Howdy!

Thank you for joining us here today. I would like to extend my appreciation to Student Body President Case Harris. Thank you, Case, for those wonderful remarks. We are fortunate to have you in this role. Thank you for your service.

I’m pleased Case selected “Building Unity Through Tradition” as a theme for his term. I couldn’t agree more with his platform since it embodies the spirit within our 74,000-strong student body.

Students are the reason that we are here. We cannot lose sight of our primary mission: education. We must continue to provide a top-quality education that prepares our students for life.

To assist students with the cost of education, we are embarking on a scholarship campaign with a goal of an additional $100 million dollars over the next four years.

This month, we launched a working group to develop a plan for adopting open-access textbooks.

Another way we’re investing in our students is through our Student Activity Fund, or our new Good Bull Fund. The fund was established to offset expenses for student-led activities that benefit the campus and the community.

I’m pleased to announce that we are making necessary investments in our health care facilities and services as well. We are currently exploring partnerships with health care providers to create larger student health service complexes that will meet the needs of our students. We plan to double the amount of funding for student mental health services over the next three years. As part of this effort, we will create a distributed mental health services model for students — embedding clinicians across campus in key academic units and other key locations.

Our traditions are the heart of Texas A&M, and the Corps of Cadets will continue to be prominent on our campus. To enhance the Corps, we have announced “March to 3000,” a campaign to grow the Corps of Cadets to 3,000 cadets.

Case – I’m looking forward to working with you on all these initiatives and others in the future.

THE GOLDEN AGE

I’ve looked forward to today for some time now because I believe the future is promising. We are poised to launch a new era of success at our university.

Chancellor John Sharp recently said that we are living in a new Golden Age of Texas A&M, aligned
in our purpose, our mission and our values. I agree
that we are in the midst of a defining moment in the
history of our beloved university.
You might ask why I believe we have reached such a
pivotal moment. There are three reasons.
Most importantly, we have strong alignment
of leadership among the Board of Regents,
the Chancellor, university leaders and affiliate
organizations and foundations. We have an
availability of resources thanks to strong support
from our state and nation, as well as our selfless
benefactors. And finally, we have a strong
organizational foundation.
Important steps were taken this year to set the
stage for organizational success.
We did this as a community. I recognize that change
is difficult. I am grateful for all of your efforts this
year.
Also, thanks to the 500 of you who served
on working groups for the Path Forward
recommendations. Because of your hard work and
commitment to this university, we are positioned to
advance Texas A&M like never before.
And we must embrace this moment. We are truly at
an inflection point. We should ask ourselves, what
kind of university do we want to be? Will we look
outwardly on the world or only inwardly within our
university? Are we willing to take the leap toward
new and challenging opportunities or continue on
the well-traveled road? Do we invest in boundary-
challenging ideas or do we follow the status quo?
Texas A&M is at a critical juncture for determining
our path forward.
I mentioned how fortunate we are to have available
resources. As we move forward, it is incumbent
upon us to be good financial stewards. We must use
our funds effectively.
To that end, next year, we will move toward a
hybrid budget model. This will allow us to allocate
resources in an efficient and transparent manner,
while continuing to support strategic investments.
Our first and most critical investment will be in
our people. We recognize that productive faculty
are essential to the success of Texas A&M. Over
the next four years, through faculty retirement,
replacement and new positions, we will hire over
500 faculty members with an investment of $50
million dollars in startup packages.
In addition, we will reduce the number of non-
mission tasks, information overload and the
creeping bureaucracy that distracts faculty from
their education responsibilities.
And to our staff: without your support and
dedication to our mission, the university cannot
meet the goal of preeminence. Therefore, we also
must invest in the employee experience.
We will create a robust talent management initiative
to support well-defined career paths and succession
plans. We will create new professional development
opportunities to enhance organizational capabilities
and showcase leaders. And, as requested by our
workforce, we will finalize guidelines for a more
flexible remote work option for staff.
We are also investing in our facilities. Historically,
the university spends about $22 million dollars
per year for maintenance of our buildings. But
that is not enough. We will commit an additional
$8 million dollars annually for this purpose, to be
used specifically for our older facilities. Investing
in facility improvements will enhance the overall
experience at Texas A&M and position us to be
more competitive in the future.

