Governor Perdue;
Members of the General Assembly, particularly Senate President Pro Tem Berger and House Speaker Pro Tem Folwell;
Chairman Gage and the current and past members of the Board of Governors;
President Friday, President Spangler, and President Broad;
The diligent and dedicated chancellors and trustees of our 17 campuses;
Our distinguished, talented, and dynamic faculty, staff, and student representatives; and
Honored guests:

I begin by again acknowledging my supportive, caring wife, Susan; my two children, Tommy and Mary Kathryn, and their spouses, Lindsay and Chris—each of whom has made me very proud; as have the many other members of my wonderful family who are here today. I thank each of you for your advice, encouragement, support, and love. Most of all, I thank you for your patience with this “work in progress” you have tolerated for so long.

I would also like to take a moment of personal privilege to acknowledge some of those who helped to make this day and the events surrounding it possible:

This month marks the 40th anniversary of the passage of legislation that brought all of North Carolina’s public universities into the University of North Carolina. The other four individuals who have led the University since that historic consolidation all provided strong, wise, and thoughtful leadership in guiding the institution to where it is today—recognized as one of, if not the—premier public university in America. To be mentioned in the same breath as Presidents Bill Friday, Dick Spangler, Molly Broad, and Erskine Bowles is emotionally and intellectually overwhelming, to say the least. To follow in their crater-sized footprints is daunting, and even a bit scary. On behalf of all the people of North Carolina, I thank each of them for their sage leadership, for their unbending insistence on academic excellence and integrity, and for the lasting difference they have made in the life of our state. I also want to express my appreciation for the support and encouragement each of them has so generously given to me. It is truly an HONOR to follow them as President of this University. Thank you to each of you! Thank you!
Likewise, this University’s reputation for excellence and record of achievement derives largely from the hard work of our dedicated and committed faculty, staff, and chancellors, as well as from the amazing students who fill our classrooms. Together, they are our University—and they are the ones who have made and kept it great. They are the ones who will ensure our future success. It is a true privilege to learn from and serve alongside of them.

Also, I want to acknowledge the personal debt I owe to Davidson College for preparing me—both as a student and later as a college president—to answer the calling to this position and to this University. Davidson and the people associated with it will always have a special place in my heart, and I will be forever grateful for the relationships I have that developed there. Go Cats!

I want to thank Chancellor Harold Martin and Chancellor Linda Brady—and their staffs here at North Carolina A&T and at UNC Greensboro—for hosting today’s ceremony and the events surrounding it. The Inaugural Steering Committee, co-chaired by Shirley Frye and Skip Moore, has done a phenomenal job in coordinating the program. Thanks to each of you. Words can’t describe how special it is for me to take the oath of office here in Greensboro—my hometown, a city I love, and a place that has helped shape my life. It was particularly sweet to visit my old high school, Grimsley, yesterday and meet with students from all over Guilford County. They were amazing. But there is nothing like a Whirlie!

I also wish to thank former Chief Justice Henry Frye for administering the oath of office to me. Justice Frye has been a mentor, friend, boss, and colleague for many years. In fact, he administered the oath to me when I became a judge more than 27 years ago.

Finally, as I look out across the audience, I see many people who have touched and enriched my life. You know who you are—and to each of you, I thank you for your support and your friendship.

It is humbling—and, frankly, intimidating—to stand before you today as the 17th President of the University of North Carolina, having been given the task of leading the University of the People. I deeply appreciate the enormous faith and trust the Board of Governors has placed in me as together we steward one of the world’s premier public institutions of higher education.

At the outset, let me say—as clearly as I know how—that I gladly and enthusiastically accept and embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead, and I pledge with all of my heart, my soul, and my fiber to do my best to serve each of you—the people of North Carolina—and this great University.
From previous experiences and from talking to my counterparts around the country, I can tell you that the question new college and university presidents are asked more frequently than any other is, “What is your vision for the future of the institution?” That was not the case with me. No, instead, the question I have been asked more than any other is, “What on earth were you thinking?”

I confess there have been more than a few days since I showed up for work last January 1 when I’ve asked myself that very same question. What possessed me to leave a job and a place I love during the most wrenching economic downturn since the Great Depression? After all, during my short nine-month tenure at UNC, we’ve already allocated over $400 million in new permanent budget cuts, dealt with the aftermath of a hurricane, experienced an earthquake, for heaven’s sake, and faced more than our share of controversial and contentious issues—and we have done so every time in the public eye. What was I thinking?

