Good afternoon.

Thank you all for having me here. As always, it is a pleasure to be with you today.

It’s been over 20 months since I became President of the College of Charleston. In these nearly two years, we’ve accomplished a lot together such as:

First, shutting the door on the idea of a merger with MUSC. Our future is now ours to control and shape, and does not rest with the authority of others outside of our institution.

Then, securing research status for our component institution, the University of Charleston, South Carolina.

Next, we received $2 million from the state to buy from the state the DEW Building on Lockwood Blvd. to house administrative offices not needed physically on our core campus, thus opening up in the future new space at a minimum cost on our campus.

We launched our Top 10% Program and the first students into the program will be on our campus this fall.
Academically speaking, we secured additional state monies to expand our footprint in computer science and supply chain logistics and information management.

We also passed and are implementing reforms to our Bachelor of Professional Studies program and working to grow our School of Professional Studies.

And recently, we have been more visible in Columbia, which has allowed us to champion our remarkable institution and call for an increased investment in higher education from our state. And it appears that our message is being heard loud and clear because for the first time in many years, the College has received an increase in state monies to our E&G budget. In the current version of the House budget, there is an appropriation for an additional recurring $2 million to the College.

Let me put that in context for you. If the College were to pull $2 million a year from our endowment in a sustainable way, we would approximately need a $40 million unrestricted cash gift, which would earn roughly $2 million a year in interest.

So you can see why the added investment from the state is terrific news. It will surely be a big help to the College as we work to implement a more sustainable financial model.

Now, much can change by the time the budget is finalized in a couple of months, but we are cautiously optimistic this money will make it through to the final budget.

The progress we have made in the last 20 plus months are steps in the right direction for the College. We are now a stronger university, and we can move forward with confidence with our plans for the future.

We have put many critical pieces in place for our boundless future, and that includes adhering to the current College of Charleston Strategic Plan. The College continues to work from the aforementioned comprehensive document that is the result of a highly inclusive planning process.
I am extremely thankful to the members of our campus community who played a role in helping shape and lift up this Plan, which was approved in 2009 and revised and approved again in 2013.

I have reviewed our Strategic Plan, and I support and embrace it. I see no need to create a new one and be slowed down by perhaps another long planning process. It’s time for action and implementation. And sure some updating will need to happen in the next 24 months with appropriate constituent input, but, overall, our Strategic Plan is directly in line with my vision for the College’s future of being an affordable, accessible, and inclusive institution.

That being said, the Strategic Plan was predicated on the idea that there would be substantial, consistent new monies for the implementation of the Plan. As we all know, our current fiscal reality does not support that previous thinking. And efficiencies, internal reallocations, entrepreneurial initiatives, and fundraising are not enough by themselves.

So I’ve chosen to highlight five priorities that fit into the Plan, which the College will focus on as we approach our 250th anniversary in 2020.

These five priorities are deceptively simple, but, as we all know here, complex in execution.

1. Become a nationally preeminent undergraduate-centered, student-focused liberal arts and sciences university with outstanding professional programs in business and education;
2. Address ongoing enrollment trends and broaden recruitment;
3. Successfully pass our 10-year reaccreditation;
4. Increase diversity on campus; and
5. Embrace sustainability in all forms on campus.

Within these priorities, we will retain our teacher-scholar model that has been the foundation of the College since we first began instruction in the late 1700s.

At the same time, we will offer some advanced degrees in targeted areas for which there is student and market demand in our local, state, and regional communities. We will never be or want to be a full-fledged research university.
In regards to addressing ongoing national enrollment trends and broadening our recruitment strategies, the College will continue to admit and retain the best and brightest students from around South Carolina and the country and the world. We will continue to seek out and add nonresident students in a way that is smart and strategic and does not erode our ability to carry out our public mission of serving the needs of our community and state. In line with that, we also will seek to grow our graduate enrollment in our current programs, and others that may be added if the need arises.

Further, we will recruit more international students to campus and nontraditional students to our North Campus as well as potential satellite campuses East of the Cooper and by the Nexton Development.

These additions to our student demographics will help us adapt to the changing landscape of higher education today and in the future.

Of course, growing our enrollment will also mean expanding our campus outside of our historic core. We will continue to seek out properties that are a smart investment for future growth of the College, whether for classrooms, office spaces, or recreational activities.