THE PROBLEM
As you can tell, I’m optimistic about our future. But
not everyone in the nation shares that optimism for
higher education.
Nationally, there is an undercurrent of
dissatisfaction — even suspicion — among the
public about universities. Surveys have shown that
only half of American adults believe universities have a positive effect on the nation. This is worrisome.

We must demonstrate to the country what a great American university can do to improve the lives of every American. We cannot afford to be casual about how the public sees us. No university can.

I also believe that if we listen to our many stakeholders, we can learn... and then we can act. We must define our priorities without abandoning the qualities that made the American university the envy of the world.

Business as usual won't work. If we don't adapt, we will lose support and relevance. But this I do know: Texas A&M is the model for solving this national dilemma in higher education.

OUR VISION

My vision for Texas A&M is simply to provide a transformative education to prepare today's students for tomorrow's world. I believe that there are three areas of importance as we execute our vision.

At Texas A&M, we are committed to making higher education more relevant. We will continue to create opportunity, and we will influence our society in new ways.

Relevance at Texas A&M means having an impact on our society. For too long, the walls of the university have been too high, impassable to the very individuals who support our efforts. If we are disconnected, we fail.

A relevant university listens. A relevant university learns. A relevant university engages. We must, and will, deliver meaningful knowledge, applicable to the lives of others.

Developing opportunity is our foundation. Land-grant universities were created to ensure that higher education was accessible to all with the passion and drive to succeed.

I have always believed that the genius of America is that the best ideas can come from the most unlikely places. Talented individuals who may not have the “right pedigree or background,” if given the opportunity to demonstrate their potential, can transform this nation.

But opportunity at Texas A&M doesn't stop at the classroom door. It's manifested when bold research ideas become life-saving products; when communities grow and prosper because of our partnership; and when our students graduate to become leaders of character.

Influence involves making an indelible mark on the body of knowledge, addressing a societal challenge or changing a student's life. Texas A&M should influence the state and nation for the better, leaving a lasting, constructive imprint.

For a great Texas university to truly fulfill its mission, it must have positive influence from Washington, D.C., to Washington County, Texas.

So how do we implement this vision? By advancing initiatives and efforts in four interwoven areas of strength: A transformational education; connecting with our state, the nation and the world; a translational research enterprise; all while celebrating the Aggie Way.

Universities that are insular are limited to the inner voices of the academy.

This leads to institutional myopia. It never succeeds.

We must weave a tapestry of engagement that depends on each area of strength, and each is vital to the whole. If one is diminished, the entire university suffers. If one is absent, success is impossible.

Key initiatives are required in each of these areas to meet the goals of relevance, opportunity and influence.

TRANSFORMATIONAL EDUCATION

First, we must find new ways to provide a truly
transformational education – one that delivers broad-based learning for our students. This is our highest calling.

To maintain America’s culture of innovation and to continue to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit, a world-class education is fundamental. Many graduates who enter the workforce today will change jobs every three years. This requires flexibility, versatility and creativity.

A wide range of experiences, multidisciplinary knowledge and hands-on learning is essential to prepare students for the workplaces they will face after graduation.

No one would deny that we have a strong history of educating students in applied areas. However, I believe an educational piece is missing and that piece is the arts. So, why does Texas A&M need an arts program?

I have, quite frankly, grown weary of hearing about outstanding prospective students who chose to attend other universities because Texas A&M lacks opportunities in the arts. Students who want to be Aggies should have these opportunities. I also believe that our students — across all disciplines — are often stronger leaders with a broader educational experience.

The passion that comes from the arts is important in the development of a leader, whether it’s appreciating a symphony, viewing a Rembrandt, experiencing Shakespeare or watching the Aggie band step off to the “Aggie War Hymn” during halftime.

