



Inaugural Address
Chancellor Robert L. Caret
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Last month, I boarded a bus and traveled the state on a four-day, 900-mile listening tour. We met business, community, and governmental leaders as well as alumni and friends along the way.

My goal was to hear firsthand where people want to go as a state, what they need from us to get there and to let them know that the University System of Maryland was there to help and was determined to make a difference. The insight I gained will help direct my actions as chancellor and our actions as a system going forward.

In Southern Maryland, I heard about the importance of expanding USM's presence at the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center to help meet the need for more engineers and engineering programs to support both the naval research presence in that area and the region's impressive growth.

In Prince George's County, I talked with local leaders about the incredible impact of UMCP to the region, the importance of USM's access and affordability efforts, and the need for better alignment between higher education and the K-12 community.

On Maryland's Eastern Shore, it was concern over the cost of higher education, the need to improve the academic pipeline, and the importance of meeting the targeted need for more health professionals that was stressed.

On the Shore and in Western Maryland, I met with farmers and vintners who emphasized the importance of—and need for—a more robust cooperative extension system, which has been part of our Land Grant mission since 1914.

At USM's two higher education centers in Hagerstown and Shady Grove, USM's role as an active and involved partner with the business community—especially high-tech, info-tech, bio-tech, and cybersecurity—and as one of Maryland's most effective economic engines was underscored.

And in Baltimore, we all talked about the ways in which we can work together to provide hope ... and the vision of a better future ... and the means of actually achieving it: improved K-12 outcomes, increased access to post-secondary education, and a focus on increased opportunities for jobs and a better quality of life.

And this is not a small matter or an abstract exercise for me, as someone who grew up in a community – far smaller and many miles away – but a community where an economic collapse occurred on such a scale, in the 50's and 60's, that many adults never worked again -- and young people, the friends with whom I grew up, wondered what the future held for us.

So, unemployment rates that make us cringe and neighborhoods where economic despair hovers like an ominous cloud are not unfamiliar to me. But as a young man growing up in a fading mill town, I instinctively understood that education was the answer. That education was the ticket to a better life. That was true then and it remains true today.

And I was so fortunate to have had mentors -- guardian angels, really -- who guided me along the way and took me on a journey that brought me to the Chemistry Department at Towson State University in 1974. It was not a smooth or easy path but I made it . . . with lots of help.

And this is why I am so passionate about public higher education and the transformational role that the University System of Maryland plays for students all over the state. And in a particular way for the people of Baltimore and so many other communities . . . communities where young people who have the ability, and desire, and perhaps the vision . . . but may just need the mentoring -- the guidance that I received, that probably many of us received, to put it all together and achieve a better career, a better life, and a better future than they would without that support.

Our listening tour allowed us to strip away distractions and zero in on what's important. And it is this clarity of vision that drives what I will pursue as my two chief priorities as Chancellor: Advancing college completion and student success

throughout USM; And enhancing USM as a dynamic economic engine, both through our direct economic impact and through targeted workforce development initiatives.

Clearly affordable access to higher education is important, but **completion** is the key. It is largely a waste of money—and of students' time—if we fail in our completion efforts. For too long we have focused only on access. But access is just the beginning . . . reaching the goal line, completion, is success.

USM takes great pride in the success of our Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E) initiative, which has saved more than \$500 million over the last 10 years. And we should be proud of it. But if we can graduate students one semester sooner, that will save us \$360 million every year! And—of course— that success means we will also graduate more students, more educated citizens.

Now let's talk about that dynamic economic engine, the University System of Maryland. We begin with a strong foundation. We are home to seven incubators and four research parks. We generate almost 80 percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded in Maryland, with between 70 and 80 percent of USM graduates staying in Maryland after graduation. We conduct about \$1.2 billion in Academic R&D each year, which results in more than \$6 billion in economic churn.

Maryland wouldn't be the state it is today without USM. And Maryland will never be the state it **wants** to be without USM. We are a powerhouse when it comes to economic vitality.

In essence, I see these two priorities (student success and a dynamic economic ecosystem) existing at the intersection of USM's over-arching mission: To graduate educated, enlightened citizens who are ready to go to work in all facets of life to make their lives, their communities, this state, and our nation better.

Let me conclude with an observation. During the course of our tour, I saw the morning mist rise off the Chesapeake Bay and sunlight shimmer on the rolling green mountains of Western Maryland. And as the road stretched on, I realized I was back in the state and back at the university system where a freshly minted PhD learned to become a university professor, an administrator, and a leader.

I was back in the state that has always recognized that a high-quality public university system is the critical bridge to the future for our citizens ... and for the state as a whole.

Each visit we made was different, but one thought rode along with me as my unseen traveling companion, and that was my recognition of the singular importance of fighting for the things this System needs so that the road to opportunity will always be open to the sons and daughters of this state.

As the miles began to accumulate, I realized that the road had taken me back to the state that had shaped my life ... to the state that shapes the lives of USM's 168,000 students ... to the state that shapes our future.

I recognized how much I look forward to working with the entire USM family and our friends—students, faculty, staff, alumni, business, non-profits, government, and friends—in the months and years ahead ... and how fortunate I am to have this opportunity.

As we neared the end of our 900-mile journey, I thought of the wonderful people I had met along the way and looked out the window at the majesty of Maryland in autumn ... and realized that I was *Home*.

So, with passion and commitment ... with a full recognition of the scope and importance of the mission ... with a vision for the future and with immense respect for the achievements of the past ... I accept this great honor that you have bestowed upon me. And I look forward to working with you to lead the University System of Maryland and the State of Maryland into a new era and to new successes. Thank you.

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