To be attractive to all these different student groups we want to recruit, we would, of course, need to be reaccredited.

As we all know, we are currently in the midst of our 10-year SACSCOC reaffirmation process. I know this is a large undertaking and a top priority not only for this administration, but for the entire campus. We can only achieve our reaccreditation by working together. And I greatly appreciate the additional time and attention all of you are putting into making our 10-year reaffirmation successful. It is not lost on me the amount of work that is being done by all of us and the toll it is taking on our entire campus community. So please know you have my most sincere and heartfelt thanks.
And in moments of frustration, and I know you’ve had a few, I ask that you remember that while the College has been accredited by SACSCOC for exactly 100 years, there have been other instances when we were not as prepared for reaffirmation of accreditation as we should be, but we survived. We all know accreditation standards are becoming more and more rigorous in response to pressure from the federal government.

That is why this process is so important and why we must build a culture of assessment at the College moving forward. Accreditation ensures that an institution’s academic program meets acceptable levels of quality in addition to ensuring the value of a College of Charleston degree by other universities and by many public and private employers.

Honestly, much of the work being done is because we are behind the eight ball. But once we have the proper process and measurements in place, it should, and will, be easier moving forward.

Now, let me talk about another priority: diversity. As a diverse national university, we will foster a deeper appreciation for people of all races, ages, genders, religions, sexual affiliations and orientations, and levels of ability. We will increase the number of minority students and faculty and staff on campus. In line with that, we will offer the appropriate support services to ensure we are retaining these diverse groups of people. This can’t, and won’t, be just lip service. We will walk the walk, and talk the talk.

In addition, we will create and award more scholarships to diverse students and increase our diversity training efforts across campus.

It’s no secret that there is still much work to be done regarding diversity and inclusion at the College, but I am proud to say that we are headed in the right direction.

The last priority I want to discuss is sustainability. We must embrace sustainability. We talk about the triple bottom line, the everyday and institutional choices we make that have a social, financial, and environmental impact. By applying these tenets of sustainability, we will be a stronger university.
And you’ve heard me talk about sustainability in the sense of developing a more sustainable financial model. And yes, that means at times, we will have to make hard financial decisions. But these choices will ultimately strengthen our financial position with funds to invest in our faculty and staff and initiatives to make our College stronger. Further, measures will be put in place that allows us to be a more affordable and accessible institution for ALL of our students.

Lastly, as we work through the implementation of our Strategic Plan, we will not decrease the quality of our academics. On the contrary, we will invest in the enhancement of renowned programs at the College and top-notch faculty and staff who are shaping the minds of tomorrow.

It’s all about implementation and execution....of new systems thinking....here at the College. Opportunities abound to change the way we think about the services we deliver, how those same services impact our bottom line, and how those same services enhance the academic achievement of the students we serve.

Focusing on these five priorities supports the goals and strategies outlined in our shared Strategic Plan. We are simply focusing on areas where we can take action now and have a real lasting positive effect on the campus.

As I mentioned earlier, our Strategic Plan is quite broad, and we need to have a more laser-like focus on a few key priorities, which we can target with the current resources we have.

Because our Plan is a living document, we will review it as necessary and make revisions as circumstances and funding – and unforeseen opportunities – may warrant. Along with that, we’ll also develop measurements to confirm we are effectively and efficiently achieving these priorities.

So much of what we do points to our bright and limitless future, including the very nature of our mission of education and service. We seek to prepare our students for the careers of today and tomorrow. There is still more work to be done, but we are headed in the right direction.
Soon, we will hopefully announce new collaborative institutional partnerships that will improve our College by enabling us to enhance teaching, research, and service to our region and the world.

With these potential partnerships, our College will grow larger and more impactful, becoming the world-class institution our region and nation needs us to be, and that we aspire to be.

Although we still have a lot to accomplish in the coming years, as we head toward our 250th anniversary year, our momentum is strong. We have a great strategic plan, our BOUNDLESS campaign is the most successful campaign in our history, and we’ve started or completed construction of signature facilities to benefit our teaching and scholarly work.

What the College is and can be, would not be possible without all of you. Because of our work together, we are stronger today than we were 20 plus months ago. And this time next year, we will be even stronger. In that, I am confident and committed.

I thank you for making the extraordinary, possible.

Thank you.