

ANNUAL PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

PRESIDENT ANA MARI CAUCE
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Remarks as prepared for delivery.

Thank you, Norm. We have a really ambitious agenda this year, and I really look forward to moving ahead. It really is a tremendous honor to be selected as the president of the University of Washington. This place has changed my life, and it is truly humbling to be given this opportunity.

I want to join Norm in thanking the search committee. I want to assure you that they me through the paces and kept me on my toes. But I especially want to thank the Regents. At a time when regents or trustees at other universities seem to be expressing distrust in the academy and in its faculty's ability to run things, our regents have really shown a confidence not just in faculty leadership in general, but in the leadership of this university. This isn't just a vote of confidence in me, it's a vote of confidence in us. Thank you!

My academic — and in many ways life mentor — Edmund Gordon, taught me the importance of what he called “stepping up.” Bill Gates Sr., who is here today and whom I also consider a mentor, talks about “showing up.” And my mother, she always said “put one foot in front of the other” and before you know it, you've arrived. But come to think of it, she never told me where that was.

I never envisioned my path at the UW would lead me here when I first stood on Red Square and saw the mountain for the first time — it was my first glimpse of Mount Rainier 30 years ago come January — I would have never thought that I would be standing here.

But I do take seriously the notion of being fully in the journey, of always working forward. Even when your destination isn't clear to you, you put all those small steps together and you take the next leap. Sometimes you have no idea where the next foothold will be. It might even feel like you're falling — because you are. But if you keep picking yourself up and keep moving, you end up someplace you never thought you were going. And when you get there, it seems just right.

It's the same way with research, discovery, inquiry.

Some of our greatest discoveries come from what seems to be a somewhat fortuitous convergence of forces — happenstance, opportunities that lead to something different, something greater than we ever imagined.

So I'm here today, humbled by a responsibility and privilege that's greater than I ever imagined, on behalf of the university I really love, that I grew up in, a university that's truly changing the world. And it feels just right.

The fact that I've shared this journey with so many of you makes it truly special.

This isn't “my” university. This is YOUR university. This is OUR university.

Last spring, I promised the Regents that we would not skip a beat during the presidential transition, and I hope we don't have one for a very long time. You were the ones who delivered on that promise that I made. You're the ones that make things happen.

Just walk around the university and you can feel the sense of momentum and excitement. We just welcomed to Seattle, Bothell and Tacoma the largest first-year undergraduate class in the history of our university. Also joining us are a terrific group of transfer students from across the state, along with outstanding graduate and professional students. These students are full of energy, of potential, of determination. They are innovators and volunteers. Nerds with a proud N — and geeks with a capital G. If you see yourself in that, you're part of my tribe. Geek is the new chic.

You are artists and athletes, entrepreneurs and engineers. Driven to dance, to discover, and to dare. Students, you are the leaders of the future — your hopes, your dreams, your energy, what you learn here, the work you do here will shape and create the future for all of us. And we're so thrilled that you chose this as your community. We knew you were smart when we accepted you.

I also want to welcome the almost 300 new faculty who joined our university this year from across the nation and across the world. You and your colleagues are the reason that so many promising students want to study here.

And to all of our newcomers, including our dedicated staff who arrive throughout the year, this is a community that you can belong to for the rest of your lives. We're all interconnected — as alumni, faculty, staff, students, supporters, sharing what I like to call that wonderful purple thread.

My most recent graduate student mentee, Rick Cruz, is now an assistant professor at Utah State and he is working on a research study with one of my very first graduate students, Nancy Gonzales, who's now an endowed full professor at Arizona State. He is also on the faculty with one of my former post docs, recently promoted to full professor, Melanie Domenech Rodriguez.

And the person that I worked with most closely as we put the grant that support the project was Rand Conger, a distinguished professor from UC Davis, who received his degree in our sociology department and is a proud alum. Talk about a long purple thread.

Together, this group and their students and colleagues are building on the education and work they did right here. They are reshaping the way we do research, intervention and mental health treatment with at-risk Latinos. That's what a family does. That's what community is. And that research that started here, that research gets pushed out to universities across the world and continues to impact the world in really transformative ways.

