



# *State of the University*

**President William N. LaForge**

August 19, 2016

# Delta State University

William N. LaForge, President

## *A VISION OF EXCELLENCE*

State of the University Address

Opening Convocation: Academic Year 2016-17

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## A VISION OF EXCELLENCE

To new and veteran faculty and staff alike, welcome to the 2016-17 academic year. Today's General Convocation is one of my favorite events, as it is the one time when all faculty and staff come together in celebration and fellowship for the start of the new year. It's an exciting and busy time, and I appreciate your being here today.

I recently opened a fortune cookie, and the message inside read: "You are interested in public service and would make an outstanding statesman." What a lucky fortune for a guy who has been driven by public service and public policy. That part of my career in Washington, like my current position, was very rewarding for me. However, my preference is being a Statesman—the Delta State type—and a Fighting Okra, as well! Now, in my fourth year as president, I consider it an honor and a privilege to serve you and our students. This morning, I will report on the state of the university, share a few messages with you, and roll out the principles of the university's visioning process.

### **STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY**

This last academic year has been one of progress on many fronts. I am pleased to report that the state of the university is strong and stable, and that we have made solid advances in several key areas of endeavor. As the saying goes, we are trending in the right direction—onward and upward.

Most notably, the university has continued to improve and stabilize our budget situation. We experienced a second consecutive year of enrollment increases, even if by a thin margin. And, I am encouraged that, for the third year in a row, we are showing positive enrollment numbers for this fall. We implemented the first pay raises in four years, however modest. We instituted a visioning process involving the entire campus that will lay the ground work for our future. Our athletic teams delivered high-end Division II winning seasons in almost every sport, while setting records in academic performance. We celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding. Our signature conferences on Race Relations, International Business, and the Blues were repeat successes. And, we initiated

key programs that are boosting academic excellence for our students and faculty. *We are* trending in the right direction and making a difference for our students.

This past year was uniquely an “up” year in many respects, for all the good reasons just noted and many more. It was also a “down” year, as we experienced a terrible human tragedy involving the loss of life on our campus, and we suffered two unexpected mid-year budget cuts by the state totaling more than \$400,000.

But, we are stronger as an institution and as a university family today than we have been in many years, and I thank each of you for that—for continuing your focus on our core missions; for putting students first; for being customer-friendly; for the competence and passion you bring to your jobs; for managing your budgets well; and, for wearing many hats and taking on much more responsibility than your paycheck reflects. That’s the Delta State way. That’s at the heart of why we are laying down the essentials of excellence on this campus, and reaching new heights as we convert our vision and goals into practice and reality.

I am grateful for the commitment and dedication each of you brings to your role at Delta State. One of my top priorities is that you receive the compensation you deserve for the good work you do. I was hoping we could provide another round of raises to the entire campus this new fiscal year, but the cuts in our state funding prohibit us from doing that right now. On the heels of last summer’s raises, my intention is to implement a second installment of pay raises next year. We are asking for another modest tuition increase; we hope that the state legislature cooperates with an increase in our state funding next year; and, we need to watch our spending again this year. So, we have a plan in place that will hopefully lead to another round of pay raises next summer.

In the meantime, because we have put our financial house in order through prudent budgeting and spending, we are able to handle the recent \$435,000 reduction in state support, as well as the three percent cut, equating to approximately an additional \$¾ million less in state funding in our current budget—all without any reductions to programs or personnel on campus. That, in itself, is good news. But the news is even better because, despite these cuts from the State, we are still able to fund some select initiatives.

With savings we are realizing from outsourcing our campus health services, previous program reductions, and other efficiencies, we are continuing to make headway in addressing compensation inadequacies, based on regional *market* comparisons. Effective July 1, for the second year in a row, we raised the pay of those employees earning minimum wage closer to a living wage. And, we also raised salaries for all faculty and staff, who were below the minimum range for their respective position, to at least the minimum market-based level. As a result, 34% of the university's employees—faculty and staff—received *market* increases in their pay this budget cycle.