But it’s about more than just enjoyment.

Exposure to the arts expands critical thinking, which means greater job opportunities for our students. Let me provide a few examples. Some of the fastest-growing job markets are for music composers and set designers for video games. E-sports also falls in that category and will be included in our future plans. Other areas include developers of medical simulations to help physicians train for surgery.

These employees need not only to have technical competences to code but also the passion to compose music and to create visual art. Without these broad skills, without understanding the technical and the artistic and how they interact, creativity is limited — and so is success.

To address this missing piece in our university, we have created the new School of Performance, Visualization and Fine Arts. Already, through the support of a generous donor, a Dean’s Chair was created for this new school, with an endowment of $5 million dollars.

In addition to developing strong programs in foundational areas, we will focus on blending the arts with Texas A&M’s strength in engineering.

Conversations are underway about the construction of a state-of-the-art facility, a center for arts innovation and learning. This unique learning laboratory would house the academic, research and creative works of this new school, along with hosting public exhibitions and performances. In addition, I requested $50 million dollars from the Texas Legislature to establish the Texas A&M Virtual Production Center within our new school to be based in College Station and Fort Worth.

You may wonder why I, an engineer, am so passionate about the arts. New worlds opened for me when I discovered the arts in college. I became a more well-rounded person — and quite frankly, a better engineer.

In addition, I believe it’s equally important that we provide our students with the opportunity to learn from those whose own experiences have transformed business or public service. We will focus on bringing more professionals with industry and government experience to benefit our students.

One example of this approach can be observed with our plan to reestablish the journalism program. Exposure and emphasis will be placed on high-impact learning experiences with industry
professionals. This includes working with campus partners like KAMU, as well as off-campus collaborators such as with local, state and national news organizations.

We expect to welcome our first class of journalism students in the fall of 2023. The home of the journalism degree will be the new College of Arts and Sciences. Located in the Academic Building, the new college will support a solid and consistent core of excellence in the natural and mathematical sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. Each of us can likely point to a pivotal experience in our life that transformed us. Personally, I think about my grandparents, who were the most influential people in my life.

Both of my grandparents left school after the third grade to support their families. My grandfather was an entrepreneur from an early age, selling fruit on the roadside and coal he mined himself. He built that enterprise into a small but successful business.

At the same time, my grandmother opened a tiny one-room general store to provide goods for our small, rural Kentucky community. When I was six years old, I started working in the store, stocking shelves, running the register, and later, helping with the bookkeeping. That’s where I found my love of math.

I learned so much from these family experiences that I utilize every day: lessons on life, hard work, compassion and the importance of community.

Our students should have the opportunity to learn from individuals from all walks of life. That’s why I’m so passionate about the expanding of the hands-on learning opportunities across campus.

The bottom line: students learn better by doing.

That’s the basic idea behind the new Aplin Center. Like me, Arch Aplin, founder of Buc-ee’s, learned entrepreneurship at his grandparents’ store. As a result of his generous $50 million gift, we will launch an exciting new approach to hands-on learning at the Aplin Center.

In this facility, we will rethink the connections between product development and entrepreneurship. The Aplin Center will allow us to offer new academic programs in business and agriculture, including programs in hospitality, hotel management and viticulture.

In addition, it is critically important for us to continue to meet the workforce needs of the state and nation through growth in several key programs. Student growth initiatives in areas of national need, such as business, nursing, construction science, computer science and data science will be encouraged and supported.

Through our commitment to the arts, by embracing innovative, hands-on learning opportunities and meeting the workforce needs of our nation, we can create an educational experience that is second to none.

CONNECTIVITY TO THE STATE, NATION AND WORLD

The second area of strength is connecting with our state, nation and world. For too long, higher education has been seen as disconnected from communities.

