeping those communities healthy.

UT Health Science Center Tyler has been a leader in this arena for a long time, and recently took a giant step forward, partnering with Ardent Health Services to create a new 10-hospital health system to be named UT Health East Texas.

This is going to be a game changer for the entire region, making quality care more accessible than ever.

I'm just as proud of how our other health science centers have been stepping up.

For the first time ever, an ambitious young man or woman can grow up, graduate college, then medical school, then practice medicine, all without leaving the Rio Grande Valley.

This will have a profound impact on the health and spirit of the entire region.

All of this barely scratches the surface of the great things taking place at UT institutions all over this state

And none of this would have been fully realized without your generosity—never forget that!

In closing, I would like to provide a few parting thoughts before I step down.

Let me begin at the beginning.

On the first day of my tenure as the Chancellor, I put out an electronic message that told the faculty, staff and students a bit of my story--

Of what I had learned from my time in the military and how I hoped that time would shape my thinking as the Chancellor.

I told them that...

As I traveled around the world it never ceased to amaze me that when I told people I was from Texas, everyone I encountered, from the youngest Afghan girl to the oldest African villager, had a common view of Texas and Texans.

They understood that Texans were men and women of character and integrity — strong-willed, independent, bold, risk-takers, who helped the weak and downtrodden, who got up when they were knocked down, and who never complained about their struggles.

Texans wore boots and big hats and sat tall in the saddle because there was a grandness in their manner.

They understood that being a Texan was something special.

This image of Texans was universal, and we have rightly earned that reputation through generations of men and women who came to this great land and made it what it is today.

We are Texans, and that should mean something in everything we do — particularly in higher education, research, health care and service.

I told them that the military had instilled in me the core values necessary to lead. But that leadership was not the sole purview of the military.

In fact, I believe that the purpose of education is to build great leaders.

From anthropologists to zoologists, from accountants to physicists, great leaders are people who make changes for the betterment of society:

...a better way to understand shifting demographics, a better business model, a better way to treat cancer, a better legal argument or a better understanding of why we exist.

As Texans, building great leaders should be part of our DNA.

However, I also told them that I don't believe you can build great leaders without creating an environment that challenges them, that encourages them — an environment that propels them forward.

Within The University of Texas System, that environment resides in our academic and intellectual freedom.

I told them that I strongly believed that as students, faculty, and researchers, we should challenge conventional wisdom.

We should challenge the great philosophers. We should challenge the nature of the universe. We should challenge our economic models, our governmental models, and our business models.

Nothing should go unchallenged. We should be relentless in our pursuit of new ideas.

We should make people mad, frustrated, irate and alive with curiosity.

We should publish papers that shake the foundation of conventional thinking.

We needed students who challenged professors and professors who challenged students.

I wanted those who educate our young men and women to come to work every day with a little anxiety, wondering whether they are good enough for our students.

And I wanted students to wake up every morning excited about their classroom and what they might learn.

I wanted researchers who pushed the envelope on every new idea, who never accept the existing theories and trends.

All of this, I hoped would produce leaders in every field of endeavor.

Leaders who were not afraid of the professional risks that comes from challenging the established thinking.

We needed leaders who could inspire, who could create and produce.

We needed leaders who could educate the next generation of thinkers.

We must be known as the institution that builds leaders through world-class education, cutting-edge research, uncompromising intellectual integrity, and the highest ethical standards.

If we did this, I offered, then we would continue to recruit the finest minds in the world, because they would want to come to institutions of The University of Texas System.

They would want to come to a place where we have the best facilities, the greatest intellectual freedom, and a student body and faculty that rival any institution in the country.

I told them that never in my life had I seen such promise and such potential to change the lives of Texans across the state.

After three years, my faith in Texas and the University of Texas System is stronger today than ever before.

And for all those who contributed so mightily to making us better, I am forever grateful.

Finally, the last three years have also taught me a lot about America.

When you wear the flag of your country on your shoulder every day, as we do on our combat uniforms, you think you understand what the nation is all about.

You think you have figured out where the courage lies, what commitment means and what truly shapes the future of our young citizens.

So, imagine my surprise when I found out there was so much more to America than I ever realized.

I used to believe that the only real courage worthy of being called heroic was on the battlefield.

I knew what real courage looked like.

It looked like SSGT Leroy Petry who saved his fellow Army Rangers during a close in fire fight in Afghanistan.

He lost his hand to a grenade and suffered severe wounds but kept fighting. He received the Medal of Honor.

Real courage looked like Navy Lieutenant Mike Murphy, who died trying to save his fellow SEALs and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Or Army Lieutenant Ashley White, a young female officer assigned to the Cultural Support Team who was killed when she stepped on a pressure plate mine.

But in this job, I have seen another side of courage.

The courage of a first in family student who leaves everything behind hoping to change the trajectory of an entire generation.

And, equally courageous parents, who sacrifice all they have, in hopes their children will be better off than themselves.

I have seen young student activists, who, emboldened by their beliefs, challenge the systems in hopes of making change.

Many of them fearful that their political stance will ruin their lives or embarrass their parents—but they do it anyway.

I have seen patients, racked with cancer, come into work every day and smile through it all.

I have a new appreciation for courage in this country.

I also use to have a very narrow view of commitment to the nation.

Commitment was about signing on the dotted line, wearing the uniform and sacrificing for your country.

Commitment was about moving every few years, and accepting the hardships of military life.

But, now I realize how the commitment of great folks, like those of you in the Chancellor's Council, is changing the nation every day—changing it in ways that are meaningful for so very many Americans.

Helping underprivileged kids get a better education.

Supporting the local fine arts scene.

Developing STEM programs at our elementary and high schools or serving on development boards and advisory councils of our health and academic institutions.

I have seen how the Captains of Industry give back to their state and their city.

How the lawyers do pro-bono work for veterans and citizens who can't afford good legal representation.

I have seen how the doctors set up clinics in the poorest of neighborhoods in order to serve the people.

And, more recently, I have witnessed the incredible acts of courage and commitment—not just by first responders, but by average Americans, Texans, confronted with the disaster of Harvey and reaching out to help their fellow man.

It is sometimes easy to worry about the future of our country.

We see the turmoil in Washington, we witness the signs of moral decay, and we are fearful for the safety of our children and our grandchildren.

But, let me give you another perspective.

I spent most of the last twenty years with the youth of America.

I have been with them on the battlefield and in the classrooms.

They are different than our generation. And I would offer, in many ways, they are so much better.

They are more inclusive. They don't see color, or ethnicity or orientation. They value people for their friendship and their talents.

They are more engaged. They will not stand by and watch bad things happen to good people.

They are more questioning. They want to know why.

Why are we going to war, why we are increasing our debt, why can't we do something new and different?

For those who wonder about the future of this nation, just look north to the Forty Acres, or south to the Rio Grande Valley, or west to El Paso or East to Tyler.

Just look to the graduates who will build the bridges, find the cures, teach the youth.

The graduates who will volunteer to wear the uniform, fight the fires, and protect the people.

Make no mistake about it, we have a lot of challenges in this country.

But I am more convinced than ever that our future is in very good hands.

Finally, it has been proven to me once again that nothing, absolutely nothing, is more important to the youth of America and a good education.

A good education can transform a society. A good education reduces fear, bigotry, racism, and inequality.

A good education brings dignity and respect.

A good education provides new opportunities and, above all, a good education gives hope and a belief in the future.

And, in the end, that is our mission; to transform society and give hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

Each of you, in your own way, have contributed mightily to this noble undertaking and it has been my greatest honor to have served alongside you.

Thank you very much.