Our fiscal year 2017 budget supports several initiatives in priority areas such as academics, student success, retention and recruitment, campus safety, and marketing. New positions and programs include: A new academic support specialist in the Student Success Center; creation of a Center for Teaching and Learning to support our academic excellence initiative; an increase in faculty research and grant writing support; retention funds for the Pivot Program in Student Success; increased scholarship dollars for academics and athletics; a new Student Development position in Student Affairs; creation of a deputy chief position and a new officer position for our police force; an additional professional counselor; a new transfer recruiter position and a call center for our recruiting office; and, a social media specialist in Communications and Marketing. We need to support these vital areas of our campus operations, and our budget reflects our policy and program priorities by funding these initiatives.

I again emphasize that all these initiatives are being funded without any personnel or program cuts on campus, without touching our financial reserves, and despite the \$1.2 million in total cuts imposed on us by the State in the last several months.

In this year's facilities and equipment budget—totally separate from our general operational budget—we are providing funding for science building furniture and equipment; furniture replacement in the H.L. Nowell Union; a new power generator for Bailey Hall to back up our technology services; temperature control upgrades in Broom Hall, Gibson-Gunn Aviation Building, and the H.L. Nowell Union; pre-planning and design for a new president's home; security camera equipment for residence halls; a chiller upgrade; and, roofing repairs on a number of buildings. Grander scale projects that will

commence this year include major renovation of the Young-Mauldin Dining Hall and Zeigel Hall, razing of the old president's home, and the building of Statesmen Boulevard connecting Highway 8 to the athletic complex.

Turning to matters involving the Delta State family, I first note the passing of valued colleagues this past year: Barry Campbell, Ruth Ellis, Sue King, Bill Marchant, Bill Moses, Patricia Roberts, Tony Scarborough, Ethan Schmidt, Edward Thompson, and Pete Walker. I ask that you join me in a moment of silence to remember them.

I am pleased to report very successful searches for the positions of Vice President for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer, and of Vice President for Student Affairs. Mr. Jamie Rutledge, formerly our Comptroller, is our new CFO. Mr. Rutledge has already brought a strong sense of budget discipline and program management to our leadership team. Dr. Vernell Bennett takes the reins of Vice President for Student Affairs. She has taken the campus by storm with terrific new ideas and programs for our students, including the exciting Okra Patch program, holistic programming in our residence halls, and a student organization leadership retreat. I welcome Mr. Rutledge and Dr. Bennett to our leadership team. And, I salute Dr. Butch Caston for his outstanding service as Interim Vice President for Student Affairs this past year.

Serving on my Executive Committee, in addition to CFO Rutledge and Student Affairs Vice President Bennett, are Vice President for University Relations and Chief of Staff, Dr. Michelle Roberts, and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Dr. Charles McAdams. Serving with the four vice presidents to round out the President's Cabinet—with representation from across campus—are Athletic Director Ronnie Mayers, Executive Director of Alumni-Foundation Keith Fulcher, Faculty Senate President Chris Jurgenson, Academic Council Representative and Education College Dean Leslie Griffin, Administrative Staff Council Chair Christie Rocconi, and Student Government President Allie Rose Parker. This team is thoughtful, talented, and visionary, and we are fortunate to have the benefit of their leadership and hard work.

In my first State of the University Address in 2013, I announced the addition of both

the Administrative Staff Council Chair and the Student Government President as new members of the President's Cabinet, the latter as a non-voting member. Today I am announcing full voting membership for the Student Government President. I believe our students should not only be represented with a *voice* on the Cabinet, they should also have a *vote*. Every SGA President during my three-plus years has demonstrated remarkable maturity and responsibility in representing the students on the campus' governing entity. They have brought great insight and valuable perspectives to Cabinet discussions, and they have earned the right to the vote. So, in the spirit of authentic shared governance, I welcome our students' enhanced engagement in campus decision-making, and I congratulate SGA President Allie Rose Parker, who will be the first to cast a student vote on the President's Cabinet.

## **MESSAGES**

### **Message #1**

During the vice presidential searches, I was asked what qualities I look for in a leadership team. My short answer was essentially the same standard I hope applies to every one of us in this hall: I want my colleagues to be able to "carry a message to Garcia."

What is that, you might ask? Well, in 1899, a fellow named Elbert Hubbard wrote an essay titled [A Message to Garcia](#) that has become an inspiration and a mantra, in the workplace and in the military, for hard work, getting the job done, finishing a task, and personal initiative. Some of you, no doubt, know this story, which has been widely published and disseminated around the world, and even made into movies.

