



State of the University

President William N. LaForge

August 16, 2018

Delta State University

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IT'S ABOUT TIME

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Opening Convocation: Academic Year 2018-19

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Good afternoon. It's about time. It's about time to kick off another annual cycle, and to welcome you to the 2018-2019 academic year!

It is about time — in so many respects and on so many levels. You might say that everything revolves around time. What a difference time can make! So much of what we do at Delta State is about time — the time we devote to our students, to teaching, to research, to service, and to everyday responsibilities.

We are creatures of time — we live and think in “yesterdays,” “todays,” and “tomorrows.” We use time to measure, quantify, and sequence. We wonder about time. Is there a beginning and an end of time? The Steve Miller Band sings that, “Time keeps on slippin' ...into the future.”

We know that time is an important concept in physics. We have units of time. Time is what a clock reads. The idea of time has deep implications in the sciences, religion, and philosophy. “A time to every purpose under the heaven.” At its core, time is fundamental to the universe — Newton's realist view of time. Or, on the other hand, is time fundamental as an intellectual structure in which we merely compare events?

There are so many types and categories and uses and applications of the term time. We plan our days according to available time. We try to practice time management. We experience time pressure. Things are time-sensitive. We have time or make time for some things. We have no time for others. We find time and lose time. Sometimes we get somewhere “just in time.” Other times, we just need “down time” or a “time out.” We take our time, and we give our time. Time is a qualifier, as in “I need more time,” or as in “that's good timing,” or in crooner fashion, “Give Me Just a Little More Time.”

In fact, just for fun, think of all the song titles that include the word time! Here are just a few: Pink Floyd's Time; Time is Tight; Time in a Bottle; For the Good Times; No Time; The Last Time; I've Had the Time of My Life; Turn Back the Hands of Time; Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?. The list is almost endless.

We use time, waste time, wish for more time, and try hard to save time. We exist in real time. And, we try to live in virtual time. We look back at a time that was memorable, and look forward to a time when things will be better. Runners and swimmers look to improve their times. Athletic teams on the losing side run out of time. Literature and history are filled with the best and worst of times. Time can be your worst enemy, or, as the Rolling Stones sang, time can be on your side. We even have a Time magazine. And, a national “past-time.”

We measure events using time and timelines, sometimes even with timers. Time passes. Time marches on. Time heals. Time can make a difference. Time has an economic value. Time is money. Time is precious. Time is all we have. Time is of the essence. Only time will tell. The time is right...or maybe it's wrong. Some say time or timing is everything.

We advise our students to manage their time better. On campus, time equates to class time, playing music in time, time in the air, time on the air, time on line, time to submit grades, time for a break! Time ensures that we are always in a state of flux...of motion...of trying to make better use of time itself and what it brings us. How often we exclaim, “where does time go?”, or *tempus fugit* — “time flies.” And, perhaps you are thinking, “Time-wise, how much more time is he going to drone on about time?” The list could go on to the end of time, seemingly like this address. So, it's about time to move on — just in the nick of time.

It's time now to remember our fallen colleagues, students, and friends from the past year: Mr. Jerry Ainsworth, Mr. Ivan Baugh, Ms. Roseann Buck, Dr. Robert Chancellor, Dr. Cheryl Cummins, Mr. Terry Everett, Dr. William Frank, Sr., Mr. Tony Garcia, Ms. Helen Gaston, Miss Rhiannon Hammons, Dr. Lucy Janoush, Ms. Devonda Johnson, Mr. Ed Kossman, Ms. Leigh Anne Marquis, Dr. Roy Moore, Mr. Ken Owen, Mr. A.C. Prewitt, Mr. Clay Rayner, Dr. William Story, Mr. Fred Thomas; Ms. Patricia Webster, and Mrs. Mary Nell Williams.

Please join me in a moment of silence as we remember our fallen colleagues, students, and friends from the past year.

Next, I will introduce the members of the president's cabinet, outstanding colleagues who provide leadership for the university, and whose time it is to stand and be recognized as I call your name.

First, I am pleased to introduce to you the newest member of our executive team — a new position, in fact — Vice President for University Advancement and External Relations, Mr. Rick Munroe. Rick's portfolio includes development and fundraising, foundation and alumni affairs, communications and marketing, mailing and printing services, and government relations. Welcome, Rick!