Our university was founded on a bond between our state, our nation and the people of Texas. That connection remains vital. Universities cannot be islands. We must move beyond the ivory tower. Connecting with communities allows us to communicate directly with our stakeholders.
This need for community connection is why I created the Division of Academic and Strategic Collaborations. This division will work to link Texas A&M to communities near and far. For example, by enhancing our continuing education offerings and youth programs, this division supports our land-grant mission. It also ensures student recruitment is conducted throughout the entire state, providing a direct gateway to educational opportunities for prospective students and their families.

As part of our community connection, discussions are underway to launch an early childhood development degree program. This will involve a new partnership between the Charlotte Sharp and Becky Gates Children Centers, which will serve as learning laboratories for our students.

As we talk about our connections and partnerships, it’s important to remember that Texas A&M isn’t just one campus. We have regional and branch campuses throughout the state, nation and the world.

We recently expanded opportunities through the Bush School’s new location in Washington, D.C. This expansion honors the legacy of President George H.W. Bush and will attract future leaders to, in his words, “the noble calling of public service.”

Our commitment to selfless service is the reason that President Bush chose Texas A&M for his presidential library. It is important that every one of our students have the opportunity to interact with the Bush School in meaningful ways. That’s why we have expanded the Bush School to include undergraduate, master’s and Ph.D. students through the addition of international studies and the department of political science.

The School of Nursing will expand their programmatic reach in South Texas, with a new building in McAllen. Not only will the building meet local demand for registered nurses, but it will also allow community-based research to address the health challenges of the Rio Grande Valley.

In Galveston, our Maritime Academy is fulfilling critical components of our sea-grant mission. Congress approved $325 million dollars to construct the Lone Star, a 524-foot vessel. The ship will support maritime training needs and disaster response capabilities and is expected to arrive in Galveston in 2025.

And our footprint is still growing.

Aggieland North is a great example. Thanks to the Chancellor’s vision and the expansion of the law school in Fort Worth, the entire Aggieland North project will be a game changer.

We also must invite more people to experience Aggieland.

We welcome record numbers of people to our athletic events each year. Our athletic facilities continue to reflect excellence, with the expansion of the Bright Athletic Complex and the construction of a new indoor track. Also, many find beauty and solitude by visiting the Leach Teaching Gardens, and now — thanks to the generosity of our donors — we have the wonderful Aggie Park.

There are several key initiatives that will showcase our campus in new ways and celebrate Texas A&M’s legacy.

Let me provide one example. Discussions are underway about a future museum and library complex on West Campus exhibiting our work in natural history, art, science, agriculture and the treasures of the Cushing Memorial Library.
TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Texas A&M’s reputation as a top-tier research university is well established. The university’s research totaled more than $1 billion dollars in 2021. I applaud our talented researchers whose expertise and innovation sustained the growth of our research enterprise.

We've also made excellent progress in attracting the world’s top researchers to Texas A&M, thanks to the Governor’s University Research Initiative, the Chancellor’s Research Initiative and the Hagler Institute. Over the last decade, we’ve seen close to a fivefold increase in the number of national academy members at Texas A&M.

Texas A&M remains committed to addressing critical research needs. We must communicate how our discoveries will improve people’s lives. This is the premise of the third area of strength — a translational research enterprise.

Looking ahead, our efforts to engage the next generation of researchers revolve around two key components: growing interdisciplinary research collaborations and advancing discoveries to benefit the world.

To increase collaboration, we are creating a new program, ASCEND, to encourage new research partnerships across all disciplines. I’ve committed $6 million dollars annually to the ASCEND program.

In addition, in partnership with The Texas A&M System, we will create a $5 million dollar fund, called Advancing Discovery to Market, or the ADM fund. This will assist our faculty, staff and students as they move their great ideas from discovery to commercial products. Additional information on these programs will be shared in the coming months.

Another important part of our translational research efforts involves the work of our veterinary school. The vet school provides essential service to Texas, the nation and around the globe. Yet our facilities have not kept up with our ambition.

We aspire to have the best small animal hospital in the world. And we will.