The story tells the tale of President William McKinley dispatching Army Lt. Andrew Rowan to the mountains of Cuba, just as the Spanish-American War began, to deliver a strategic message to a Cuban Rebel Commander named Garcia. Rowan successfully delivered the message to Garcia, got the job done despite considerable difficulties, finished the task, and became a hero.

In one way or another, we are all messengers like Lt. Rowan, and it is my strongest hope that each of us carries out our duties as well as he did. Too often, things go unfinished

or not finished well. I used to tell my children when they were in school how important it is to sprint across the finish line—to complete a project or task. In my time here, I have discovered that we are blessed with a lot of colleagues who know how to “carry a message to Garcia” and how to finish, and I hope we continue to double-down on that trait in the years ahead.

As examples, our colleagues in Facilities Management—who care for our buildings and grounds, repair our broken parts, and beautify our campus—carry the message of pride in our university surroundings every day. Professors in the classroom impart the message of education in a special way when they give our students extra time and assistance, and that personal touch for which Delta State is widely known. Our athletic department and coaches deliver the message not only through winning games and matches, but by mentoring our students and placing unprecedented emphasis on academic success for our student athletes. The many offices throughout the campus that support our students in so many ways deliver a clear message by providing efficient services in a customer-friendly manner. And, the list could go on. Ladies and gentlemen, our students win and this university excels each time one of us “carries a message to Garcia.”

## **Message #2**

Here’s one message for your consideration that I respectfully request each of you take to our students. As a university, we should be providing our students with a wide array of experiences in and out of the classroom. My own experience as a student at Delta State taught me the value of exposure to and involvement in a wide of array of activities—ranging from athletics and student government to Greek life and the arts—where I learned lessons in leadership, teamwork, accountability, service, community involvement, and interpersonal relationships. While academics is always first in line, extracurricular activities help round out our students, expose them to new experiences and people, and help shape them into versatile individuals who have a special leg up when they enter the workforce and start their professional lives.

College is a time for exploration and discovery for our students, and we need to provide a platform that encourages student engagement. We should be encouraging

students to participate in organizations on campus, regardless of our personal views about the purpose or value of those organizations. Shouldn't it really be up to each student to decide his or her own engagement with other students and organizations? Some may question student affiliations beyond academics, intercollegiate athletics, or your particular field of endeavor—perhaps on the basis of loyalty or a time management rationale. However, I respectfully suggest that we should all be encouraging more—not less—extracurricular engagement by our students. Advise and guide them, yes. But then let them make organizational and time management decisions on their own. Let's don't overly micromanage their time with us. I ask that you actively encourage the students in your charge to be involved with student government, intramurals, religious life, cultural and service organizations and projects, and fraternities and sororities—as *they* choose. It is a responsibility we have to our students, and it's an important part of a college experience.

### **Message #3**

We have just rolled out a new and expanded healthcare service plan for our students, and this plan will also be available for faculty, staff, and the community. In partnership with Bolivar Medical Center, we will have a more modern healthcare delivery system—in the same facility on campus, the Reily Health Center—that will provide better medical services. I thank Bolivar Medical CEO Rob Marshall and his colleagues for engaging with us, and look forward to a productive partnership.

### **Message #4**

This year promises a lot of special programming on campus that will enhance our educational mission and provide top-notch entertainment. A full slate of superb BPAC programming is scheduled, including music, dance, and Broadway shows. Statesmen football opens its season at home against Kentucky Wesleyan on Thursday night, September 1<sup>st</sup>. Our annual International Conference on the Blues is slated for October 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup>, and our signature Race Relations Conference will be held again in the spring. I am pleased to announce two University Colloquia Distinguished Speakers Programs for the Fall—Federal District Judge Gustavo Gelpi of Puerto Rico on September 20<sup>th</sup> on the topic of police reform in the United States, and U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson on November

9<sup>th</sup> for a unique and timely “next day look-back” at the 2016 national election. And, I am pleased that we are finally reopening the Wiley Planetarium this fall.

## **VISIONING**

Beyond the year ahead, we are also thinking about our longer-term future, and that brings me to my final thesis—visioning. A year ago, the Cabinet and I commenced a visioning process that has included input from all facets of the campus. Simply put, visioning is figuring out what we want our future success to look like. Our mission has been to look forward and help determine where and what Delta State should be three, five, ten, and twenty-five years down the road. We have concluded that process, and I’m pleased to share a snapshot of the results with you today.

