

Texas A&M University

# State of the University Address

October 4, 2018

## *Howdy!*

Jennifer, thank you. Thank you for sharing some of your amazing story, and for your kind introduction. Thank you for representing our graduate students of which we have surpassed 15,000...in fact you'll be happy to know it's 15,001, as of today!



I would also like to thank colleagues with the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies, led by Dr. Karen Butler-Purry, for their incredible advocacy on behalf of our graduate students, and for nominating Jen to introduce me today. We at A&M are very happy to be the choice of graduate students for furthering their education and their opportunities in life.

Jen's research – now take notes on this – focuses on changes in investors' tax rates on banks' risk-taking behavior. After working at two of the Big 4 accounting firms and becoming a CPA, Jen wanted to learn more, grow more, contribute more, and that drove her to pursue her Ph.D. in the Mays Business School. You heard her story today. She has overcome challenges in life – challenges she has turned into motivation to work harder. When asked about what helped her through this period of recovery, she pointed to Dr. John Robinson, and Dr. Chris Yust, her advisor for whom she had served as research assistant. Both of these faculty leaders took a stake not only in Jen's scholarship but also in encouraging her. Dr. Yust and his wife, Adrienne, even cooked a full freezer's worth of meals during her recovery. Selfless service is among our faculty and it is amazing. Many of you do this and don't get the credit. Thank you for what faculty and staff do for everybody on this campus.

I would like to ask Drs. Yust and Robinson and Jen, if you would, stand up and let us thank you again for being Aggies!

*Welcome everyone.*

The State of the University on this very day, our 142nd birthday, remains strong.

- Our strength is in our ability to rise to new heights of academic excellence, as evidenced in improved rankings and distinguished faculty, staff, students, and former students who represent us in leadership and service positions throughout the globe;

- Our strength is in fiscal accountability to the state, to our students, and their parents, and affordability compared to peer universities, and, importantly, return on investment as reflected both in terms of lower debt loads and higher potential earnings;
- Our strength is in striving to always live up to our core values; to celebrate them; to hold ourselves accountable when we fall short; to weave them into everything we do – from classrooms, to laboratories, to athletic fields, to every part of the university - referencing these core values with decisions large and small. This makes Texas A&M the truly special place that it is.



And at our core, we strive to create and support a diverse, inclusive and equitable environment where differences are valued, indeed encouraged, where everyone has the optimal learning environment, ensuring that our students are as successful when they leave this university just as our students have been for the last century and a half. The sheer variety of experiences of our faculty, staff and students at A&M has been the source of creative ideas in all disciplines, validating our role as leaders in the nation.

Looking back at this time one year ago, we were in the midst of recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. More than 33,000 of our students, faculty and staff – not counting their families – were from the affected areas.



And Aggies did what Aggies do – selflessly served:

- Our students jumped into boats to rescue and save lives, and rallied to send truckloads of supplies to affected regions;
- The Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, and Veterinary Medicine treated humans and animals;
- The Association of Former Students and the Texas A&M Foundation mobilized to assist others;
- Our Qatar students hosted a fundraiser on their campus, selling t-shirts and juice to support their fellow Aggies here in Texas. We felt their love and their support 8,000 miles away. The strength of the Aggie Network is very much intact.



- Many students in Galveston were evacuated to College Station where staff worked overtime to assist them with housing and food. Even Reveille helped out, making a visit to these relocated students and one other dog who was also evacuated with them.



Some of our students showed up for the semester with only a plastic bag with some of their clothes inside – plastic bags they'd held above water level as they waded through their neighborhood streets to reach higher ground and make their way to a hurricane-delayed fall semester.

