



State of the University

President William N. LaForge

August 15, 2019

Delta State University

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CHANGE IS UPON US

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Opening Convocation: Academic Year 2019-20

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Welcome, one and all, to the beginning of the 2019-20 academic year, one in which we will have the unique opportunity to usher in the third decade of the 21st century together! But, for the moment, there's something special and exciting about being on a university campus at the start-up of a new year. Maybe I feel that way because I'm reminded of my own student days here when we would leave our summer jobs, return to school to see friends, get back in the swing of classes, smell the aroma of cotton defoliant in the Delta, get ready for the first football game, and live the good life of a college student.

Since this is the State of the University address, first things first. I would characterize the past year as one of growth, progress, and modest prosperity for the university, and I would describe the state of the university as stable, with a lot of terrific things on the horizon. We have numerous signature academic programs and a couple of new ones that have great student demand, along with a number of infrastructure improvements underway. Our student recruitment efforts are robust and proving successful. And, we are in the early stages of a major fundraising project leading up to our centennial celebration in 2025.

I would also characterize Delta State as being in a state of change, and I have chosen the concept of *change* as the focus and theme of my remarks today.

We have all heard the maxim that nothing is certain but death and taxes, but you might add *change* to that list. Someone has said it another way: "Life happens, and what happens is something called *change*."

As human beings, we come to realize that change is a constant force all around us, and it can sometimes present difficult challenges. All of us certainly observe that human nature resists change, sometimes quite strongly. And, the same can be said about human institutions such as businesses, membership organizations, and universities. Who among you sees in your own place of work the vestiges of the old saw, "but that's the way we've always done it"? Status quo and tradition can be the enemy of change and progress.

One sad and unpleasant change year to year is the passing of family, friends, and colleagues. I ask you to help us remember our fallen colleagues, students, and friends from the past year: Mr. Jim Armishaw, Dr. Andrew Badger, Mrs. Babs Clark, Dr. Allen Dennis, Ms. Gloria

Enriquez, Mr. John Ford, Mr. Hal Gerrard, Mr. Gerald Jacks, Dr. Adam Johanson, Ms. Anita Johnson, Mr. Matt McGregor, Jr., Dr. William Middleton, Mrs. Ann Nelson, Mrs. Liz Parker, Mrs. Ginger Pepper, Ms. Mary Robbins, Mr. Jeff Tarver, Mrs. Jean Taylor, Dr. John Tiftickjian, Jr., Dr. Paul W. West, and Mr. Ray Wilson.

I would also ask that we include in our thoughts and tribute today the passing of a great Mississippian and American, United States Senator Thad Cochran, who did so much to support his beloved state, including program funding for Delta State projects, and who was a frequent visitor to our campus. Please join me in a moment of silence as we remember our fallen colleagues, students, and friends from the past year.

We have had a few recent changes in my Cabinet membership. It's important for the entire campus to know who comprises the administrative officers and leadership team who help me guide and govern the university. Especially for the benefit of those of you who are newcomers to Delta State, it is my pleasure to introduce the members of the president's cabinet, both veterans and newcomers.

Continuing members of the Cabinet include: 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; and, Vice President for University Advancement and External Relations Mr. Rick Munroe. These five vice presidents also comprise my Executive Committee.

New to the cabinet are the following: Athletic Director Mr. Mike Kinnison; representing the Academic Council, Graduate Dean Dr. Beverly Moon; Faculty Senate President Mr. Chet Oguz; Administrative Staff Council Chair Ms. Tricia Killebrew; and, Student Government Association President Ms. Elizabeth Swindle.

These Cabinet colleagues assist me in making critical decisions that affect every aspect of the university. Please join me in thanking them for their service and time.

I would also like to introduce to you the hardworking members of the President's Office: Ms. Claire Cole, Ms. Ann Giger, Ms. Phyllis Thornton, and Dr. Michelle Roberts. They are my daily bosses, and I couldn't operate without them.

Returning to the theme of *change*, I am fascinated by people's varying perceptions of change. People see change differently, from many different perspectives, and, understandably, quite often through the lens of how change will affect them directly and personally. Others take a more circumspect approach when it comes to change.

Well-known playwright George Bernard Shaw famously wrote that, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

Are we able to change our minds? What does it take to change our minds? And, should we? For good reasons, of course.

Change is inevitable. Change is necessary. Change is all around us. To some, change is a cold slap in the face—a rude awakening. To others, it is a warm blanket—that first cup of java in the morning. Some resist change...dread it...fear it...even fight it. Others embrace it...facilitate it...even thrive on it. Most thinking people are willing to consider change, and make good decisions about it. Others, not so much.

People can and do change. I've seen it in my lifetime. In government. In business. In the courtroom. On this campus. It's amazing to see thoughtful people change their minds on important issues.

We all change, whether we want to or not. The key is how, when, and why we change...or how we change things around us. My proposal is that we should all at least be open to change.

Did Jesus, Mandela, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa change the world for the better? Did Hitler, Stalin, Saddam, and bin Laden change the world for the worse? For those notable individuals, famous or infamous, the answers are pretty obvious and easy...whether in the affirmative or negative. Can thoughtful, intentional, committed change make a difference? I think it can.

