



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**GEOFFREY S. MEARNES
PRESIDENTIAL INSTALLATION ADDRESS
EMENS AUDITORIUM
SEPTEMBER 8, 2017
3:00 P.M.**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege to serve as the president of Ball State University.

Rick, thank you for your kind words.

And to all of the members of the Board of Trustees, thank you for giving me this special opportunity. As I have said before, I know that you are individually and collectively committed to the mission of our University, and I know very well that you have entrusted me with serving an institution that you cherish. I will honor that trust with my best efforts.

Mayor Tyler, thank you for your remarks today. I look forward to working with you as a partner to create a vibrant community for all of our friends and for all of our neighbors.

Jud, I am grateful for your presence and for your participation. For more than a century, your family has helped to build this city and our University. You and Tom Bracken, and your extended families—you continue to extend that proud civic and philanthropic legacy for another 100 years. All of us are the beneficiaries of your generosity and your vision. Thank you.

And how about the Ball State University Chamber Choir?! These young men and women are representative of the talent that permeates the student body here at Ball State. Please join me in another round of applause for these outstanding students.

This day is a special one for the University and for the community. And it's also a very special day for me, for my family, and for my friends.

I'm honored that some of my friends and some of my former colleagues from Cleveland and from Northern Kentucky have joined me today. Thank you very much.

I want to recognize a few special people.

Neil King. Neil was my father's college classmate, his roommate, and his track teammate. He has been a friend of the Mearns family for nearly 70 years.

Neil was a world class pole vaulter in the 1940's and 1950's, back when they used bamboo poles and then steel poles. And he continued to compete as a master's athlete.

I can remember visiting his home in Skokie, Illinois, when I was a young boy. Neil was the only person I knew who had a pole vaulting runway and pit in his driveway. Back in those days, I made a few attempts at pole vaulting. But I decided to become a distance runner, because I didn't want to kill myself.

Neil, thank you and Diana for joining us. Your presence fills our hearts with so many fond memories.

I had hoped to also introduce you to my father-in-law, Jim Proud. A few weeks ago, we celebrated Jim's 90th birthday at his home in Florida. He hasn't been able to travel these past few years, because he wanted to be home with Joan, his wife, who had been ill. Joan was a kind, loving, and gentle woman.

Now, when Jim heard that we were having a big party in Muncie, he told me and Jennifer that he wouldn't miss it. Unfortunately, because of the hurricane, Jim wasn't able to make the trip from Florida.

Jim, I know that you're watching this program. And I want you to know that I have never met anyone who squeezes more joy out of each day than you. You're a role model. And we miss you.

I am delighted that two of my eight siblings are here today.

My sister Leslie flew in from Montana with her son, Jake, who lives in Los Angeles. It's so good to see you.

And my sister Tracey and her husband, Eddie, drove in yesterday from Cleveland.

Thanks, guys. I love you.

Three of my four daughters, Bridget, Christina, and Clare are here today. Bridget arrived this morning on a red-eye flight from California, and Christina just drove in from Cleveland.

My twins weren't able to be here. Geoffrey is in Sienna, Italy, for the Fall semester. And Molly, who is a sophomore at the University of Michigan, just finished her first week of classes.

Apparently, there's also a home football game tomorrow, and Molly has to be sure that the team is prepared.

And you have heard from Clare.

As you see, she's pretty special. In fact, they're all special. Yet each of my five children is different—different interests, different personalities.

But they share some common traits. Each one is bright, articulate, poised, and kind. No father has been more blessed than I have been. Kids, I'm proud of you. And I love you.

My children have also been blessed. That's because my wife, Jennifer, is their mother. They're fortunate because, as a result of some fluke of nature, they got all of their genes from her.

Ladies and gentlemen, you, here, at Ball State and in Muncie—you are fortunate, too. You are fortunate—very fortunate—because Jennifer Proud Mearns is the newest member of this community.

Jennifer, thank you.

And, finally, to all of you—thank you, again. Thank you for being with us this afternoon. I am honored by your presence.

Three weeks ago, in this auditorium at this podium, I had the opportunity for the first time to speak to the faculty, the staff, and the Board at our Fall Convocation. During my remarks, I shared some of the impressions that I gained during my first three months as president of Ball State. I also talked about our future—a future that presents some challenges. In my estimation, though, our future also presents many more exciting opportunities.

As you know, the university has gone through a protracted transition. But the institution is strong. And it's getting stronger—day by day, month by month, year by year.

We have earned an excellent reputation for academic quality and innovation across a wide range of disciplines and programs. And that reputation for excellence and rigor continues to improve.

Our facilities are also outstanding, and they're getting better, as well. Right across the street, the construction of our new Health Professions Building is underway. This \$62 million project is fully funded by the General Assembly. And last Spring, the state appropriated an additional \$87 million to allow us to design and build a new foundational science building, which will also be constructed on our new East Quad.