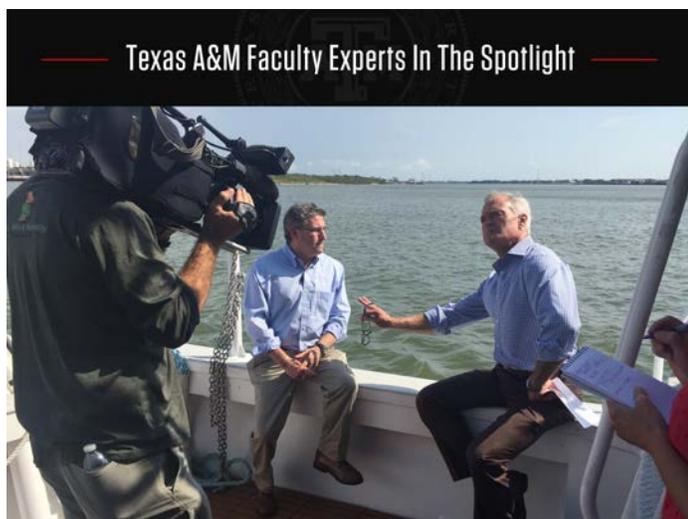
Hurricane Harvey gave our staff the opportunity to show what they do best as well, day in day out...they serve our campus:

- Transportation Services bused our Sea Aggies to safety from Galveston and back and ran ongoing shuttle service to their temporary housing;
- Dining Services and Recreation Sports kept our campus fed and fit;
- Safety and Security and Marketing and Communications monitored campus conditions and kept our community informed;
- Utilities and Energy Services and our Facilities teams made it possible to fully open our campus for the first day of classes;
- Financial Aid and Student Business Services reduced the anxiety of students by assisting with their tuition and fee payments;
- MarCom, IT and Finance created a process to provide nearly \$130,000 of emergency financial support to hundreds of faculty, staff and students. Emergency aid gift cards in some cases meant the difference between dropping out of school and continuing education – just enough to get supplies, just enough to make it another day, just enough to get on with life and stay the course for their college education. Thank you to everyone who made this possible!
- Our faculty offered hurricane expertise in rescue, recovery and rebuilding as well. Experts such as Sam Brody, John Nielsen-Gammon, Shari Yvon-Lewis, John Cooper, George Rogers – to name just a few.

- And our own Chancellor, Chancellor John Sharp, was selected by Governor Abbott to be the Hurricane Recovery Czar for the Commission to Rebuild Texas. This was in addition to his day job. Chancellor Sharp and many with our university, across the system and related agencies supported through action and expertise.



It was all hands on deck. We are a resilient state, and Aggies are a vital part of that resiliency.



And as I was delivering this address last October, we were preparing to host just weeks later, at the request of President George H.W. Bush, every living former U.S. President as well as royalty from our friends in Qatar who helped to underwrite a fundraising concert. The One America Appeal for Hurricane Relief took place on October 21st at Reed Arena. The event required much effort and logistics from across the university. We were proud to support. The One America Appeal raised \$42 million dollars to help people in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico.

## Former First Lady Barbara Bush Laid to Rest



And, as we now know, just six months later, in April of this year, our university community would again serve – this time as First Lady Barbara Bush was laid to rest here in a beautiful area at the Bush Presidential Library. Her funeral took place on the very day of Aggie Muster, which is – for 135 years and counting – a time we honor the lives of Aggies throughout the world who passed away the preceding year. Thank you to our staff, faculty and students who supported the funeral.

## Cadets Honor Former First Lady



Thank you to the more than 700 cadets who lined Barbara Bush Drive as the funeral procession with family and friends made its way to her final resting place. And to the Singing Cadets who sang softly for the private burial among family members – a quiet private moment after a life of public service. This is also what makes Texas A&M, Texas A&M – love, respect, and honor.

As we speak today about our State of the University, we are at an important inflection point. Twenty years ago, in 1998, a group of faculty, staff, students and former students created Vision 2020.