We live with change and the concept of change all around us all the time. A change of pace. A change in time. Need for a change. Seeds of change. Fear of change. Justifiable change. Change for change's sake. Change for a dollar. A change of clothes. A change of plans. A change of hands. A change of seasons. A change in our interests. A change of ways. Some change diapers. Or lanes. Or careers. Or university presidents! Bob Dylan sang, "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Sam Cooke sang that "A Change Is Gonna Come."

Change often runs into the buzz saw of tradition. In one sense, tradition is only what we did yesterday. Certainly, tradition can be good and prudent...and comfortable. And, so can change, especially when it means progress.

Progress can mean “getting better,” improving, making changes that matter for the benefit of people and institutions.

For those of us entrusted with educating the next generations, considering and making changes are important enterprises and valuable parts of our responsibilities. Every day, we have to weigh change against tradition and the status quo. This friction and competition surrounding our decision-making abilities raise an important question for us all to ponder: What and where are the balances between tradition or the status quo, and progress or change?

It’s kind of like the old saying, “On the one hand, and then on the other,” which reminds me of the famous Whiskey Speech delivered by the late Noah “Soggy” Sweat, a well-known Mississippi judge and law professor at Ole Miss, who, when he was a young member of the Mississippi legislature during a time of prohibition in the early 1950s, made some famous remarks about the devil’s brew.

So, merely for your entertainment, here’s the Whiskey Speech, a digression well-worth the time.

“My friends, I had not intended to discuss this controversial subject at this particular time. However, I want you to know that I do not shun controversy. On the contrary, I will take a stand on any issue at any time, regardless of how fraught with controversy it might be. You have asked me how I feel about whiskey. All right, this is how I feel about whiskey:

If when you say whiskey you mean the devil’s brew, the poison scourge, the bloody monster that defiles innocence, dethrones reason, destroys the home, creates misery and poverty, yea, literally takes the bread from the mouths of little children; if you mean the evil drink that topples the Christian man and woman from the pinnacle of righteous, gracious living into the bottomless pit of degradation, and despair, and shame, and helplessness, and hopelessness, then certainly I am against it.

But, if when you say whiskey you mean the oil of conversation, the philosophic wine, the ale that is consumed when good fellows get together, that puts a song in their hearts and laughter on their lips, and the warm glow of contentment in their eyes; if you mean Christmas

cheer; if you mean the stimulating drink that puts the spring in the old gentleman's step on a frosty, crispy morning; if you mean the drink which enables a man to magnify his joy, and his happiness, and to forget, if only for a little while, life's great tragedies, and heartaches, and sorrows; if you mean that drink, the sale of which pours into our treasuries untold millions of dollars, which are used to provide tender care for our little crippled children, our blind, our deaf, our dumb, our pitiful aged and infirm; to build highways and hospitals and schools, then certainly I am for it.

This is my stand. I will not retreat from it. I will not compromise.”

Now, back to the topic at hand...*change*.

Just look around us. Higher education is changing. University life is changing. The academy is changing. Mississippi's community colleges are planning to ask the legislature next year for authority to grant bachelor's degrees in technology. Tennessee now offers free tuition for community college. In the next few weeks, the California General Assembly will likely pass legislation prohibiting all universities in California, public or private, from denying student-athletes the right to monetize their name, image, and likeness—effectively gutting the amateur sports model.

Our campus demographics are changing, and have been for years. Of our approximately 3,700-plus students this past year, more than 700 were dual-credit students in high schools. Another 600 were 100% online students, and could be living anywhere. Of the remaining 2,400 or so, fewer than 800 lived on campus. The majority of our students are commuters, either from their hometowns in the Delta or from the neighborhoods in Cleveland that have become “student communities.” During my college days at Delta State a half century ago, enrollment was about 3,200, almost equally split between on-campus residents and commuters.

Do you remember Tower Records, Pan Am Airlines, Borders, Blockbuster, Woolworths, or Circuit City? Perhaps, some of you may have never heard of them. There's a reason for that. They're gone. Forgotten. They failed to innovate—read, *change*. They couldn't adapt to the market place. They lost “touch,” and they became irrelevant or obsolete.

There are universities around the country facing the same fate. And, many have already paid the piper. Since 2016, some 60 non-profit universities and colleges have closed, merged,

been acquired, or been consolidated. They couldn't change to meet their markets. The reasons are serious and varied, but they all include the challenge of *change* in some way or another.

Some of the biggest challenges for public regional universities across the country include state funding cuts, declining regional demographics, students struggling to afford to stay enrolled, and growing competition from flagships and community colleges. Sound familiar? These issues are impacting public universities daily, and Delta State is not immune to these challenges. A stark current example: the University of Alaska system budget was cut 41% this year.

Our Provost, Dr. McAdams, presented a stellar program to the faculty this past spring outlining many of these and other challenges to higher education. His presentation was a clarion call for us to be vigilant and diligent in ensuring that Delta State remains relevant and on a sustainable path.