The balance of the cabinet includes: Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Dr. Charles McAdams; Vice President for Executive Affairs and Chief of Staff Dr. Michelle Roberts; Vice President for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer Mr. Jamie Rutledge; Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Vernell Bennett; Athletic Director Mr. Ronnie Mayers; representing the Academic Council, Dr. Billy Moore; Faculty Senate President Dr. Severine Groh; Administrative Staff Council Chair Dr. Christy Riddle; and, Student Government Association President Mr. Charlie King.

The five vice presidents also comprise my Executive Committee. All of these colleagues assist me in making critical decisions that affect every aspect of the university. Please join me in thanking them for their service and their time.

Some of you who are new to campus or are just returning from a summer away may have missed the news that Athletic Director Ronnie Mayers has announced his retirement, effective December 31. Ronnie's retirement will certainly mark the end of an era. I have appointed a search committee to identify a potential successor, so the search is underway. Dr. Rose Strahan is chairing the committee. We will have many opportunities to recognize and thank Ronnie for his 42 years of service to Delta State, but, for now, please join me in saluting our outstanding colleague.

Speaking of time and its passage, 50 years ago this fall I was a freshman at Delta State. One half century ago! That's a long time. It began for me an outstanding four-year undergraduate experience for which I will always be grateful. My college experience here was a platform and springboard for my life and career. It opened the doors for me to professional and graduate school, career and volunteer service opportunities, and the chance to grow as a professional and a leader. It was a special time in my life. And, I want that outcome for every one of our students today. It is up to us to provide it. And, we really

have so little time in which to do it.

For a different, and perhaps unique, perspective on what we should expect of our students, and how we should be guiding them during their time with us, I am in favor of our helping them become “C” students. In fact, I wish for every student at least Five “Cs”. Now, before you target me for academic heresy, I don’t mean “C” in the usual scheme of grading, but “C” meaning competent, confident, committed, concerned, and connected.

1. Competent in their chosen field.
2. Confident in themselves and their abilities.
3. Committed to the notion of service and the core values we hold dear.
4. Concerned enough about the world and people around them to engage in order to make the places we call home better.
5. Connected, in person and through contemporary technology, with faith, family, friends, and the world today, and, tomorrow, in ways we cannot even predict today.

We should, of course, be about the mission of educating our students in the truest academic and professional sense, but we are also charged with the responsibility of helping to prepare them for life. Please make time to serve that purpose, as well.

Consider the backdrop of what we are seeing occur with some government and business leaders today, who have no respect for, or understanding of, truth, ethics, and integrity. We should be educating our students about truth-telling, respect for all, transparency, tolerance, the rejection of prejudice and hate, and a return to values-driven leadership and common civility. That’s what our Visioning Principle #9 is all about — core values — and I encourage you to dust it off and incorporate it in your teaching and your influence. Our silence represents complicity with respect to the bad actors and actions that are giving bad example to our youth.

Our time here at Delta State has been filled with excitement and fascinating enterprises since we met a year ago for convocation, and it is my hope that this excitement will continue as we plan and execute programs that will bring even better times this

coming year.

We just completed a very good year, with nearly 400 graduates at both commencements. We hit another enrollment high last fall of 3,789 students — a 5.6% increase over the previous year, and our fourth consecutive year of enrollment increases.

Our student retention numbers also demonstrate the winning ways of our faculty's teaching and our student success programs — a 6% increase in retention of freshmen last year, and 14.8% over the last two years.

In athletics, football, women's and men's basketball, swim/dive, golf, and baseball all participated in post-season play, giving our student-athletes incredible experiences and times they will never forget. There is tremendous value in the student-athlete experience, especially in the NCAA Division II paradigm of "Life in the Balance" — academics and athletics — and our students are demonstrating success in the classroom as well as in their sports.

In the budget arena, we received a very small increase in revenue from the state for our general operating budget — essentially flat funding — and we are increasing tuition this year 5%, for a total of \$7,076 annually. However, we still offer the third lowest tuition rate of all the public universities in the state, which is certainly a higher education bargain by any measurement.

