

OFFICIAL REMARKS  
MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE  
2017 CONVOCATION AND GALA

SJSU PRESIDENT MARY A. PAPAZIAN

(SECRETARY MINETA INTRODUCES PRESIDENT  
PAPAZIAN.)

Good evening!

One of the joys of being a university president is the opportunity it affords me to introduce luminaries, particularly at significant events such as this.

But to be introduced *by* the luminary for whom this institute is named truly is an uncommon honor.

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much. I will have a bit more to say about you in a few moments.

My friends, what a wonderful event! Dr. Karen Philbrick and her team have done an amazing job, haven't they? Let's thank them.

You should know that this is San Jose State's final convocation ceremony of a busy commencement season. In that sense, it serves as a punctuation mark on my first year as your president. I am thrilled to be here, and deeply honored to be your keynote speaker.

And tonight's event, for numerous reasons, is noteworthy.

Twenty-eight students are being honored tonight. All of them came to the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University already making an impact as working transportation professionals all over our state.

This cohort of 28 students also reflects the diversity, determination, and capacity for innovation that distinguish San Jose State *and* the Mineta institute.

San Jose State annually enrolls more than 5,000 graduate students in more than 70 academic programs. This spring alone, we awarded 3,100 graduate degrees. Many of our graduate

students also juggle careers and families. But this cohort of institute students, which formally will receive their degrees in August, truly is unique.

Undeniably, the potential for career advancement is a worthy motivation for pursuing a graduate degree. But *our* students also were driven by a zeal to improve the mobility and quality of life for citizens in their communities, from the Southland to the North coast.

And whether they serve in a local or regional transportation agency, local or state government, or the private sector, this graduating class will conclude their studies later this summer better equipped to lead and serve.

So, to our students, I want you to know that on *this* night, all of us—your academic community; family members, friends and co-workers; elected officials; community leaders and supporters—salute you.

You deserve our congratulations on your accomplishments, appreciation for what it has taken to reach this point in your academic careers—and a rousing round of applause!

As many of you know, the Mineta Institute has a long tradition of meaningful engagement with our region's political and community leaders. We are fortunate to be joined this evening by a large contingent of city, county, state and federal officials. You met them earlier.

I want to reiterate how grateful we are for all they do in support of our mission and our students. This is a challenging time to serve in elective office. We appreciate you more than you can know.

Ladies and gentlemen, will you join me in once more thanking all of our elected leaders? Thank you!

On this occasion, two of these public officials deserve particular recognition.

A few of you know that I am a Los Angeles native. And although I am still reacquainting myself with the California lifestyle after several decades in Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, one thing has never left me: I love to drive. And since returning, I have noticed a few things about our highways.

They actually haven't changed much since I left California for my first academic job in Michigan. That is a diplomatic way of saying that the potholes have multiplied, and expanded.

A lot.

It's common knowledge that California has long depended on its gasoline tax to build and maintain its state highway system and help fund public transit. Some so-called "self-help" counties—including Santa Clara—also have convinced voters to pay slightly higher sales taxes for transportation improvements.

A couple of years ago Senator Jim Beall thought it was time to revisit the gas tax—which hadn't been touched for more than two decades—and he introduced legislation to do just that.

To put it mildly, he met some resistance. That legislation, introduced in 2015, was stymied.

But Senator Beall, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee, is a San Jose State alumnus. And among other valued attributes, Spartans don't easily give up. So, Senator Beall decided to try again—and he made sure his legislation, SB 1, was the first bill to be introduced in the Senate this year.

After months of dogged effort and considerable negotiation, the legislature in April approved SB 1. And on April 28<sup>th</sup>, Governor Brown signed it into law.

We all know that tax increase proposals bring political risk. But a healthy, vibrant economy depends in large measure on our ability efficiently and sustainably to move people and goods.

That cannot happen without sustained investment in our transportation infrastructure. Thanks to this legislation, California annually will generate an estimated \$5.2 billion for transportation.

Senator Beall, you took on one of California's most vexing policy issues, and you delivered. I think it is reasonably safe to say that the transportation professionals and community leaders here tonight appreciate that more than most.

We are grateful for your leadership. Ladies and gentlemen, let's thank Senator Beall—as well as his legislative colleagues—for addressing one of the most critical issues confronting our region and our state.

Now, I would like to shift from a currently-serving public official to someone for whom the very idea of “public service” easily could have been invented.

I could have devoted all of my time this evening, and then some, to talking about the honorable Norman Mineta. And I probably

could contribute a sound bite or two to the PBS news crew that is here collecting footage for a documentary story.