What seemed like a far-off time now is upon us. Consider this – many of the students at this university today were not even born when Vision 2020 was launched! The strategic document set a bold vision for a greater faculty access; greater faculty focus; increased access for students; diversity; and resource parity with the best public universities in the world.

est. 1998

## VISION 2020

ELEVATE FACULTY STRENGTHEN GRADUATE PROGRAMS ENHANCE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE  
BUILD THE LETTERS, ARTS & SCIENCE CORE BUILD PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION  
DIVERSIFY & GLOBALIZE TEXAS A&M INCREASE ACCESS ENRICH THE CAMPUS  
BUILD COMMUNITY BUILD ENLIGHTENED GOVERNANCE  
ATTAIN RESOURCE PARITY WITH BEST PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES  
**MEET OUR COMMITMENT TO TEXAS**

TEXAS A&M STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY 2018

Since then,

- More than 100 National Academy members have joined our ranks, as well as countless other professors;
- Research expenditures are nearly \$1 billion per year; and
- We are on the cusp – just four-tenths of one percent away from our current 24.6 percent of the student population – of becoming a designated Hispanic Serving Institution, which we should achieve in two years.

There is more work to do. We plan to issue a report card at the conclusion of Vision 2020 as we simultaneously set another vision, with specific metrics, this time ten years out to Vision 2030 in a continuing and passionate pursuit of excellence. Dr. Michael Benedik is co-chairing the Vision 2030 process with distinguished former student John Zachry.

Many of the key tenets from Vision 2020 fall into one of three strategic imperatives, which we introduced in 2016.

## Three Strategic Pillars

TRANSFORMATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
FOR ALL STUDENTS

DISCOVERY &  
INNOVATION  
FOR THE  
WORLD

IMPACT ON  
THE STATE THE NATION  
& THE WORLD

TEXAS A&M STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY 2018

They are:

**Transformational Learning** – which is about providing intense, intellectually-transformative learning opportunities for our students ... it is about helping our students develop the capacity to create their own analytical frameworks for discovery in order to problem solve in innovative and creative ways. This includes not only innovative classroom experiences, but undergraduate research, capstone projects, internships, innovation and entrepreneurship programs, activities and competitions, and study abroad. In fact, we have more students studying or working internationally than any other public institution in the world. In order to continue to facilitate these opportunities, we must grow the number of faculty and ensure that our student numbers and our infrastructure align – more on that in a moment.

**Discovery and Innovation** – As we mentioned, we are nearing the \$1 billion mark in research expenditures, which facilitates discovery and innovation across our great university. It is not only the amount of the grants, but also how we use that funding to optimize the discovery process, including offering research opportunities to graduate and undergraduate students alike.

And of course our reason for being is to have impact - **impact on the state, the nation, the world**. Our mission is to graduate leaders who selflessly serve and to support research and discovery that makes the human condition better.



It is unfair to call out only a few examples of progress each year. We would be here until next year if I called all of them out, but let me offer just a few examples:

The Aggies Invent concept extended its global reach significantly this year, thanks to the exuberance of Dr. Rodney Boehm, director of the Engineering Entrepreneurship Program. The “Invent for the Planet” contest involved 400 students, 14 universities across 10 countries and a 48-hour competition. The winner connected a needs statement submitted from Brazil – and the one that won was to create a

light source with stored energy for children to be able to study in the evenings – with a team here and one in Myanmar. The winning Myanmar team and the winning A&M team combined to create this solution. The winning Myanmar team actually ventured to Aggieland in February – the first time any of the group’s members traveled outside of that country. What an incredible opportunity for those students who met face-to-face for the first time with those at our university with whom they teamed to solve a real-world problem. And what an opportunity for our students.

Another example is the partnership between Mays Business School and health and well-being company Humana to conduct a national health care analytics competition open to all accredited U.S. universities. This is about helping graduate students learn and innovate using data analytics to solve real-world business problems in the health care space. We look forward to more opportunities to collaborate with industry leaders as in this case with Humana CEO Bruce Broussard, himself a former student of Texas A&M.

The impact that we are having on others here in our own state was never more evident than with two school projects on which our teams from the College of Education and Human Development focused. These projects helped to derive research principles that set an example truly for the entire country.