I was so pleased last week to join the Institute for Health Metrics Evaluation as they received the Outstanding Global Health organization award. Did you know that we have 167 organizations in our region working on global health issues, and almost all of them have a collaboration with UW faculty and our departments? When we say we're changing the world, we mean it.

We're also pleased to be moving full speed ahead on our medical school expansion in Spokane — this is a tremendous opportunity for the people of Spokane and throughout Eastern Washington, and really, for all of us. So much momentum!

But we still have a long way to go. This legislative session we saw a big investment in access with historic tuition reductions. Next session we'll be seeking a clear investment in excellence, with an emphasis on accelerating progress on improving faculty salaries. Because it's top faculty that make us excellent and that make our promising students come here. We need to continue to focus on both access and excellence. We don't want one at the expense of the other.

Our philanthropic partners contribute so much to our momentum and impact. We have friends across the region. You may have heard the fabulous news coming from our School of Social Work. Steve and Connie Ballmer have committed a little over \$30 million dollars to the School in recent years, and earlier this month we announced a really extraordinary investment in scholarships so that students can pursue a career in social work without incurring the kind of debt that's really out of proportion with salaries in this important field.

Generosity such as this contributes directly to the excellence of our university. We see that kind of donor support in areas of supporting research and teaching in almost every discipline: from Alzheimer's research to our spectacular arts and music schools to our outstanding Human Rights Center. Our friends are very important to us. One of the biggest joys to me has been getting to know the individuals who care so deeply about our university and its ability to change, and to save lives — to create a world of good.

We've also planted a seed on innovation, and it has really sprouted. From expanding enrollments in CSE, to the reshaping of CoMotion, to the historic launch of the Global Innovation Exchange — and in just a few weeks we're having an Innovation Summit in Shanghai. We're staking a worldwide claim to innovation for the UW and for our whole region.

When we were ranked number four in the world by Reuters, behind a few little places like Stanford, Harvard, and MIT, you have to believe that the world, and I do mean the world, is finally taking notice. The best-kept secret in the northwest — it's out.

In my interview with the Regents, I told them if I became the permanent president, I did not envision fundamentally changing the course of our university. We are — you have made this — one of the great public universities in the world. Our status, our reputation,

is well-earned. But our greatest enemy would be complacency. If we stand still, we slide backwards. So the work continues, and in a world where change is all around us, we have to tackle our work with a sense of urgency.

I see the role of public education as one of breaking down boundaries and breaking through barriers. We can and we should appreciate and learn from our differences — that's why the Race and Equity Initiative we began last year is so important.

We want to remove barriers that limit who we can become, as individuals but also as a community. That's part of what being boundless is all about.

I'm going to talk for a bit today about the ways we do that, through our student experience, our focus on innovation, and on our research and scholarship, scaling it in ways that truly transform the world. I'm also going to talk about a couple of additional points that make all of those things possible: our work on behalf of our state and our own university culture.

It bears repeating again – we have fabulous students. Just look at our alumni and where they go. I'm going to give a shout out to Sheila Edwards Lange, whom we launched onto a new path this spring. She's a UW alum and she's now presiding over Seattle Central Community College. I'm really looking forward to working with her as a peer.

The University of Washington — in Bothell, Tacoma, Seattle or Spokane — is really a place where students of modest means can, with your guidance and mentorship, become masters of the universe.

And in a world where too many people close the door behind them when they achieve success, I'm proud that we have the kind of culture that instills in so many of our students a desire to help others follow in their footsteps. Students like Meili Powell, a junior from Seattle. She lost her mother when she was in high school and credits the Dream Project for helping her focus on her work through that loss and helping her find her path. She became a volunteer for the Dream Project, and is now one of its leaders, helping other students find and follow their own paths.