Our university's financial condition is very sound. For many years, we have managed our resources prudently and strategically. This practice, as well as increasing state operating

support, enabled our Board in June to approve the smallest undergraduate tuition rate increase in more than 40 years.

Our affordable tuition, our beautiful, modern facilities, and our excellent academic programs continue to attract more and more outstanding students to our University.

This Fall, we enrolled more than 4,000 new freshmen—the second largest freshman class in our history. We were just three students shy—just three students—of enrolling the largest freshman class ever. And compared to the all-time record freshman class in the Fall of 1997, this year’s class of new students is more academically qualified and much more diverse.

In terms of total enrollment, we set an all-time record this Fall. We now have more students at Ball State than in any year in our history.

More importantly, the number of students who graduate each year has been increasing even more dramatically. For example, in 2010, we conferred approximately 4,800 degrees. Last year, our students earned approximately 5,800 degrees. That’s a 20 percent increase in just seven years.

We now have 190,000 graduates—living and working here in Muncie, in other communities in Indiana, and in countries all around the world.

During my remarks at our convocation, I spoke about a few of our recent graduates. They have embarked on successful careers, because of the education that they received here. And they have been inspired by our faculty and our staff to lead meaningful lives—lives defined by service to others.

This progress is remarkable. And there are many people in this auditorium today, and there are many more people all across our campus, who deserve our appreciation for these achievements.

But at the convocation, I reminded the faculty and staff that we are also indebted to the people who founded this institution nearly 100 years ago. And we owe a debt to the women and the men who transformed a small teachers college into the modern, comprehensive research institution that we have inherited.

I want to speak briefly today about that history, because I believe that our past should inform how we plan for our future.

Ball State began as a public, state-assisted teachers college in 1918.

But as many of you know, this new college wasn’t the first attempt to bring higher education to Muncie. In fact, there were four prior efforts to start a college or university in Muncie.

The Eastern Indiana Normal School in 1899.

Palmer University in 1902.

Indiana Normal School and College of Applied Technology in 1905.

And the Muncie Normal Institute in 1912.

All four of these initial attempts failed—very quickly.

But these unsuccessful efforts were not total failures. To the contrary, these unsuccessful efforts demonstrated some very important, positive attributes about our community.

Our predecessors had the audacity to dream bold dreams. And these initial failures did not deter them. These were temporary setbacks that would be overcome.

As we embark on a process to develop our next strategic plan, let's internalize these lessons—let's emulate our founders.

Let's continue to be innovative and creative.

Let's embrace change.

Let's take some risks.

Let's not fear failure.

Let's be persistent and tenacious.

Let's have the courage and the audacity to pursue an ambitious, long-term vision for our University.

And let's examine our history. After all, we are an academic institution. We should study the past, so that we can learn from our experiences.

So, what led to success after our founding in 1918?

There are many factors. Talented, creative faculty. Dedicated staff. Good leadership. Loyal alumni.

But after speaking to our resident historian, Professor Bruce Geelhoed, and after reading his "Interpretive History" of our University, I believe that there is another determinative factor that has contributed to our success: the sustained generosity of the people of Muncie.

Let me share just a few examples.

Between 1918 and 1929, there were many significant improvements on campus. The state funded the construction of three new facilities: a science building; the library; and the Burris Laboratory School.

But the members of the Ball family, who invested their own money to establish this new teachers college, also donated even more money to build a new gymnasium and a dormitory for women students. These private gifts ensured that the new teachers college would survive.

Another period of dramatic growth and expansion occurred in the 1960's and 1970's. One of the most significant and enduring physical manifestations of that era is Emens Auditorium—this beautiful space where we have gathered today.

Because state law prohibits the use of state dollars for non-instructional buildings, the University had to raise private contributions in order to build this auditorium. Because of the generosity of the Muncie community, Ball State received the private donations that we needed in order to reach our goal.

I recently had a chance to review the program for the official dedication.

President Emens, for whom this auditorium is named, said that Ball State as an institution and all individual Ball State employees should “be good citizens because it is good business to be good citizens.” That sounds familiar.

Frank Bernard, who helped lead the fundraising campaign, said, “Only an extraordinary romance between town and gown could have brought forth such a beautiful progeny—an edifice designed to serve well the cultural aspirations not only of our age, but of all generations yet unborn.”

Their words are as relevant today as they were more than 50 years ago. Indeed, this town-gown collaboration—this “extraordinary romance”—continues to this day. A substantial portion of the cost of the recent renovations came from private philanthropy.

The third and final example of the exceptional support from the community for Ball State is our University's first capital campaign in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The campaign was successful. We raised more than \$44 million.

Steve Anderson, who was the chair of that campaign is here with us this afternoon.

Our alumni were generous. But 59 percent of the money that was donated to the campaign came from the community—from corporations, from foundations, and from other friends of the university. That's a remarkable statistic.