First, College of Education professor Kay Wijekumar developed a program to teach students in high-poverty neighborhoods to recognize underlying text, and how information within a written text is organized. Keller Elementary School in Brownsville, Texas, moved to a 100 percent pass rate in all subject areas at the end of the first academic year following the introduction of this program.

Second, my office provided a seed grant to the college, to begin an intensive school support project to turn around failing schools. Dean Joyce Alexander, and her colleagues Dr. Beverly Irby and Dr. Fred Nafukho, have focused this project not on “taking over” schools, but instead enhancing schools by working with leadership teams and instructional coaches. Initial results within one district alone showed enormous promise with all the schools in the district coming off the “improvement required” rating system within two years. This million-dollar seed project was parlayed into a \$12 million dollar project grant for continued work with these schools and others around the state and to further develop the model statewide. We look forward to one day welcoming some of the many children who are actually benefiting from these programs.

There is not enough time to touch on everything! From the depths of the ocean where Texas A&M Galveston researchers discovered a brand new underwater species, to space, where our researchers discovered the earliest known dead galaxy in the universe – Texas A&M is truly a global – indeed one might say galactic – leader in discovery, impact and education.



One item that I wanted to mention today, by the way, is a milestone that we anticipate that we will hit in May of the coming year – May of 2019 – Texas A&M is expected to surpass 500,000 living former students across 165 different countries around the world – 500,000 individuals, – half a million – over half of whom graduated since 1997, by the way. The Aggie Network is global, our future is bright, and their contributions to the world are truly extraordinary.

At last year’s State of the University address, I announced a ten-year, \$100 million dollar President’s Excellence Fund. The purpose of this fund is to help faculty find each other across this expansive university – and I mean that both physically and virtually – to collaborate on research and work together.



Triad, or T3 Grants, were launched as seed grants for faculty with great ideas. A total of 100 projects, funded at \$30,000 each, were awarded to faculty teams. At least half of the funded teams included an assistant professor. A total of \$7 million dollars was awarded in larger “X Grants.” Let’s take a look at a brief video about this process and some of the people involved in it to date.

<https://vimeo.com/293407839/8cd68f5f41>

And this is just the start. I was moderately worried about this video because I already had two professors tell me they are still working on those computers that were shown at the beginning of this video. But this is just the start. This is about Texas A&M faculty unleashing their ingenuity, their brilliance. And I frankly, personally, can’t wait to find out more about the projects themselves and see what results come from this.



We’ll be doing this for a long time and I encourage you to bring your best thoughts to the table as this continuing funding is available. This year presented both challenges and opportunities. In the summer, I ordered internal and external review of our Title IX investigation processes in response to criticism that we had received. Seated at the table of these reviews were experts in trauma-informed investigations, student and former student sexual assault survivors, and members of the local community. The result was a set of actions, some of which were implemented with immediate effect upon the announcement in August, and others, which are currently under study to be implemented. A student sanctioning matrix is in place now, and a similar faculty and staff sanctioning matrix is underway. We want a transparent, clear, supportive, fair process for all. Of course, the best and most productive approach is prevention – taking every step we can to help prevent this from happening in the first place. We are reviewing and enhancing prevention programs and are also bringing in additional resources to prevent this kind of behavior anywhere within the university. We believe that these actions will not only contribute to continual improvement at our university in safety, processes, transparency, fairness and accountability, but will also set a new standard nationally for how Title IX investigations and processes are managed.

From an opportunity standpoint this year – plentiful opportunities. For example, Texas A&M leaders through The Texas A&M System were part of a team that won the management and operation of Los Alamos National Laboratory. I would especially like to call out the great work of Vice Chancellor and Dean Kathy Banks. She led an incredible

team of professionals from across the university and the System to produce an outstanding proposal that articulated well how we are the best choice to contribute to the success of the lab through multidisciplinary research in areas like renewable energy, medicine, nanotechnology and national security. This is the first time any university has ever participated in this, except for the University of California System, and we are very, very pleased.

