



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Office of the President

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES
COMMENTS BY GEOFFREY S. MEARNES
DECEMBER 11, 2020**

I begin my remarks by expressing my gratitude to Anita Kelsey, who concluded her 30 years of service to our University in October.

In her role as Senior Executive Assistant to the Board of Trustees and University President, Anita earned our sincere appreciation for her exemplary service. Over the course of her professional career, Anita provided administrative support to our Board, to other senior administrators, and to seven university presidents. I am grateful for the guidance and counsel she provided to me.

I am also grateful to our benefactors and our friends. Despite the pandemic and the resulting economic recession, they have continued to give generously to our University.

Earlier today, we announced a \$2.8 million gift from Charles W. Brown that will fund our new Brown Family Amphitheater. As you know, Mr. Brown has been very generous to our University. This new outdoor performance venue and

gathering space is the latest manifestation of his support for our efforts to enrich the arts and cultural opportunities that our campus provides to the community.

Last week, we also announced that our Teachers College had received a \$1.45 million commitment from one of our graduates, Michelle Ryan, and her husband, Jim. Their gift is the single largest donation to the college in its history. Because of their generosity, more of our students from diverse and economically challenging backgrounds will receive scholarships to help cover the cost of their education in Teachers College.

I am also grateful to you—the Board of Trustees—for approving our *2020: Days of Beneficence*. I recommended that you provide our employees with these four additional days of rest and relaxation over the upcoming holiday season as a demonstration of our appreciation for their extraordinary commitment to our University during these difficult times.

Throughout the Fall semester, I heard stories about the many ways in which our talented faculty and our dedicated staff have sustained our vital mission, despite the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like our faculty, our academic coaches and supplemental instruction professionals have had to adapt their tutoring sessions to an online format. Thanks to their creative efforts, they have continued providing much-needed support to students enrolled in some of our most challenging courses. This Fall semester

alone, more than 1,300 students took advantage of our Learning Center's online services. These services have proven so convenient and effective that, even after the pandemic ends, our staff will continue offering them as they resume face-to-face tutoring sessions.

As grateful as I am for the agility of our colleagues, I also appreciate their determination in helping to ensure that we were able to carry out on-campus instruction this Fall. Their dedication to our students has been recognized by many students and their families. I want to share just one special example.

A few weeks ago, on November 12, four of my colleagues received an email from the parent of one of our students, Chad Phillips, whose son, Collin, is a freshman majoring in telecommunications. The subject line of Mr. Phillips' email read: "A 2:30 AM text and a sincere thank you."

In his email, Mr. Phillips wrote: "Good morning. I am a parent of a BSU freshman enrolled in the BSU Sportslink program. I received a text message from him at 2:30 AM today. I immediately thought, 'I hope he's okay,' and then, immediately after, 'I'd better get in the car to come bail him out.' Instead, this is the message I received from him: 'A LONG, COLD DAY. BUT I LOVE IT! THIS IS WHAT I'M MEANT TO DO AND WHY I'M HERE. THANK YOU FOR ALL OF YOUR LOVE AND SUPPORT!'"

Mr. Phillips described how receiving a text like this from his son was everything he could have hoped for when he sent him off to college. In his own words, he said:

“My heart is filled today. I am writing to thank you for everything your entire organization has done to make this a successful semester. These kids missed prom, graduation, and so many experiences. I don't know if you realize this or not, but this class is made up of 9/11 babies. They were born in the year following the horrific 2001 event. They are a small cohort because many people were not willing to bring kids into the world at that time. So, we are an optimistic and determined group of parents, for sure. We are thankful that you went forward with a school year. Because you decided to work hard and dedicate the resources necessary to have in-person experiences, and to have a sports season, my kid is happy and fulfilled right now. Thank you to everyone who made this semester possible for him and for others. Please share my thanks with those responsible for making sure these kids had a freshman year in college in 2020.”

Mr. Phillips' email is a testament to the hard work and the sacrifices that so many of our faculty, our staff, and our leadership team have made this year to fulfill our mission during these unprecedented times.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to our students. Their cooperation in following our health and safety protocols this Fall was crucial in allowing us to provide the on-campus instruction that we value so much.

As we look ahead to a Spring semester in which we will continue to confront the challenges of this pandemic, I want to introduce you to a song that was created by a talented group of our musical theatre students. With guidance from Professor Michael Rafter, these students created this song as the finale for their virtual Chicago showcase. The song is appropriately called the “Keep Going On Song.”

Bill Jenkins graciously allowed me to share it with you today as a preview of their performance next month. I also asked our colleagues in Marketing and Communications to pair the song with images taken of our students this Fall. As we listen to the students’ lyrics, and as we watch this slide show, let us reflect on all that we have to be grateful for this holiday season. And may we look forward to brighter days ahead—as we keep going on.

Thank you.