And it confirms my principal point: from our inception to the present day, our University has received extraordinary support from our neighbors. As a result of their vision and generosity, we are an outstanding university, and we are poised for an even brighter future.

Given this history, what are we now called upon to do?

To me, the answer to that question is clear.

First, we must recognize that the future of our University will continue to be inextricably intertwined with the future of Muncie. As I've said, our University is strong, and it's getting stronger.

But as you know, Muncie is facing some challenges, primarily because of the adverse effects of external, economic forces. These changes in the economy have substantially reduced the number of manufacturing jobs, which has caused a decline in our local population. And the Muncie public schools have been hit particularly hard.

Now, some of our faculty and staff have children who attend a Muncie public school. But I suspect that many of the children of our faculty and staff do not. My children don't.

So, I've asked myself, and perhaps all of us should ask ourselves, "What would you do if the students in the Muncie public schools were your children? Or if they were your grandchildren? What would you do?"

I believe the answer to this question is also clear: we all must do more for our schools and for our community. Because if Muncie continues to stagnate, that stagnation will impede our ability to secure a bright future for our University. In short, we here at Ball State, we have a self-interest to support our schools and to rejuvenate our community.

I also think that we have a moral obligation to enhance our commitment to Muncie. That obligation derives from a simple principle: because we cannot repay those who have nurtured and sustained our development, we should pay it forward—to our neighbors and to the next generation.

Let me bring this general proposition right here to our campus.

A few hundred yards from here is Beneficence—the statue that is the iconic symbol of Ball State University. The Muncie Chamber of Commerce commissioned the creation of this statue from Daniel Chester French, the man who sculpted the statue of President Lincoln—a statue that is in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In the midst of the Great Depression, the citizens of Muncie donated \$450,000 to construct Beneficence. And they chose to install Beneficence right here, on our campus. What a gift! It's another tangible example of Muncie's extraordinary contributions to our University.

Beneficence embodies our continuing commitment to several enduring values. Excellence. Integrity. Respect.

Beneficence also reminds us of the importance of gratitude.

Gratitude means more than just a verbal expression of appreciation. An expression of appreciation is necessary, but it's not sufficient.

Genuine gratitude requires us to act. To serve others who need us.

Simply put, Beneficence now reminds us of our moral obligation to support our neighbors.

For me, this obligation is also personal.

At the announcement of my appointment in January, I spoke briefly about my parents. I want to share a bit more about them, because it's pertinent to my principal point.

I told you that my father was the first in our family to earn a college degree. I described how that opportunity transformed his life and changed the trajectory of our whole family. He committed his entire professional life to teaching as a law professor.

But his commitment to education extended far beyond the walls of his classrooms and far beyond the boundaries of any university campus.

In 1961, my father was appointed to serve as a consultant to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. For two years, he travelled across the South to prepare a report on the status of school desegregation in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Fifteen years later, in the mid 1970's, my father was appointed by a federal judge to draft the court-ordered plan to desegregate the Cleveland public schools.

My father passionately believed that every child—every child—had a fundamental right to a quality education. Not just his children. Not just the children in the community where we lived. But every child. Every child.

In January, I also talked a bit about my mother. I told you that, after raising nine children, she served 10 years on the City Council of Shaker Heights, Ohio. And then she was elected as the first woman mayor of that city. She served two four-year terms as mayor.

As an elected official, my mother wasn't preoccupied with building shopping centers and office complexes. She understood that these projects were beneficial to local and regional economic development. She supported them.

But my mother was much more interested in building a community center for senior citizens, and playgrounds for children, and playrooms for toddlers. And she built genuine, personal relationships with people. To my mother, the citizens of Shaker Heights weren't voters. They were her friends and her neighbors.

My mother greeted everyone with a kind word and a warm smile. And if she had met you just once, she would remember your name, and she would remember the names of your children. That wasn't a political skill that she developed to secure votes. She remembered your name instinctively because she cared—she cared about you.

In their private lives, my parents taught us the meaning of true love. They showed us, through their actions, that “perfect love makes sacrifice a joy.”

In their professional and public lives, my parents showed us what servant leadership truly means. That the word “servant” always comes first. They demonstrated that the scope of our moral obligation to serve other people was not articulated within the four corners of a job description.

For my parents, their responsibility to serve others sprang from what was in their hearts—from their deep, abiding compassion for all people. Through their actions, they taught us that, each day, we are called to advance the common good.

At the beginning of my remarks, I renewed my commitment to work hard to advance the mission of our University. As an integral part of my commitment to that mission, and to honor the memory of my parents, I will encourage our faculty, staff, and students—I will try to mobilize this small army of talented men and women to partner with our friends and neighbors to secure a bright, vibrant future for Muncie.

Our history has shown us, and my parents have taught me, that we are all better together. We are better together.

Thank you very much.