In other good news, the Austin region was selected out of 150 potential sites for the Army Futures Command, a research and development hub for next generation discovery and innovation. This is great for Texas A&M and for our entire state. Most importantly, contributions to the Army will help safeguard the lives of service members and citizens and civilians around the world.



The Lead by Example campaign to raise \$4 billion dollars by year-end 2020 is in full swing. As of last month, the campaign stood at \$3.3 billion dollars! We are so grateful to donors for helping us to make this a reality and to the Texas A&M Foundation who are working tirelessly so that we may continue to provide an outstanding education to students and research that changes the world. In weeks and months ahead, you will hear more about ways in which faculty and staff can also get involved in Lead by Example. Some of you, including many of my own leadership team members, have already committed personal donations to the campaign. Thank you to everyone who has participated. I particularly want to commend the Texas A&M Foundation for their stewardship of the funds raised, they do an extraordinary job.



For the coming year, we have four strategic initiatives, building on the success of last year: The President's Excellence Fund, which we have already discussed; a Student Success Initiative; Enhancement of Research Support; and Faculty Hiring.



So let me turn first to Student Success. Overall, we know that our students are doing well. But this is about going from good to great. I want us to be laser focused on understanding the needs of our students today; I want to know what more we can do to ensure their success. In order to do that, Provost Fierke has assigned a task force of more than 50 people from across the university to take a deep dive into the needs of these students and to present the first in a series of action plans to the campus community on November 5, with additional recommendations coming forth in the spring. When students enter Texas A&M, it can seem a little overwhelming at times, it can be challenging. First-year retention rates are good but they can be better. We want students who are admitted to attend Texas A&M to stay, and to succeed. Our first-year retention rate is at 92.2 percent; our goal is 95 percent. Graduation rates are also very good, but we can do better. We want our four and six-year

graduation rates also to increase to 65 percent and 85 percent respectively. This means helping students get the support they need. It means ensuring that infrastructure and resources – classrooms and laboratory space, professors, number and timing of classes and sections, student support services, advising and counseling, food options, recreational and study areas – are all aligned with need, and designed to ensure student success. We are – and we must be – deeply committed to the success of our students in every facet of their educational endeavors.

Anyone who has visited campus recently would see many new buildings going up. From the College of Engineering's state-of-the-art Zachry Engineering Education Complex, which provides labs, study areas, classrooms and collaborative spaces with artwork based believe it or not, upon engineering principles, to the 21st century innovative classroom building, a student services building, two satellite recreation centers, a music activities center, and a plant and pathology building, to name a few. These buildings I've named are 100 percent student-focused. And there is one more construction endeavor for our students – the new seven-acre Leach Teaching Gardens opened this year on west campus. This will provide a place for learning as well as a beautiful place for respite for our students, faculty and staff alike. Our focus must be on ensuring our students' success.



Other key initiatives are research support and faculty hiring.

As I mentioned, we are at nearly \$1 billion in research funding. And we absolutely cannot take our eye off of the ball on this. This means making sure that we are supporting faculty research through grants, partnerships and commercialization and anything else we can do to enhance their capacity to build on their research. This year, in addition to the \$10 million from the President's Excellence Fund, the Research Development Fund will include millions more in funding. It is managed by Dr. Mark Barteau, vice president for research. This fund is a substantial investment by the university, TEES, and AgriLife in multidisciplinary, shared

research facilities and equipment. It enhances our cutting-edge capabilities of Texas A&M researchers. In the last three years alone, more than \$25 million has been invested – and today we are committing to renew that for the coming five years.

