First, let me attend to some thanks and introductions:

Thanks to Elson Strahan for hosting us.

Thanks to Mike Worthy for his gracious introduction.

I’d also like to thank Corwin Beverages for providing some of the refreshments.

I’d like to thank the WSU Vancouver Advisory Council and our chair Steve Horenstein for their support and commitment to our campus. I’d particularly like to thank them for introducing me to dozens of people over the last six weeks. (recognize with applause)

And I’d like to introduce my partner of 23 years, Lee Faver, and publically thank him for his support during this transition.

Finally, I’d like to recognize and thank our students who are here today.

It’s interesting that last week at a campus welcome I began by discussing the importance of our partnerships with the communities of Southwest Washington. And at this community-wide event, my inclination is to begin by talking about our students.

We are educating a diverse group of students who will enter a world that is increasingly diverse. We must prepare our students for careers with local responsibilities and global implications. We must prepare them to become active, engaged and responsible citizens.
As I see it, everyone is a partner in the education of our students. We know that our students are more successful academically when they engage with their communities. And we know that our communities are better places when our students are actively involved.

The fact that our faculty, staff and students already embrace this commitment is part of what excited me about the opportunity to become the second chancellor of WSU Vancouver. And it was clear from my very first interview—where community members almost matched the number of people from WSU Vancouver on the search committee—that the communities of Clark County and Southwest Washington want to and expect to be involved in our campus.

Hal Dengerink has left an incredible legacy. (And I am so, so thrilled that Joan Dengerink and members of the Dengerink family could join us today.) Because of Hal’s leadership we have a faculty engaged in cutting-edge research and the highest-quality instruction. We have state-of-the-art facilities that make those experiences possible. But the thing that makes all of this richer and stronger is what I have learned is the greatest part of Hal’s legacy: Community is the foundation on which WSU Vancouver’s mission is built. It’s in our DNA.

There’s a lot of research on how universities most effectively engage with their communities. Research suggests that the best university-community partnerships occur when there is reciprocity, when the university and its community partners are invested in each other’s success and work together to be more successful.

This is the environment I am so excited to be joining.

WSU Vancouver is committed to being responsive to community needs. (If you’ll let me boast for a moment) This year we have welcomed 23 students who will pursue the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree. These students will contribute to the body of
research on nursing and also prepare the next generation of nurses. The Business Growth MAP program in the College of Business brings together business leaders and students to mentor small business owners as their businesses grow. Our engineering program engages in research partnerships with Boeing, Christensen Shipyards, WaferTech and Intel. Our Digital Technology and Culture students and faculty developed a mobile app to lead visitors through Fort Vancouver, and they’ve created a permanent exhibit at OMSI in partnerships with Dick Hannah Dealerships. And because of a long collaboration with our public schools on STEM initiatives, next week iTech Prep will open in a Clark College building on the WSU Vancouver campus. This is a short list of the amazing ways our campus already connects to our community. (And if you want to know more about them, my colleagues in the room are the spirit and energy behind them.)

I hope that over the next few years these opportunities to collaborate will become richer and deeper and spread throughout both WSU Vancouver and the community.

We also have our challenges ahead. Higher education, like so many public sector fields, is changing. Growth, reductions in state funding and the impact of technology on education are three of the areas leading to dramatic changes in higher education.

WSU is a growing University. At the recent Board of Regents meeting, President Floyd said he expects WSU to grow from about 27,000 students to 30,000 students over the next few years. The WSU Vancouver campus will be a part of that growth. How we grow will be of great importance to our campus and our community. We must be intentional as we create our path forward.

More students are moving from other parts of the state to attend WSU Vancouver. As we grow, those numbers will increase. 75 percent of our students already stay in our region, and many of those students who move here to attend WSU Vancouver will live
and work in our community after they have graduated. It’s new for us that students are relocating here to attend WSU, and we need to insure that the needs of these students are taken into consideration. We also know that even more of our students are choosing to attend Clark College and Lower Columbia College prior to attending WSU Vancouver. We will continue to build on the fine education students receive at our community colleges when they transfer to WSU Vancouver. We need to build current programs and offer new programs that will attract new students and serve the workforce needs of our communities.

Advances in technology have allowed us to forge powerful new partnerships with the Pullman campus. But technology is also reinventing higher education. One of our challenges will be to continue the systematic integration of technology into our programs in ways that support student learning and advance our research mission.

To address funding issues WSU is raising more of its revenue through private donations. We need to support students by raising funds for scholarships, and we need to support the work of the faculty through grants and philanthropy. Strong community support has made it possible for hundreds of our students to attend WSU Vancouver, for our faculty to conduct their research, and for us to build state-of-the-art facilities. Many of our donors are in the room this afternoon, and I would like to thank you and recognize you.

I started by talking about our students, and I would like to end there. I have great hope in this generation. They have great ideas and they accomplish things that I can’t even dream about. But their success is dependent on a strong university and a strong community behind them. That’s what we, together, offer to the people of Southwest Washington.

This is such an exciting time to be a part of WSU and to have the honor to lead WSU Vancouver into its next chapter. We have accomplished so much and we still have so much work to do.
Thank you again for being here today and for such a warm welcome to this community.