Then I look around; I listen to those who know more than I do; and I read the headlines, the stories, and the latest studies, and what do I find? I find that our nation’s system of higher education—particularly public higher education—is in a time of unprecedented change and transition. Our own University is facing unrelenting challenges and uncertainties about how we will fund higher education in the future: What is the appropriate balance of state funding versus tuition, for example? What is the proper role of private giving? Can we continue to count on substantial investments in research from government and private enterprise? Given our changing demographics and our large national debt, will there be adequate financial aid for tomorrow’s students?

Questions are also being asked about our capital facilities: How will we find the funds to address over $2 billion in documented repair and renovation needs across our 17 campuses? Can we reasonably expect to replace costly scientific equipment frequently enough to give our students a chance to learn in state-of-the-art environments?

And what about technology? Will our teaching morph to the Internet and social networks and out of the classroom? Will we still be able to afford the educational value that results from regular personal interaction among students, and between teachers and students?

And what about our human resources? Already, we have lost many of our talented faculty and staff through budget cuts. Will that talent drain continue because we lack the resources needed to
compete for the brightest minds and to secure the quality of teaching and research that they bring?

I could go on and on. No one doubts we have our share of challenges. So, what was I thinking?

While the question is always asked in a light-hearted way, I do have a serious answer that I want to share with you. I accepted the honor, the challenge, and the opportunity to lead the University of the People because I love this State, and I know there is no institution more important to North Carolina and her future than this University. I deeply care about higher education and the difference it makes in enriching our lives, building our communities, and strengthening our civil society. I have witnessed—and experienced—its transforming power first-hand. Virtually my entire professional career has been spent in various forms of public service, and I want to continue to give back to this State and to do all I can to make life better for every North Carolinian—just as others before me made my own life better.

But there is more to my thinking. We are at a defining time in our history and in our own lives. Just within the past decade, we have felt a seismic shift in our way of life, and I fear that neither our nation, nor our state, nor most of US individually have adjusted to the changes we have experienced.

In previous times of adversity, we have believed that things would soon get back to normal and then get even better. Now, however, we feel uncertain about both today and tomorrow. We worry about our own financial security and that of our families. We are concerned that our children and grandchildren won’t have the opportunities and the quality of life many of us have enjoyed. We used to talk about the need to prepare for a changing knowledge-based global economy. Well, the economy has changed. It is no longer becoming global. It is global, and we worry that we are not ready for it. The U.S. economy is not nearly as dominant or independent as it once was. Other nations are catching up, and catching up fast.

We used to see ourselves as largely insulated from the problems of the rest of the world. Then came 9-11, two wars, the Arab spring, a string of natural disasters, uprisings, and tragedies around the world that have directly affected us and our way of life. We are in an economic and social malaise and fear we may never come out of it. We have heard the words “the new normal” so often we sometimes believe that where we are right now is where we will stay. Well, I don’t buy it. It doesn’t have to be that way. This is our time, and what we do with it is up to us.
Among the 50 states, North Carolina is still defined, in part, by its historic, sustained commitment to higher education—having chartered our University within days of becoming a state. The framers of our state constitution affirmed its value to the common good when they declared in Article IX, Section 9 of our constitution that “the General Assembly shall provide that the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense.”

For more than two centuries, the faith and financial support of the people of North Carolina have sustained our great University—the University of the People. And the University has, in turn, helped to sustain them. Across the generations, the teaching, research, and public service of our University’s faculty and staff have enabled North Carolina’s people to build better lives and stronger communities—and to weather periods of transition and adversity. In fact, it is impossible to recount the history of this state and that of her leaders without telling the history of our University.

Our past has been exciting, meaningful, and significant, but it is, nonetheless, our past. As UNC President Edwin Alderman observed at his own inauguration in January 1897, “…our past is secure. Today belongs to the present and the future.” The question then for me, and I believe for you, as well, is this: “What are we going to do in our time?” In what kind of state do we want to live and work in our time? What kind of communities do we want to construct for our children and grandchildren in our time?

If we want North Carolina not only to regain its economic equilibrium and its well-earned confidence, but also to thrive and prosper in the years ahead, then it is our time to preserve, protect, and strengthen our University. If we want our people to be able to compete in the global economy, to work in the jobs of tomorrow, and to enjoy with their children and grandchildren a standard of living that is better, not worse, then it is time for us to break free of today’s turmoil and to equip this University to become the University of Tomorrow’s People, as well as Today’s.