Although we received no renovation dollars from the state for the second year in a row, our Facilities Management colleagues are making this campus look beautiful with fewer resources than we had just two years ago. I salute them for their outstanding work, and ask you to help me thank them.

Through creative savings strategies and the tuition increase, we were able to provide a modest, yet much-needed and well-deserved, pay raise for faculty and staff for the first time in three years. We also elevated all minimum wage earners to a living wage of \$22,000. One area of creative savings was our summer program of 4-day workweeks and targeted building closures, which netted \$268,000 in savings in 2017, and is expected to yield the same or more savings this summer.

We recently put the finishing touches on Zeigel Hall renovations, and the Music

Department is almost back in the comfort of their campus home — pretty much in time for the fall term. Young-Mauldin Dining Hall is near completion, and Statesmen Boulevard, which will provide a beautiful tree-lined and landscaped passageway to our athletic complex, is scheduled to open soon. Those projects will all be finished...on time.

A major lighting project has brightened the campus to provide enhanced safety, easier nighttime passage, and an eye-catching aesthetic appeal that draws people to our campus. And, it is also an energy efficient cost-saver. Many of those lights are on... timers.

This past Spring, Delta State announced one its largest foundation grants ever — \$3 million from the Gertrude Ford Foundation in support of our Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center provides faculty with resources, workshops, and programs focused on topics of improved teaching and academic leadership, and it is a great boost to the academy.

Another seven-figure gift, from Ms. Anita Bologna, will continue supporting and growing this performing arts center. We announced her gift pledge at the Gladys Knight concert this past spring. What a time that was! Anita is here today, and I ask her to stand so we can thank her once again.

A long-time funding partner, the Hearin Foundation, recently committed to support \$200,000 in scholarships, plus \$80,000 for a pilot project using our planetarium and science labs to showcase the importance of STEM studies and careers to Delta schoolchildren.

Our local partner and supporter, the Bolivar Medical Foundation, is generously supporting a new simulation lab for the School of Nursing to the tune of \$200,000.

Our partner, the Casey Family Foundation, is not only supporting our race relations conference and Local Government Leadership Institute, but is also engaging with Delta State to develop a cutting-edge educational program in public schools that will benefit the Delta.

The Delta Music Institute's "Healing with a Groove 2.0" project was recently awarded a \$500,000 grant by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to continue the work of racial healing through commercial songwriting and audio production.

And, the university, and many of our faculty colleagues, have been successful in landing grant funding and foundation support for a wide array of research and projects, and many other faculty colleagues are publishing papers and books, making professional presentations in their fields, and, consequently, making us proud every day.

Today, I am pleased to announce a very special seven-figure gift pledge. The Delta Regional Foundation is pledging \$1.5 million over the next five years to support a variety of academic and athletic programs on campus. With us in the audience are directors of the foundation board, whom I ask to stand as I call their names — Mrs. Faye McGuffee, Mr. Charlie McGuffee, Mr. Lloyd Clark, and Mr. Jerry Stigler. I also want to acknowledge board member Mr. Woodie Bounds, who could not be with us today, as well as the late Mr. James Donald Cooper, Delta State's Registrar Emeritus, who also served on the board. Combined with that foundation's previous gifts of \$2 million, its pledges and gifts to Delta State now total \$3.5 million. Thank you!

Now, please understand that these men are all alumni of Delta State University, and they are part of the so-called "Drew mafia" — where they all grew up and became friends. So, to help Faye handle all of that Drew and Delta State focus, we now bestow upon her an honorary membership in the Delta State University Alumni Association. And, one more plaudit for the Delta Regional Foundation board — they are picking up the tab for our back-to-school luncheon tomorrow!

Several six-figure gifts, from individual donors, to support scholarships and campus programming are in the works and helping to set the stage for our capital campaign. We will recognize those individuals on other occasions. More good fundraising news is in store for the months ahead — demonstrating to the Delta State nation that this university is rock-solid and going places. For all of these gifts, the timing couldn't be better.

Some other notable activities and accomplishments over the last year include a very successful blues conference in the fall, the fifth annual race relations conference in the spring, and the international business symposium, also in the spring. The Delta State Colloquia program featured distinguished lectures by Dr. Rod Paige, former U.S. Secretary of Education, and Mr. Fred Smith, founder and CEO of FedEx. In June, we hosted the fifth

annual Mayors' Summit that involved a number of Delta mayors who came to campus to discuss Delta issues and engage with the university. And, we concluded our first year of the new Local Government Leadership Institute, which provides basic training to municipal officials around the Delta.