I’m proud to share that through the generosity of the Texas Legislature, we will build a new Small Animal Teaching and Research Hospital. This hospital will provide hands-on educational workspace for veterinary students and a state-of-the-art laboratory for animal health and translational research. Faculty members in the vet school will partner with colleagues across the university to develop innovative diagnostic and therapeutic strategies.

Finally, we are committed to developing programs that will increase our funding from the National Institutes of Health. To support this effort, we will construct two new research facilities in the Texas Medical Center in Houston.

The first of these – known as the TMC3 Collaborative – is a joint venture with MD Anderson Cancer Center and UT Health. The second is a $200 million dollar biomedical research building developed in partnership with the University of Houston. These facilities, along with the EnMed program, will attract international research talent and increase the prominence of our biomedical research portfolio.
THE AGGIE WAY

The fourth area of strength is what makes us unique, what makes us Texas A&M. It’s the Aggie Way.

We must never lose sight of who we are as Aggies. We must remember our history, as it will direct us to our future. And this spirit must be woven into the classroom, the laboratory and our connection to the world.

The Aggie Way represents the Aggie core values, those wonderful guideposts that lead us in our Aggie lives: respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity and selfless service. These values should be visible in both our words and deeds.

We see the shadows of the past that remind us of the loyalty and sacrifice of others when the Corps of Cadets walk through campus in uniform.

We see the spirit during scholarship award ceremonies where the dedication of our students is recognized, as well as the faithful support of their families.

We see the commitment in the decades-earned reputation of Aggie perseverance, a get-the-job-done attitude so associated with Texas A&M and its former students.

And we see the pride in our athletic venues, when the loudest and proudest fans in the SEC show up to cheer the Aggies to victory. The support and love our current and former students have for this university, that’s the Aggie Way.

It’s important to note: the Aggie Way embraces all. Quite simply, those who embrace the Aggie Way are they themselves embraced by the Aggie Way.

From time to time, I’m asked by those who aren’t familiar with Texas A&M to explain the Aggie Way. I tell them it represents everything good about us. I’ve experienced the Aggie Way as a member of this special community and as an Aggie Mom, but it was reinforced recently for me at an unlikely event.

This summer after my mother’s passing, my family gathered at a restaurant in Kentucky. By chance, my niece’s fiancé ran into a colleague from work who was an Aggie. I was introduced, we shared stories about Aggieland, and I returned to join my family.

When we finished our meal and requested the check, we were told that this Aggie — who I had known all of 15 minutes — had paid for my entire family’s dinner. When I went to thank him for his generosity, I realized he had quietly slipped away. He didn’t seek recognition or gratitude.

This was such a simple, but profound, gesture — at a time when our grief was evident — and I will never forget it. This is the Aggie Way.

Some may view Texas A&M’s core values and our can-do spirit of optimism and enthusiasm as obsolete, a relic of another time. The world is increasingly cynical and wants us to be cynical as well.

But here at Texas A&M, we do not simply use words like “excellence” and “integrity” on our websites. They aren’t just slogans on a poster. We actually live them.

We pursue them and embed them in all that we do. To us, they are a way of life. And I believe that by remaining true to our core values, by knowing who we are and what we stand for, Texas A&M is an island of strength and endurance in an ocean of shifting ideals.
To be sure, Texas A&M is a great institution. Our job is to make it even better. And that will require an ongoing commitment from all of us. Some of that work is happening today. But much work remains.

I’ll be coming to each division, college and school over the next few months to continue this dialogue. I want to hear your ideas and your concerns. We need both to truly launch into a new era of success at Texas A&M.

It’s worth emphasizing again — we must capitalize on this unique opportunity that history is granting. This is our moment.

Aggies never shrink from a challenge. They always rise to the occasion, with remarkable innovation, unmatched determination and sheer grit.

Building on our Aggie core values and traditions, a renewed commitment to working together for the greater good and the conviction that we can make a difference — the golden years ahead are promising for Texas A&M and those we serve.

Thank you and Gig ‘em.