It is our time to redefine ourselves and to decide how to retain the essence of what we do best—teaching, research, and public engagement—but to do so in new and different ways that are relevant in the lives of our people and that add real value to the state and to the nation.
It is our time, not mine alone. The tasks ahead are ones that we must tackle together. Together, we must plan for and embrace the change that has happened to us—and will continue to happen around us—so that the core mission and values of our University are guarded, our reputation for academic excellence is sustained and enhanced, and the many ties that bind us together are secured and strengthened.

So let me address what we, as the University, must preserve, and then turn to how I believe we must evolve and adapt in the years ahead.

First, we must recommit ourselves to truly being the University of the People. In his 1931 inaugural address—delivered in the midst of the Great Depression—UNC President Frank Porter Graham observed that, “The State university cannot, as the University of the People, be an institution of a class, whether based on section, blood, money, creed, or intellectual background.... The State university can never lose the common touch .... The state University is the University of all the people.”

We must never lose our clear focus on the University’s duty to contribute to the common good, to develop leaders for our communities, and to serve those communities in ways that enhance the quality of life for the people who live in them. After all, it is that commitment to the common good, to the public good, that is central to being a great public University.

Two hundred and sixteen years ago, a young man named Hinton James walked the 160 miles from Wilmington to Chapel Hill to become the first student to enroll in the University of North Carolina. Across our 17 campuses, the same passion for learning that inspired his trek still burns brightly, and we must continue to provide our students with knowledge and skills and to foster their visionary curiosity, so that they can succeed in the entangled, interdependent world.

We must enable our students to enter the workforce with the essential skills of thinking creatively, solving problems effectively, writing and speaking clearly, reasoning analytically, and working collaboratively in teams with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

To achieve these goals, we must continue to provide the best teachers and the best instruction, which means we must encourage and reward excellence in the classroom. We must ensure that our faculty have the equipment and technology they need to perform at their best. We must continue to insist on academic excellence and rigor. And, we must promote even more international engagement and experiences for our students.
We must also continue to find more direct ways for the University to help North Carolina communities and our struggling economy. More than a century ago, President Alderman reminded us that, “Our first great duty is to our students….Our next great duty is to the people……” Because of where we are as a state, the University can and must reach out as never before to offer new ideas and partnerships to our rural areas, our urban areas, and everywhere in between. Through our research and scholarship, the transfer of new technologies to the marketplace, and outreach to small businesses, local governments, and our growing military community, we must meet the needs of the state today while building the economy of tomorrow.

For example, advanced composite materials designed and certified right here at North Carolina A&T are being used to make cheaper, lighter, and stronger replacement parts for helicopters. A partner company based in Morganton is today producing those parts, employing over 25 workers. Another company—this one a spin-out from research conducted at NC State—has commercialized a diagnostic test for assessing coronary heart disease risk in patients with normal cholesterol levels. That company, based in Raleigh, now has more than 100 employees. These are but two examples among many. But if we do our job right, there will be even more new ideas that make it to the marketplace and bring new jobs to the people of this state in the years to come.

To be successful in all of these critically important tasks, we must also continue to attract, develop, and retain a premier faculty and staff. The investments we make in these valuable human resources will determine our level of success in the years to come.

Yes, it is our time to preserve what we do best and to make a difference going forward. But what will that difference look like?

We must take real, concerted steps to streamline our operations and identify ways to carry out our three-part mission more efficiently and cost-effectively. We cannot simply continue to do things the ways we’ve always done them. We cannot expect things to return to the way they were. They won’t.

First, we must start with a new and heightened focus on academic success and academic accountability. To ensure that students arrive on our campuses prepared to take on college-level work, we must continue prudently to raise our minimum admissions requirements. We must set stronger, clearer, and more consistent standards for Satisfactory Academic Progress to help keep
students on track for graduation. And in partnership with our public schools and community colleges, we must ensure that students have a number of different seamless pathways to enter or re-enter the University, with those needing remediation obtaining the necessary skills before they enroll at one of our institutions.

We must look for new and innovative ways to continue to incorporate faculty members’ research into their teaching, since a growing number of companies expect students to have graduated from college with research experience. To increase graduation rates, we must more directly link enrollment funding to satisfactory student progress and cost to degree. But we must also ensure that we have the resources needed to offer classes of appropriate size, with sufficient frequency, and in the appropriate sequence so that we do not inadvertently create barriers to students’ progress toward a degree.