Our educational partnership with GRAMMY Museum® Mississippi continues to prosper, and we are excited about the incredible season ahead for the BPAC, where we will see amazing performances on this very stage. Our focus on music continues with the addition of the "music across campus" program that includes strategically placed speakers located in nearly all quarters of the campus that project music and programs from the campus radio station. Also, we added a course in the Beatles this year in the DMI program, which includes a partnership with the famous Cavern Club in Liverpool, England, where the Beatles made their name.

As a sampling of the many great things going on in the academy, I am pleased to highlight a couple of notable credits from each college and the school of nursing.

In the College of Business and Aviation, the Department of Commercial Aviation is one of only three university programs participating in Fed Ex's new program, Purple Runway, an effort to attract and recruit the best aviators in the industry in the coming years. FedEx CEO Fred Smith announced the program when he was on Delta State's campus in the spring. We are also very proud of our colleague, Ms. Lynn Byrd, who received the Mississippian of the Year Award from the Association of Information Technology Professionals.

In the College of Education and Human Sciences, our colleagues managed more than a half million dollars generated by external grants to provide tuition and other support for students across a wide range of degree programs. Additionally, the Division of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research piloted a successful first year of the "Practice to Profession" partnership with Bell Academy, a project that provides intensive yearlong clinical experiences for student interns.

In the College of Arts and Sciences, our colleagues commissioned the Laws-Elliott Professional Prep Laboratory that provides a reference library and a dedicated,

computerized venue for students to prepare, free of charge, for professional school exams such as the MCAT. Also, Art instructor, Mr. Chet Oguz, participated in the International Teaching Experience at Shangqui University in China where he taught painting and drawing.

The Robert E. Smith School of Nursing was recognized statewide as the best nursing program in Mississippi, and nationally for having one of the top 25 best online master's programs and one of the top 50 best online RN to BSN programs. We also salute our student nurses, who continue to lead the state in high scores on the licensing exam, and who completed more than 25 service projects representing 525 hours of dedicated time this past year.

In news from the Roberts-LaForge Library, a poll shows that the library enjoys a remarkable 90% overall satisfaction rating from our students, and our library staff colleagues report that the reference department answered 5,000 questions in just the last year alone.

Graduate and Continuing Studies received a highly competitive \$1.12 million TRIO grant from the U.S. Department of Education to create the McNair Research Scholars program that is helping to increase the attainment of Ph.Ds by under-represented, first generation, and low income students. Additionally, our QEP — Quality Enhancement Program — sponsored more than 80 diversity and inclusion events on campus this past year, and its director, Ms. Michelle Johanson, received the highest award from the Institutions of Higher Learning Board office — the Mississippi Diversity Educator of the Year.

I salute our faculty colleagues for the good work you are doing in and out of the classroom — in teaching and advising our students, conducting research, providing service, and being leaders in the academy. In the interest of...time...I cannot possibly note all the great achievements of the university academy during the past year.

However, I can point you to the link on our website that lists an impressive array of accomplishments and progress by college or school. In your own time, please visit the university website at the address www.deltastate.edu/president/accomplishments to see

the many grand things our colleagues have done this past year.

So, to what do we have to look forward this academic year? What will our trek through the next period of time bring us?

Here are eight areas of challenge, opportunity, and focus I see on the horizon for Delta State, with a little context for each.

1) Focus on academic excellence and student success. This area of challenge is the most compelling, because it lies at the heart of both our responsibility and what we do best as a regional university — superb classroom instruction and personal attention by our faculty to prepare our students for the marketplace and post-graduate work. While we would necessarily expect this Vision One principle to be at the top of our list, it's good to remind ourselves that it represents the essence of our mission. We will need to continue to focus on providing the very best instructional programming possible, given our limited resources, while serving one of the poorest regions of the country that brings to our doors many individuals who are first generation, Pell grant eligible, and unprepared or underprepared students.

Our success is their success, and that converts over time to the improvement of the Delta and the state.