As a point of departure and context for our visioning, consider where we are today in contrast to where we were just a couple of years ago. Our budget and enrollment pictures are stable and improving, but we can do better. Our cash position has improved greatly, and we are successfully recruiting and retaining students, but we can do more. So, while we are taking care of the basics, to what higher objectives do we aspire? How do we transition from good to great? That’s where visioning and planning can lead us.

Quite different from a vision statement, which we already have and embrace, this visioning exercise has led us through some “big think” discussions for near-term and long-term aspirations. As an outcome of the process, we now have some clarity regarding the priorities and goals that support a vision for our future. Our vision now begs for the next steps on our path to continuing excellence—the strategies necessary to elevate our game and to support our goals; yet, focus on targeted enterprises and programs that make the best use of limited resources. In many cases, during the visioning process, exciting program and project specifics have been developed that will constitute goals and strategies.

So, let’s take a look at the big picture. Going forward, we will be guided by ten building block visioning principles that will help us plan and shape our future.

**First, at the top of the visioning priority list are academic excellence and student success.** As a regional university of distinction, Delta State is committed to delivering and investing substantially in superior academic experiences for our students and professional development and research support for our faculty. This university will create a welcoming environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, and that serves as a path to success for our students. We are off to a great start with the Center for Teaching and Learning and with increased faculty research and grant writing support, as I mentioned earlier. And, I am very pleased that we are moving toward a capstone experience for every student in every degree program, as well as integrated discipline-specific writing assignments in upper division classes.

*Academic Excellence and Student Success. With academic excellence and student success as its top priorities, Delta State will be a nationally and internationally known regional university of distinction, while primarily serving the Delta and the State of Mississippi. The university is committed to delivering and investing substantially in: a) superior academic experiences for students in the arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing; and a learning environment conducive to teaching and learning that provides a personal path to cultural growth and success for a diverse array of students to become productive members of society; and, b) professional development and research support for faculty.*

**Second is a student-centric focus.** Delta State will provide its students with experiences that provide a path to individual and professional success, including opportunities for personal engagement, growth, and accomplishment—in and out of the classroom.

*Student-Centric Focus. Delta State will provide its students with experiences that provide a path to individual and professional success. To complement the student academic experience, the university will provide dynamic extracurricular student-centric programs and services that focus on individual engagement, growth, and accomplishment; an excellent residential college experience; a safe and secure campus*

*environment; leadership opportunities; self-governance; community awareness and service; recreation and entertainment; career counseling and preparation, health care; social and cultural development; and membership opportunities in a wide array of social, service, religious, and cultural student organizations.*

**Third, the university must have a solid business and financial platform.** To support its academic mission and student success, as well as the faculty who drive both, Delta State will be a successful growth-oriented business with a stable financial base, best management practices, and first-class customer service.

*Solid Business and Financial Platform. Delta State will be a successful growth-oriented business. To support its academic mission and student success, and the faculty who drive both, the university will maintain and continue to build a solid and stable financial base, engage in ethical and best management practices, provide first-class customer service, adhere strictly to its fiscal responsibilities, invest in enhanced technology campus-wide, and maintain and improve the campus infrastructure to ensure a physical environment that is conducive for teaching and learning.*

**Fourth, the university will significantly ramp up its efforts in the areas of marketing and student recruitment.** To position Delta State as a center of education and culture, and as a university of choice for a diverse array of students, we will strategically increase our marketing presence and aggressively advance our recruiting efforts. We have a great product and a great message, and we will increase our salesmanship and messaging across the board.

*Marketing and Recruiting. Delta State will undertake efforts to publicize the “hidden educational treasure of the Delta” for all to know. To position Delta State as a center of education and culture, a university of choice for a diverse array of students, and a major contributor to the improvement of the Delta and the State, the university will invest in public communications and student recruitment programs that will strategically increase our market presence and aggressively advance our recruiting efforts.*

**Fifth, we will pursue new revenue and funding streams.** To supplement institutional revenue derived from tuition and the state, Delta State will secure the university's future success with private funding and alternative financial support—from grants, auxiliary enterprises, and private gifts from corporations, foundations, alumni, and friends.