While State appropriations must remain the University of the People’s primary source of support for academic programs, the second step we must take is to find new ways to help finance our programs and operations. In part, that will require that we place greater emphasis on private fundraising. It may also require that we alter the methods by which new dollars and budget reductions are allocated.

Given constrained state resources, we must also balance our constitutional mandate to keep tuition and fees as low as practicable with our determination to preserve high academic quality. As President Bowles often said, “Low tuition without high quality is no bargain.” Still, maintaining high quality and raising educational attainment amid rising costs will require a dependable, adequate stream of need-based financial aid, lest we deny many economically disadvantaged—and middle-class—students opportunities the world of the future will make available only to the college-educated. We must ensure that a University of North Carolina education remains accessible and affordable to those ready to compete and succeed, for in this unforgiving global economy, North Carolina cannot afford to close the door to a UNC education for qualified students.

As a University, we are challenged to do more with less, and if we are to be successful—while maintaining our high quality and affordability—the third adaptation we must make is to become more innovative and nimble. That means we must use every dollar to the maximum benefit of our students and those who are critical to student success. To that end, we must move
to a shared services model in targeted areas where it makes sense to consolidate back-office operations.

To lessen our reliance on bricks and mortar and to adapt to changing demographics, we must leverage technology to make more online courses and degree programs readily available. UNC campuses now offer nearly 170 degree programs fully online, and that number must continue to increase, without duplicating efforts. While online programs are often more convenient for adult learners, they also help our residential students get the courses they need to graduate in a timely fashion. In addition, we must promote more innovative collaborations between departments, programs, units, and campuses, as well as multi-campus consortia centered on selected academic fields. Such efforts will help preserve and expand student opportunities while reducing costs.

Fourth, in a world of finite resources, we cannot be everything to everybody. We must therefore refine our academic priorities and identify programs of excellence. We must eliminate low-demand programs and services and recalibrate our processes for developing and funding new programs so that we can meet the demands of the marketplace and the needs of our students.

Fifth, we must recognize our duty to serve all students, not just the traditional 18-year-old recent high school graduate. Today the face of the University is white, black, yellow and brown; it is young and less so; it is rich and poor. It is our soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan—and their families. It is the growing number of community college transfer students looking to complete a four-year degree; it is students who have attended early college high schools or taken online coursework; and it is students—some of whom have lost their jobs—returning to college to gain new and marketable skills. North Carolina’s civic and economic future hinges on our ability to serve and educate all of these students—and to do so in ways that enable their success.

Sixth, as the University of the People, we must do even more to unleash our faculty’s brainpower and creativity in a more strategic, targeted fashion to help solve some of our state’s and our world’s toughest problems. Whether it’s in developing the next new thing in environmental science, energy production, marine science, high-speed computing, natural products, finance, or health care—we must play an even larger role in economic recovery and future growth.
And finally, we must prove once again that North Carolina’s deep-rooted belief in the transforming power of education has not been misplaced. We must demonstrate the enduring value of the People’s University to the common good—as it not only prepares our citizens for jobs and careers, but also prepares them for lives of leadership and service to their communities and to a civil society.

In closing, I would like to borrow a sentiment that President Bill Friday expressed as he was inaugurated some 54 years ago. In his usual eloquent way, President Friday said, “Today is a day of faith and hope. Today, we look at the record to reassure ourselves that we have kept the faith with the dreams of the founders. Today, we look ahead—we hope, we dream, we have great ambitions for a more distinguished Consolidated University respected in the educational world for the excellence of its teaching and research, and loved by its people for its devoted service.”

I am proud of the University of North Carolina and the state that has built and sustained it. Our University is a treasure to be preserved, and it needs and deserves our citizens’ strong support and continued investment—just as they need and deserve the many benefits their University brings to them and their communities. However, if the University of the People is to become even more distinguished, if it is to preserve and enhance its reputation for excellence in teaching and research, and if it is to constantly earn the love and devotion of North Carolina’s people, we must seize our time. We must remake our great University for a greater tomorrow. Our methods will change; our programs will change; but our constant purpose must remain the same.

We cannot know for certain what tomorrow holds for our University or our state. But we can help shape our tomorrow by what we do in our time. It will take sacrifice, planning, and hard work to create the future we need and the future we want. I want each of you to know I am committed to the fight. I promise to work for you and the University of the People with all the energy and effort I can muster. But that will not be enough, for it is not my time—it is ours. We must do our best work, and we must do it together. We must reaffirm our commitment to each other, to our state, and to the University of the People. It is our future. It is our time.

Thank you!