Ratcheting up our academic requirements — namely, requiring capstone projects and upper division courses with writing skills emphasis for all majors and all graduates — will help prepare our graduates to be more skilled and marketable for jobs and graduate/professional school positions. And, those enhancements will only boost our academic reputation in the eyes of prospective students and the public.

Our wide array of student success programming should continue to support the good work of our faculty. We will need to find additional marketing dollars to promote the university generally, as well as our unique signature (and growing) programs — such as nursing, DMI, aviation, Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, social work, accounting, and teacher education — all of which have the potential to attract many more students to Delta State.

2) Focus on recruitment and retention. While we are employing new and

creative strategies in the recruitment arena, and have realized steady increases in student enrollment over the last four years, we will face increasing pressure on recruitment as the number of Mississippi high school graduates dwindles in the years ahead. We are addressing this concern by ramping up targeted in-state recruiting — especially in the Delta region which is our primary service area — as well as increasing community college, out-of-state, and international student recruitment, all of which are trending upward.

We also need to keep our foot on the gas in support of our retention efforts, especially with our excellent student success programs that are supporting instruction and clearly working to help keep our students in school and on the path to graduation.

We will need to continue to focus on both recruitment and retention to maintain steady enrollment, and to expect a modicum of growth. We also need to meet the challenges of declining summer school and graduate school enrollment. Task forces are now in the process of addressing these concerns. Additionally, we need to double-down on recruitment of first-time, full-time students.

3) All eyes on the budget. The university’s annual operating budget is \$47 million, and our overall budget — including auxiliary, designated, and plant funds — totals \$70 million.

Diligence with respect to the university’s budget and finances can never wane. Our campus leadership is focused on maintaining strong budgetary management as we move toward a higher number of days of cash as well as improvement of our debt ratios. We will likely continue to be in the position of managing scarce resources, especially if we do not enjoy the benefit of adequate funding from the state, as we have experienced in recent times. Our leadership team is up to that task. Even with the double-digit budget cuts over the last three years, the university has managed to protect its personnel and programs from cuts and elimination.

Special focus will also be needed to address challenges presented by the increasing cost of scholarships, insurance, and the graduate assistantship program.

Additionally, as a smaller institution with limited resources, we continually battle the challenge of having fewer dollars to support any “surge” capacity or big leaps forward,

resulting in slower progress toward our goals. Absent additional state support, we hope private dollar fundraising will help alleviate some of that pressure.

4) Deferred maintenance. The university has millions of dollars in deferred maintenance that needs addressing sooner rather than later. But, we can't afford to do it all now. Increased and regular bond dollar support from the state will be necessary to address this problem, as well as reinstatement of vital renovation funding for routine maintenance. Aging roofs, as well as heating and cooling systems, may fail at any time. The state must provide the financial means to address these needs through bond authority and appropriated dollars. This year, we have \$5 million available to address roofing needs on eight buildings, heating and cooling issues in six locations, pool repairs at the aquatics center, and the first phase of major renovations of the coliseum.

As we plan our future, we are going to create a master plan for the campus to ensure thoughtful and well-considered building and land usage, as well as the smart development and growth of our campus. These master plan discussions began last year, and more information will be available soon.

I am pleased to announce that we are going to build a new president's home on the site where the former residence sat for six decades. The old house, which was razed a year and a half ago, had major issues with mold, general aging, and other deterioration problems that led to its demise. In the absence of a campus home for the president, which is required by Delta State's Board of Trustees, my wife Nancy and I have been living for the last five years in temporary housing on campus that was built in 1927.

The new house will consist of a unique design combining the environment of a personal residence with the versatility of a public event venue. The two-story structure will incorporate the Italianate architectural style found throughout the Delta State campus. It will be built to accommodate the various family combinations and needs for future presidents.

The new residence will be financed with funds from our building fund, which is used solely for the purpose of supporting housing facilities on campus. Just this morning at its monthly meeting, the Institutions of Higher Learning board gave final approval for the

project. The facility will be constructed by Cleveland's own Collins Construction Company, and work should begin very soon. In a show of community collaboration and support, the construction line of credit is being provided in shared fashion by six local banks.