That's a perfect story of how public universities can break down the barriers that hold back far too many of our society's truly most promising young people. Our university really does combine access and excellence, two aspects of education that are too often portrayed as dichotomous choices — but it's a false dichotomy. That's why you're not going to hear me talking about chasing ever-higher GPAs or test scores, or chasing ratings that give you points for “selectivity” — selectivity is how many applicants we deny. We already turn down more than I'd like, and turning down more will never be one of my pride points. That's not who we are. We want to be a place, and we are a place, sought out by do-gooders, change-makers and innovators.

When students get here, they find a place where faculty are leading the way in breaking down the boundary between experiences inside and outside the classroom; in mentoring sessions with a professor or a TA; in a residence hall where she can go downstairs and work in a makerspace; or by interning in a Seattle start-up; or by engaging in study abroad.

We're going to continue to invest in the Husky Experience, to support all that goes on in our classrooms, with a very strong focus on identifying and nurturing transferable skills that will enrich each student's success in their careers but even more importantly, throughout their lives.

The drive to break through barriers — to push the envelope — also applies to our research, scholarship, art, and performance. Our faculty push the boundaries of disciplines and discovery, and create a place where all are encouraged to take risks, to explore, to go wherever their imaginations may lead them.

Just this year, UW researchers linked two human brains over the Internet. They used 3D printing to help surgeons fashion new ears for children when one is missing or underdeveloped. They tracked poached ivory in Africa, they rethought poetry for the digital era, and they mapped the history of American activism.

Professors at UW Bothell discovered a new geometrical pattern of irregular pentagons that could have applications for self-assembly machines. Researchers at UW Tacoma developed an analytics tool that predicts with an over 82 percent accuracy the chance that a patient will be readmitted to a hospital within 30 days.

Our work improving health here and around the world — whether it's using big data to portray the impacts of disease in developing nations or providing charitable care to the underserved right here in King County — our work transcends every boundary imaginable —

cultural, economic, technological, geographical, even political. And it involves every aspect of our university — from the Jackson to Evans schools, to public health, and of course our School of Medicine and our hospitals. Our hospitals — and the links between them — really shone through when they came to the aid of the students after the Aurora Bridge tragedy. It took our Harborview trauma center, our School of Medicine hospital, AND the outpatient care at Northwest hospital working together to ensure that they had the best possible care.

At a research university like ours, we also break down boundaries between research and teaching — they are not mutually exclusive. They're not in opposition to each other, as colleagues at some other universities say. At a university like ours, they are absolutely interdependent. Some of our best teaching happens when students stand shoulder to shoulder with faculty in the lab. Or in our performance halls. That's also true for the boundaries between teaching and service or research and service. We have greatly expanded the number of service learning opportunities we offer, so students can learn by doing. And some of our most important research focuses on assessing the effects of service and policy so they can be improved. Teaching, research, service; it's not always clear where one begins and the other ends. It's truly a virtuous cycle.

All of this takes place in an environment dedicated to innovation, and in the truly inclusive sense, inspired by the region we call home. We talk a lot about the innovations coming from wedding science and technology, mobile medicine, or sensoring your household to control your energy consumption.

We call this the Innovation Imperative and we've taken big steps forward. Creating CoMotion. Securing a down payment on the expansion of computer science and engineering, and bringing UW innovators together, whether in a Hacker House in the U-District or in Shanghai.

But, innovation isn't found just in the STEM disciplines. A couple of years ago we launched a musical theatre program, drawing together our world-class dance, drama and music programs. And that's innovation too. It's in every discipline, from medieval history to global health. Every new idea is an innovation, and we want those innovations to have impact — to make a difference in the world.

We're going to continue to work with our nonprofit, state and corporate partners to build this innovation ecosystem — so that the next generation innovators will come and they'll sustain it — for the future.

Now, I know how important the work on all of our campuses and across the state is. You know it too. But one of the things I've learned during this interim period is that there are some people — even in our state — who don't understand how the work we do here, every day, makes our state and world better.

That the surgery that saved their daughter's life was first introduced — or even conducted — by a UW-trained physician. Many people don't know that we give degrees to nearly as many graduates as all other Washington universities combined.