And – in order to serve our students' needs – we must invest in current faculty, and we must hire more. Texas A&M is a place that fosters research and innovation, teaching and scholarship. We want to continue to recruit and support top-tier faculty, with a goal of adding 30 additional tenure track professors in the next 12 months alone, and 100 new faculty over the next five years. This program is focused on excellence, diversity and interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty. These hires will be new faculty, over and above those that may replace others who have moved out of the university. Support for hiring these faculty will come from a variety of sources, including central administration funds, the Chancellor's Research Initiative, the Governor's University Research Initiative, funds from the respective colleges and, of course, philanthropy. This will help alleviate workloads on existing faculty and expand our capacity to teach and serve our students, and enable even further growth of our research enterprise.



As we head into the legislative session, I have had the opportunity to testify and present our Legislative Aid Request. We appreciate very much the support we get from the state, especially among so many competing needs and interests.

In my testimony, as will be the case throughout the session, I stressed the critical importance of formula funding to all of our core activities and to ensuring that we remain on the extraordinary trajectory we are on.

I also highlighted the importance of the Texas Research University Fund, which has been central to our capacity to significantly increase our extramural research funding. Those two funding requests will be our primary emphasis throughout the session. In addition, we will request maintenance of grants such as the Texas Sea Grant College

Program, the Texas A&M Cyclotron Institute, the Colonias Program, and Energy Resources Program.

One new endeavor, however, is of such importance to the state that it is our sole new programmatic exceptional funding request – Data Science for Energy. Through our strong energy-related programs and the newly created Texas A&M Institute of Data Science, we are uniquely positioned to make an impact on both the research and workforce development aspects of Texas’ current and future energy supply. Researchers must be able to analyze ever-growing, massive amounts of data from oil exploration, production and the environment, as well as alternative sources of energy – all of which hold the key to Texas’ leadership as the energy capital of the 21st Century.



I've talked a lot about initiatives, metrics, infrastructure, but nothing is more important, more central to this university, than our commitment to the success of each other, our core values, and a deep understanding of what this university means to those who attend and all who benefit from the extraordinary work that goes on here.

This year, within the next six weeks in fact, is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Aggie War Hymn. Texas A&M student J.V. "Pinky" Wilson, like so many of his time, left Texas A&M after his sophomore year to fight in World War I. We know from records and his recollections passed down to family members that he wrote the song while literally in the trenches in France. He was homesick. He was undoubtedly scared. He was wet, hungry, rain soaked to the bone. He kept a small oilcloth in his pocket, inside of which he had a pencil and a piece of paper. In order to keep them dry, he kept them in the oilskin. He wrote that song one line at a time in that ditch, in the cold, dreaming of his beloved university. Now we know of course that he happily returned from the war at its conclusion. But that song for him was hope – hope to live and share. I mention this song not only for the anniversary, which is significant itself, but also for what this university means to so many of us, what it meant to Pinky Wilson. How wonderful

that the love he captured on paper is spread at so many of our events today. What the university meant to him and what it would do for him, his family and his descendants. What we did mattered more to Pinky Wilson than I am sure people ever knew. It matters every bit as much to students who walk across this campus today, and to those countless students who will stride across this campus – or maybe ride their hover board across this campus, in the future. What we do matters. This university matters.

And in conclusion, I want to mention that there are also people who love this university and those who are beloved by it. It is the people who have made this university, and continue to do so. I want to take a moment to call out one such Aggie named John J. McDermott. Dr. McDermott passed away on Sunday of this week after an incredible life and career, which included more than 40 years at this university. He was named in 2016 one of the greatest living philosophers. As I mentioned in my note to campus earlier this week, he was an inspiration and a friend. Because of his writings on finding meaning in life, on what it means to be human, people would contact him and thank him. Depression and loneliness is real, and people took heart in his scholarship. They had hope. He was, as one of his distinguished colleagues notes, also the protector of the "academic soul of this university," its most valiant intellectual guardian. Those of us who knew him personally, benefitted from his work, his mentorship, his friendship and his embodiment of our core values.

So as we walk out of here today, let us do so with a firm resolve and the heart to embrace our core values in all that we do, to truly be present in life in service to others, and to always remember that what we do matters. This university matters. Thank you.