*New Funding Streams.* Delta State will secure the university's future success with private funding and alternative financial support. To propel the university's regional, national, and international prominence, provide funding for a wide array of university programs and priorities, and supplement institutional revenue derived from tuition and the state, Delta State will increase its focus on attracting significant financial support from government grants, auxiliary enterprises, and private contributions from foundations, corporations, alumni, and friends.

**Sixth, by providing programs that encourage a lifelong Delta State experience for our graduates,** the university will promote alumni loyalty, engagement, and pride. Delta State is for a lifetime, not just a few years on campus.

*A Lifelong Delta State Experience.* Delta State will encourage alumni loyalty and pride, and provide a lifetime experience for graduates of the university. To ensure lifelong Delta State engagement opportunities for our alumni, the university will offer comprehensive programs of cultivation and involvement through national, chapter, campus, and individual initiatives.

**Seventh, as a university of athletic champions, Delta State will continue to complement its academic mission with first-class intercollegiate athletic experiences for our students** in the spirit of the NCAA Division II philosophy that blends academics and athletics.

*A University of Athletic Champions.* Delta State will complement its academic mission with first-class intercollegiate athletic experiences. The university will continue to support and develop intercollegiate athletic programs that provide student-athletes with the full complement

*of personal and academic growth, athletic skills development, superb coaching and mentoring, scholarship assistance, first-rate facilities, a high level of competition, consistent post-season play, and community service, all in the spirit of the NCAA Division II ideal and philosophy that blend academics and athletics.*

**Eighth, Delta State will embrace distinguishing factors that describe what we are—a welcoming and hospitable regional university that provides a rich cultural experience, a supportive learning environment, and superb classroom instruction with an emphasis on the individual student.** We will offer excellent general education, as well as signature programs that distinguish Delta State, such as those listed below, and that support one of the most affordable and accessible quality higher education opportunities in the country.

*The Distinguishing Factors. Delta State will distinguish itself as a welcoming regional university that provides a rich cultural experience, a supportive learning environment, and superb classroom instruction with an emphasis on the individual student, and that embraces excellent general education, centers of excellence, and signature programs, including music, arts, and culture; commercial aviation; teacher education; geospatial information technology; business enterprise; accounting and supply chain management; outdoor recreation; nursing, dietetics, and health sciences; pre-professional and graduate school preparation; select graduate and on-line programs; winning intercollegiate athletics; and, service to the community. The university will continue to provide one of the most affordable and accessible quality higher education opportunities in the country.*

**Ninth, as a description of who we are, Delta State will promote and embrace traditional core values** such as family, individual worth and well-being, good citizenship, and a healthy life style; intellectual and academic freedom; the pursuit of truth and knowledge; cultural enrichment; civility, inclusive excellence, and respect for all; and, integrity and ethical conduct, among many other desirable values, as listed below—all to

support the well-rounded development of our students, and to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning.

*Core Values.* To support the well-rounded development of our students, and to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning, Delta State will promote and embrace traditional core values of family, individual worth, well-being, good citizenship, and a healthy life style; intellectual and academic freedom; the pursuit of truth and knowledge; cultural enrichment; a caring faculty and staff; significant student-faculty academic interaction; personal and professional development, leadership, resourcefulness, and competence; loyalty, commitment, and a strong work ethic; hospitality and family-orientation; civility, inclusive excellence, and respect for all; integrity and ethical conduct; accountability and transparency; diversity, inclusion, and fairness; and, customer and community service.

**Tenth, as the educational and cultural center of the Delta, the university will strongly embrace community engagement and programs** that address educational deficiencies and poverty, support economic growth, and promote civility and racial harmony.

*Community Engagement.* Delta State University will continue to serve as the educational and cultural center of the Delta, engage with Cleveland and surrounding communities in collaboration and partnerships, and provide leadership and programming that address educational deficiencies and poverty, support economic growth, and promote civility and racial harmony in the Delta Region.

Colleagues, we will pursue this collective vision—these future stages of Delta State success—by setting goals and objectives. We will meet our goals and objectives by employing strategies. Those strategies to reach our goals will be our priorities. And, our priorities will enjoy the benefit of support from our budget and our campus leadership. The vision is the end. The rest are means to that end.

