Hello, everyone!

What an honor it is to be with you. It truly warms my heart to look around this room and see so many stalwart, generous supporters.

I look forward to the opportunity to visit personally with each of you. But, for now, I want to express my sincere appreciation for all you are doing to help us fulfill our mission.

Paul and Randy asked me to some reflections about San Jose State based on my first few months on the job, and also offer a sense of my vision and aspirations for our future.

I’m thrilled to do that. Many of you have Spartan “DNA.” You are an important part of our legacy as the West’s first public university. And, of course, you are intrinsic to our future.

So, let’s start at the beginning, with my beginning months as your president!
I’m immensely proud to be San Jose State’s thirtieth president. And prouder still to be the third woman in 160 years to lead the university.

Our country will elect its 45th president tomorrow—and one of the candidates is, obviously, a woman—so this is somewhat topical.

If you’ve paid attention to political pundits, you know that America’s current electoral map reflects demographic changes that have been evolving for decades. As a nation, we are far more ethnically diverse than ever.

Our campus reflects these changes. San Jose State today is one of America’s most diverse public universities. That matters. With your help, we are opening doors of opportunity to students who otherwise might never have the chance to earn a four-year college degree.

And that college degree is the key to transforming the lives of these students and future generations.
Please do not ever forget that your support is essential to our capacity to help these students.

I am a third-generation Californian. My immigrant grandparents settled in Southern California in the early 1900’s. My parents met as students at UCLA, where I later pursued my own undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Coming home to California after spending so many years in Michigan, New York and New Jersey is a homecoming of sorts for me.

But I was also attracted by this university’s remarkable legacy. You know much of this story.

We are the first public university in the West, and the founding campus of the California State University, which is the largest public comprehensive university in the world.

We are perched squarely in the center of America’s tenth largest city. We are the top provider of talent in engineering, education, business and finance, education, health care,
public and social service. We truly do power Silicon Valley.

I spent much of the summer meeting students and their parents, faculty and staff, alumni and loyal supporters like you, and community leaders.

I came away from these conversations more convinced than ever that San Jose State has the power to be—and should be—America’s preeminent urban public university.

We have the power to shape the future.

Let me share a few reasons why this is so.

Our students are remarkable. Many of you, I know, have dedicated your planned gifts to scholarships and other forms of student support.

They deserve your support. Close to half of our newly enrolled students—the Class of 2020—will be the first in their families to earn four-year degrees. They know they’ve been blessed by a
tremendous opportunity, and they’re determined to succeed.

Last Thursday night, a group of students camped outdoors, right next to the Smith/Carlos sculpture, in order to experience for just one night what the thousands of homeless in our county live through every night.

That’s just one example of the conviction and focus that our students bring to their college experience. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to serve them.

Our faculty members are dedicated to the success of our students. And, consistent with San Jose State’s legacy as the state’s first Normal School for teacher preparation, they are educators at heart.

Thanks to additional funding from the state and generosity from donors like you, we were able to add 68 new faculty this fall. We intend to add another 60 or so over the next year.

Growing our faculty ranks is essential to helping more students complete their degrees in less
time. Government—our single largest donor—
expects this of us. Not every student can
complete a degree in four years; life
experiences for some make that impossible.
And we would be abandoning our mission if we
expected every student to do so.

But we want--and need--to decrease the time to
a degree. And we’re attacking this challenge on
multiple fronts, investing in faculty, academic
advisors, better technology, and more.

We’ve also made significant physical
improvements to the campus, to better serve
students, faculty and staff.

Have you been inside our newly expanded and
renovated Compean Student Union? It is a
beautiful, lively space, teeming with activity
every day, from morning to dusk.

Last month, we opened Campus Village 2,
adding more than 800 residential beds. Two of
the old “bricks” dormitories—I hope none of you
are too sentimental about this—have been
removed to make room for the construction of a
new student recreation and aquatics center.
Thanks to a new partnership agreement with CEFCU credit union, we will be able to make long-overdue renovations and improvements to the newly named CEFCU Stadium--Home of the Spartans. And we’ve begun work on a golf practice facility, the first step in a comprehensive renovation to our South campus athletic and recreational facilities.

We are actively planning a new interdisciplinary science center, which when constructed will be the first new academic facility on campus since the Engineering building opened nearly thirty years ago.

I was somewhat shocked to learn that the state of California has pretty well walked away from its responsibility to fund capital improvements to its public universities.

We’re pretty much on our own. The science center project got a jump-start from the CSU, but we’ll need to fund the rest on our own from private and corporate partners. I’m sure Paul would love to know if this interests you.
There’s much more we need to do to meet the needs of students, faculty and staff, but we are pretty well landlocked in our downtown location. We will need to be imaginative and entrepreneurial about finding ways to add space where it benefits our students and the surrounding community.

California needs more than one million additional college graduates just to meet current workforce demands. Paul and I meet regularly with CEO’s of regional companies, and we hear over and over how desperate they are for talent.

I have been meeting regularly with community leaders including elected officials from our city, county, state legislature and the U.S. Congress. I am heartened by how much these leaders are counting on San Jose State to contribute intellectually and concretely to meeting the region’s needs.

Over a decade ago, my predecessors had the vision to partner with the city of San Jose on a joint library. It has been a national model for civic collaboration.
More recently, we agreed to reopen and operate the Hammer Theatre Center for the next three years, bringing back arts and cultural programming and helping revitalize our downtown core.

But I believe we can and should do more, if we are to fulfill our promise as the premier American metropolitan university. Our region faces significant housing and transportation woes. We have great intellectual and creative assets to offer in finding solutions.

And as a very diverse public university with 33,000 students and nearly 6,000 faculty and staff, we are essential to the ongoing national dialogue about racial and gender equity.

We now have nearly a quarter million living alumni, two-thirds of whom live right here in the Bay Area. I am still amazed to see how many Spartans live and work among us.

Yet many aren’t aware of the extent of our influence, or our vast untapped potential.
Being a leading urban public university means persistently and urgently reaching beyond our campus borders, imagining possibilities, and being a willing and engaged community partner.

A community leader recently asked me if I had a five-year plan for the university. Here’s what I told him: before we develop a five-year plan, we need to imagine our twenty-five year plan.

I was serious. Consider this: babies born this year will likely live into the 22nd century. Many of them will be entering college in the year 2034. That’s sooner than we think.

So we need to be thinking and planning now to be the university that can meet their needs. And we need to be the university that meets the needs of a city and region that likely will look quite different than it does today.

Great cities and great universities go together. Mayor Liccardo and other community leaders have big aspirations for our city. We have big aspirations for our university, too. Let’s dream big together!