Representatives from those banks are with us today, and I ask them to stand as I call their name: Mr. Danny Whalen from Cleveland State Bank, Mr. Mark Hargett from Planters Bank, Mr. Jay Joel from Renasant Bank, and Mr. Will Sledge from State Bank and Trust. Guaranty Bank and Trust and Regions Bank are participating as well, however, their representatives were unable to join us today. Please help me thank them all for their commitment.

We think the new residence will be a source of great credit and pride for the university, and faculty and staff will be among our first guests for a grand opening reception. The plans are in my office if you'd like to stop by to see them.

Campus planning also includes commercial development of the old golf course. The request for proposal process concluded early this summer. We are now in discussions with a potential developer, and are planning to conduct a feasibility study soon. Eventually, we hope to create a new revenue stream for the university from this development. Whatever we do with our design, the development will be a terrific addition and credit to the university, as well as to the city. We will share more details once the feasibility study is complete.

5) Private fundraising. A major challenge — and opportunity — for the university over the next several years will be the pursuit of private funding support from foundations and individual donors. The initial steps are underway to prepare for a major capital campaign. For starters, the university has experienced a surge of private gifts and pledges in the last few months, as I mentioned earlier. And, we anticipate more good fundraising news in the months ahead. As Delta State approaches its centennial in 2025, success in private fundraising will be a key to the university's ability to attract and educate more students and to implement and grow programs — none of which would be possible with state support and tuition dollars alone.

6) Focus on our vision. With the university's visioning process now in place, we are focusing on goals, strategies, and plans to support the ten visioning principles

developed through a buy-in process — involving the entire university — that we conducted a couple of years ago. It will be important to maintain our focus on those principles as we navigate the need for adaptation, growth, and planning in the years ahead. I look forward to your full engagement in that effort.

7) **International programming.** We have made great strides in recruiting international students to Delta State, which has resulted in our doubling enrollment in this area in the last four years to 134 students from 48 countries. And, we already have an additional 62 new international students on the books this Fall. In addition to boosting enrollment through increasing international students, the university will need to continue developing relationships with partner institutions around the world to provide study abroad, student and faculty exchange, and other cultural experiences. We are necessarily taking small steps in these efforts due to limited resources. But, earlier this summer, in a conversation with two of our students who traveled to South Korea with our music program, I was reminded of the terrific impact and benefits an international experience can have on the young minds in our charge.

Delta State has developed relationships with seven foreign institutions in the last four years, and next year we will receive our first-ever Fulbright Scholar from abroad. Professor Katarzyna Mackowska, from John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in Poland, will teach and conduct research in the Division of Social Sciences and History during the second semester, and she will enroll her children in the Cleveland public schools. I had the opportunity to teach again at the law school at that university in May, and I signed a new student-faculty exchange agreement with the rector.

Our growing on-campus international program will also need to meet the challenge of welcoming and accommodating visiting faculty and students, as well as sending Delta State faculty, staff, and students abroad. The 2017-18 academic year was the first full-year of operation of our new Study Abroad program, and a total of eight faculty and staff, and four students, engaged in teaching or learning experiences in Australia, China, Poland, and South Korea.

Obviously, not all of our students can go abroad to study, but many of them should

and will. For the rest, we will bring the world to them.

8) Strategic Plan. Eighth, and finally, we are embarking on a review and reworking of the university's strategic plan — a well-researched and well-developed blueprint that is important as a guide for the university and its future, as well as a vital part of our academic credentialing.

To conclude — and, yes, it's about time for that — the state of the university, at this time, is strong and healthy, and we are doing everything possible within our means to become more productive and robust in serving our students.

As you can readily see, we have accomplished a great deal this past year, and the university is on very solid footing. We have a busy year ahead, and many challenges to face. But, I know that we are up to those challenges, and I look forward to working with you to meet and exceed the goals we set for ourselves.

Colleagues, opportunity is our friend. And, this *is* our time. The time is right to excel, to make the year ahead the best ever, to make the best of the time we have, and to make this university an increasingly superb experience for our students and ourselves.

At the end of the day, it really is about time, and I thank you for your time this afternoon.

I wish for you a terrific year, filled with quality time in teaching and serving our students. Thank you for the time and talent you provide. Those are timeless treasures, as are you.

So, as my time expires, I leave you with one simple question: How will you spend your time for Delta State this academic year?