And these students, whether they came from our state or abroad, will someday teach their children, they'll provide our state and our neighbors with needed social services, be the leaders and workforce in our large businesses like Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks and Amazon, but also the whole range of smaller start-ups that rely on to make this a thriving and creative city.

Many don't fully appreciate that the breadth and depth of our community engagement is greater than that of virtually any other university on the planet — we do millions of dollars in charitable care, we have students deeply engaged in service in all parts of our state. We have the thousands of students in K-12 who come to our campus regularly to learn about natural science, history, culture, attend free music and arts programs or attend science and math camp.

We are the university for Washington. We serve all of Washington. And I'll be asking you to help me make sure that our neighbors, our legislators, see the University of Washington through our eyes, that they see — really see — what we do here. And as we do that, I want to ask all of us to recommit to that great public mission that will always be at the core of who we are.

I used to say I was the Provost of socks and underwear. I may be forced to add on some lipstick, maybe even the occasional skirt, because, hey, I'm president — but you also know that my focus is not so much on style. I like to focus on actually getting things done. So over the summer, Provost Jerry Baldasty — who I thought was going to buy a few more ties — and his team began working on what we are calling Transforming Administration.

Administrative units or what I prefer to call, academic support units — mine included — exist to serve our academic and research units, to support the work of our faculty and our students.

Our redeployment of administrative resources — for example, to support child care — and the significant work on upgrading our payroll systems are just a couple examples of how we're transforming to better serve you. Jerry and the team leading this project have identified several dozen projects to gain efficiencies, to improve our operations, and to redeploy resources to their highest use on behalf of the academic mission. Our work is to facilitate your work. We can, and we will, do better.

I'd like to conclude today's remarks where I started: With us as a community, and that boundless purple thread. If we can commit to working together to nurture that culture — to cross borders and transcend differences and pull together — then we WILL continue to make progress on the big, messy, hairy, complex work we do together in the service of others, in pursuit of our public mission.

My aim isn't to start a bunch of new things and do them in small ways. Instead, let's use our culture, our way of working together, to make real progress on the big things that truly make a difference. It's our culture that makes the complexity of this university not a weakness, but a strength. It's what pushes us to take risks so we can make an impact on the grand challenges facing us all. And that's what it's about. Sometimes there will be points of tension, but rather than pulling at each other, let's try to pull together.

I spent some time during this truly glorious summer on San Juan Island, where the College of the Environment operates a field station, Friday Harbor Labs. At one of the many lectures and events that the labs takes out in to the community, I heard Susan Middleton, an award-winning photographer, whose work was displayed at the local museum. For years, she's spent parts of her summer at the labs, inspired by its scientists. They introduced her to the countless small invertebrate creatures in our oceans. Most are tiny and not much to look at — upon first glance. Yet they are the origins, the bedrock of life on our planet. In Middleton's exhibition, called "Spineless," large, majestic portraits give these tiny beings the dignity and status that they truly deserve.

So armed with new knowledge, my frequent, contemplative, beach walks and tide-pooling uncovered a whole new wonderland. I no longer focused on the warmth of the water and the boats or even the whales that might be on the horizon — instead I looked down at the amazing biodiversity below me, at life forms I'd been oblivious to. This new knowledge I'd gathered broke down the boundary between art and science. And I saw the ocean's beauty in a whole new way. Anyone who visited me that summer had to join in, from our best friend's 80-plus year-old mother, to our 17-month-old grandniece.

I'll never forget the look of delight and wonder on her face as she watched a tiny sand crab swim right between her legs as she crouched down in the shallow water. It was the same look I saw on the faces of our scientists and students when I visited UW's Friday Harbor Labs — where they turn wonder into discovery, and then apply it to real-world problems.

That's who we are.

We nurture wonder. That wonder becomes curiosity, which leads to our discoveries, and that in turn becomes the innovations that change our world. That wonder is literally life-saving — for our bodies and for our souls.

Thank you for your trust and support. But more importantly, thank you for breaking down boundaries by sharing your sense of wonder with our students, our state and our world.