This visioning process has given us a good jump-start on our future. But to elevate our game and support our vision for the future, we will certainly need significantly more revenue than provided by the State and generated by tuition. It is very clear that we will

need substantial private resources to pursue our dreams. The plans for a major fundraising campaign are already underway through the good work of the Delta State Foundation. Bringing in those new resources will be essential to our ability to do the things incorporated in our vision. We hope to roll out the plans for a major fundraising campaign within the next year or so, while continuing our efforts to increase annual fundraising to new heights in support of academics and athletics. In fact, we just completed another record year of annual fundraising in which we exceeded more than a half million dollars in unrestricted gifts. Thank you to those of you who share your treasure with the university. When the time comes for our major campaign, I will ask for 100% participation by the entire Delta State family. That campaign will be one of the most important things we do over the next decade as we approach our centennial year in 2025, and I will be fully immersed in ensuring its success. The visioning principles I have outlined, and especially their accompanying goals and strategies, will provide the substance for our fundraising campaign—essentially the programs and projects for which we will seek private funding.

So, how will our visioning principles translate into initiatives and change? Many ideas are already floating around, and we must now be about the task of deciding our priorities and laying out a plan. This will be an exciting time as we identify and define goals, strategies, and priorities. Using recommendations from all quarters of the campus, the Cabinet will commence this process this academic year. With our vision as our outline—as our blueprint—we will develop specific strategic steps to pursue the goals we develop.

Some examples of possible game-changing goals for the future might include:

- A boutique hotel on campus;
- Repurposing Hugh White Hall as a welcome center and home for the university's centers of excellence;
- The initiation of extensive and robust new partnerships and internship opportunities by our College of Education and Human Sciences to develop better P-12 teachers in the Delta;

- A renewed focus by the College of Business to equip the next generation of business and aviation professionals with experiential learning and applied research that match the economic needs of the Delta;
- A refinement of Arts and Sciences programs to support professional and graduate school preparation, and to prepare the next generation of engaged citizens with lessons in critical thinking, analysis, communication, appreciation of artistic processes, and an understanding of society and cultures;
- An expansion of our outstanding nursing program to increase the number of nurses supporting improved healthcare efforts in the Delta;
- The addition of intercollegiate athletics programs, perhaps in volleyball and women's golf; and,
- Community and economic development initiatives such as the creation of a training academy for local government officials in the Delta.

As we implement plans to reach these possible objectives, and many others to be determined, consider the potential outcomes years from now. Where can our visioning lead us? What can we reasonably and realistically accomplish if we put our minds, resources, and hard work to the task of reaching new heights? What will it mean for our students and for this university as we build a tradition of excellence?

Travel forward in time with me for a moment to visit some hypothetical media headlines 15 or 20 years hence. Just imagine the impact!

- This year's GRAMMY® Award for Artist of the Year goes to a recipient who recorded at Delta State's DMI studios.
- Delta State announces record enrollment of 400 international students.
- For the fifth year in a row, Delta State students have the highest rate of acceptance to the University of Mississippi Medical Center.
- Delta State's Commercial Aviation program adds jets to its fleet and curriculum.

- UPS announces the Abney Endowed Chair in Supply Chain Management in the College of Business at Delta State.
- Delta State produces its tenth Truman Scholar student and third Fulbright Scholar faculty member.
- Lady Statesmen and Statesmen athletic teams claim a combination of three national championships in the same year.
- Delta State sends a record 300 students and 25 faculty members abroad to participate in international exchange programs.
- Delta State's Honors College celebrates 10 years in Ward Hall.
- Delta State's enrollment tops 4,500 students.

Even more far-reaching:

- The poverty level in the Mississippi Delta has been cut in half thanks to Delta State's innovative programs.
- For the second year in a row, *U.S. News & World Report* ranks Delta State #1 in the nation for high quality, low-cost collegiate education.

Can you imagine? Can you dream with me? To those who may think these possible outcomes are too ambitious and unrealistic, I say it *is* all possible. With a clear vision, realistic goals, adequate resources, and a lot of hard work, we can make these things happen. You can be a part of this exciting venture. And, this venture starts NOW!

So, with our vision to guide us, let us continue to think and act boldly and wisely, while marshalling all the resources we can to move Delta State toward excellence. We are off to a great start. Terrific opportunities lie ahead for us. It is now time to create the path that will guide us to our vision. To chart our future using our visioning process, our leadership team is at full mast and operating on all cylinders. We are "all in" and ready to roll, and I hope you are too. Here's to a grand year for us all as we pursue our vision of excellence.