My time tonight is limited. But I think it is important to place into proper context the remarkable nature and impact of Secretary Mineta's six decades of service to his country.

Born in San Jose, Secretary Mineta, his parents and immediate family were sent during World War II to an internment camp in Wyoming. They remained there for several years.

How did he respond to this indignity? After graduating from UC Berkeley, Secretary Mineta joined the United States Army, serving with distinction as an intelligence officer in Asia.

He was elected in 1969 to the San Jose City Council. He went on to serve a four-year term as San Jose's mayor—the first Japanese-American to lead a major U.S. City—and represented the South Bay for twenty years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

As a member of Congress, Mr. Mineta shepherded landmark legislation giving states and local governments greater control over transportation plans and decisions, and enabling the creation of the transportation institute that today bears his name.

In the year 2000, Mr. Mineta joined President Clinton's cabinet as Commerce Secretary, making him the first Asian-American ever appointed to a cabinet post. That *alone* was noteworthy.

And when the Senate in 2001 confirmed his appointment as Transportation Secretary under President George W. Bush, Secretary Mineta became just the fourth cabinet member in our nation's history to serve two administrations from different political parties.

In an era of dwindling bipartisanship, that is every bit as noteworthy—am I right?

As Transportation Secretary, Mr. Mineta played a major role in assuring the safety of all Americans. In the immediate aftermath

of the 9/11 attacks, he ordered all civilian aircraft grounded—the first such order in our nation’s history.

He oversaw the establishment of the Transportation Security Administration, which we all know today as the TSA.

And, weeks after 9/11, Secretary Mineta issued a communiqué to U.S. airlines, forbidding them from engaging in blanket racial profiling or other discriminatory passenger screening practices.

As I earlier noted, context matters.

Since leaving official government service, Secretary Mineta has remained active and engaged. He faithfully attends this institute’s annual convocation, addressing graduates and affirming the importance of their work.

He participates in MTI’s annual Garrett Morgan Sustainable Transportation competition for middle school students. We will honor this year’s winner this evening.

And he has mentored more students than anyone possibly could count.

While I cannot possibly paint the full mosaic of more than a half-century of landmark public service, I think you get the picture.

It is easy to understand why Secretary Mineta is a past recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And it is only appropriate that this institute, a state highway, and the international airport serving this region all bears his name.

Mr. Secretary, we are grateful for and humbled by your extraordinary record of service to your country. Please accept our gratitude and our thanks.

On the occasion of this academic convocation, it also is fitting that we acknowledge a member of the Mineta Institute's academic leadership team who has announced his retirement.

Since 2001, Dr. Peter Haas has served as the Mineta Institute's Education Director, helping prepare graduates for upper-level management and executive positions in the transportation industry.

His association with the institute dates back to 1995—only a few years after it was established. Like many of his faculty colleagues, Dr. Haas has brought rich interdisciplinary expertise—specifically, a mix of public policy, administration and transportation.

Through his many contributions to the institute's academic programs, an active research portfolio and significant collaborations with federal and state transportation officials, Dr. Haas has been an invaluable asset.

He is retiring this August. This evening therefore affords us the opportunity officially to thank him for more than two decades of exceptional service to students and colleagues.

Dr. Haas, while you soon will leave us, your impact and legacy will live on. Congratulations on a well-deserved retirement!

Let me conclude with a few words for our graduates.

In his latest book, *Thank You for Being Late*, columnist and author Thomas Friedman posits that we are in the midst of one of history's greatest inflection points. Technology, globalization, and climate change all are accelerating at an unprecedented pace.

*Everything* is accelerating. An IBM executive told Friedman, “the future is much closer than you think.”

As a modern university president who is responsible for a community of more than 40,000—in effect, running a small city—I see these forces, and others, at play every day.

And as working professionals living through unprecedented changes in aviation, ground and rail transportation policy and practice, I suspect you do as well.

True, you face some of the same challenges that confronted this institute's first students in the 1990's—gridlock; insufficient public investment; safety; threats to the environment.

But today, you confront the implications of autonomous vehicles, high-speed rail, and the ever-present threat terrorism poses to our collective safety and security.

Your time at the Mineta institute, inside and outside the classroom, has prepared you for these challenges. And I am confident that all 28 of you are more than up for the task.

So, on behalf of San Jose State University, I offer my personal congratulations and very best wishes as you wrap up your studies and prepare for what comes next.

Thank you so much.

