

Devinder Malhotra, Chancellor
Acceptance Speech upon his Selection as Chancellor
March 2, 2018

Chair Vekich, members of the Board of Trustees,

Needless to say, I'm humbled and grateful to all of you for the confidence you have placed in me, for your continuing support, and for your guidance over the last few months. I look forward to working with all of you and to tackling the challenges you so well laid out in your comments about my selection.

There have been very few moments in my life when I've felt tongue-tied or speechless, and this is definitely one of them. I'm reminded of a line in a Beatles song – I forget which song – but I remember the line: "Life is what happens to you when you are planning for something else." All through my life, I have been an accidental administrator, so in that sense, I thrive in situations which call for change leadership and change management.

Leading Minnesota State colleges and universities the last few months has been an incredible opportunity. As you all know, we open each and every day with hope and opportunity for all Minnesotans, and we are indeed the economic and social engine that will secure our future and provide Minnesota with the talent it needs. Our faculty and staff and our presidents have steadfastly focused on student success and on the stewardship of the communities in which our colleges and universities are located. I'm inspired by the transformative work which goes on in these colleges and universities each and every day.

No doubt we face challenges, and these are enormous challenges. But I also know that as a system, as faculty, staff, and the leadership of Minnesota State, we will not let our system be defined by the constraints and the challenges we face, but rather by our potential and our compact with the citizens of Minnesota.

So here today, I want to renew my commitment to work with you, Chair Vekich, the Board of Trustees, and everybody else who works at Minnesota State to meet your expectations and your goals as we serve our students and, indeed, as we serve the state of Minnesota. It's an awesome responsibility, but also a great opportunity to strategically position our colleges and universities to live into our compact with the citizens of Minnesota. As I have said in the past, how many opportunities does one get in one's lifetime to rethink one's own profession? So I am incredibly excited.

Higher education today is facing some strong headwinds. When we look back at the last 30 to 50 years, our knowledge of the physical phenomenon in the universe has increased dramatically. Our knowledge of life sciences and our genetic makeup has also gone up dramatically. There has been a tremendous amount of mobility across nations, which has altered very significantly and dramatically the demographics of the western hemisphere. There has been an acute political environment in which we are struggling to find our way. And then add to all this mix the impact that technology has on each and every aspect of our existence. The way we think, the way we process our information, the way we communicate has changed very dramatically. Today, simultaneously, as we sit here, there are billions of interactive conversations going on – conversations that are shaping the future in real time as we speak.

And so, all of these changes will require us to rethink our programmatic structures, our curricular designs, our modes of delivery. They will require us to shed old ways and embrace change with all its challenges and risks. We need to be bold and courageous, and we need to rethink our organizational structures, our approach to supporting students, and the way we allocate our resources. New budget realities are affecting investment in public higher education, so we need to reaffirm our value proposition in a very clear, distinct, and persuasive manner. In other words, we need to adapt to this changing environment and we need to do it quickly.

However, as great as our challenges are, so is our capacity and resiliency as a system to meet these challenges. We need to heighten our focus and we need to redouble our efforts with a sense of urgency and immediacy to realign ourselves to the changing demographics and to the needs of new learners. Because today's learners access information differently, process information differently, aggregate information differently, and connect information differently, we need to catch up with them. And we need to also realign ourselves to new budget realities which, as Chair Vekich and Trustee Cowles alluded to, will require rethinking our existing models.

There is no question that there are days when I feel completely overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks and challenges. On those days, I remind myself of a piece of paper I keep in my desk at the office. On that paper is a quote from John Maynard Keynes, the noted economist, who once remarked that the power of vested interests and status quo is vastly exaggerated when compared to the gradual encroachment of ideas.

So here we are. Through our ideas, through our hard work we will indeed usher in a new era in which we can deliver on our innate potential and promise and prepare our students for work and for life and for citizenship so they are not only better themselves through our education but so that they also contribute to the progress of the communities in which they will live and work.

So again, thank you, Chair Vekich; thank you, Trustees. I am looking forward to working with you and the rest of my colleagues at Minnesota State and indeed meeting the challenge that you have given us today.