His challenge question was this: Is Delta State University willing to innovate and evolve quickly enough to remain viable and grow? Today, we should ponder that question seriously, and continue to do so in our departmental meetings tomorrow and in discussions throughout the year.

Dr. McAdams noted major challenges for higher education such as decreasing state support, rising tuition and student debt, demographic pressures on enrollment, free or partial tuition relief in some states, the rise of the mega university and increasing online education, declining public and employer confidence in higher education, and changing federal government attitudes and policies. And, he pointed out that the most vulnerable institutions are underfunded state schools in rural areas with insufficient private endowments and no significant positive cash flow.

We at Delta State face these very challenges, and it will be up to us, with guidance from our board and assistance from the state, to navigate the tough waters ahead. We need to manage the *change* that will keep us on a sustainable and successful path.

As a current example, state funding for Delta State for this new fiscal year is flat...no increase. So, the revenue side of our budget for the current academic year is indicative of the absence of state support, while the expenditure side reflects rising costs, which are having to be supported by our six percent tuition increase. Fortunately, we did receive badly needed bond

fund authority for capital improvements, increases to match rising insurance and retirement expense costs, and funding for mid-level repairs on campus. That funding is truly good news. But, Delta State—along with our seven sister state universities—came up short again in state funding for our operating budgets that pay salaries and keep the lights on. Once again, higher education was not a high enough priority at the state level.

As a matter of reference, we operate today with less state support than we had in 2016, and much less than we had 10 years ago. In this election year, if you need a message to share with candidates running for office at the state level, here it is—make higher education a top priority. Our system-wide pitch to the legislature this coming session will be to adopt a six year plan to bring Mississippi university salaries up to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) average, meaning a nine percent increase in appropriations next year.

Colleagues, to plan for and protect our future as a thriving university, we need to be open to change and innovation for the right reasons and in the right ways: 1) to advance our interests at Delta State, 2) to adapt to the changing landscape of the university world, and 3) to meet the needs, expectations, and requirements of both our students and the careers they will enter. If we don't, we may well face the same fate as those 60 universities I referenced earlier, or, at minimum, and equally troubling, we may not be able to reach the levels of success and excellence of which we are quite capable.

We have a great university here...great faculty and staff...a beautiful campus...a great story to tell...and with both traditional and signature academic programs to offer. With prudent change and innovation, we can meet the challenges ahead. While we can't control state financial support, we do have our hands on the controls, at least to some extent, when it comes to enrollment and recruiting, student success, distinguishing academic and cultural features, and private fundraising. And, I am committed to seeing us move the needle forward in each of those areas. These are human enterprises that require our collective talents and efforts, and I am convinced that we can meet and exceed the inherent challenges if we apply ourselves and work together.

Several notable changes have occurred on campus in the form of successes over the past year. While time prohibits my mentioning them all, I am pleased to report to you many achievements across the spectrum of our campus activities. For a more complete list of

accomplishments, please visit the university website at the address www.deltastate.edu/president/accomplishments.

Our faculty continue to excel in teaching, publishing, service, academic peer reviews, presentations, performances, and other scholarly pursuits. And, they are teaching some amazing students who are going on to outstanding internships, graduate programs, and career posts. If it sounds like I'm bragging on you, it's because I am. You—we—are all change agents in one way or another, and you are making a difference for our students.

Consider the following, and many other, changes—progress...improvements... successes—over the past year, as well as some changes on tap this coming year that will move the needle toward excellence for Delta State.

In the College of Arts and Sciences, the Division of Mathematics and Sciences boasts numerous outstanding graduates who were accepted into professional health programs, including medical, dental, physical therapy, pharmacy, and veterinary schools, as well as masters and doctoral candidates in a number of fields ranging from ecology to neuroscience.

The Art Department is leading a collaboration with the Delta Music Institute (DMI) to expand the Digital Media Arts program, which henceforth will occupy lab space in the renovated former laundry facility, the Odealier Morgan building, which will retain its name in honor of our late colleague, Ms. Morgan. This partnership will create a home for a new Digital Media Arts Center, which will feature two state of the art Mac labs, video production courses with a green screen area, 2D and 3D animation courses, and a voice-over booth. Delta State will have the only program in the state offering an animation concentration. The Art Department is also implementing a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in Integrated Visual Art, which is considered a terminal degree in art.

The Geospatial Information Technology Center became a Regional Support Office for the United Nations Platform for Space-Based Disaster and Emergency Response, the only one in North America. The DMI All-Stars performed once again at GRAMMY Mississippi Night in Los Angeles. The Division of Languages and Literature launched a new, all online M.Ed. in Secondary English Teaching Program, the only one in the region. The Music Department hosted more than 600 pre-college students attending campus events such as honor band, honor choir, the high school choral festival, and the band invitational.

In the College of Business and Aviation, the online integrated MBA program was named one of the best MBA programs in the nation, our Commercial Aviation Program received a half-million dollar grant from FedEx for scholarships, and a flight training lab was established with a grant from American Airlines. And, after years of planning, the college initiated the installation of a state-of-the-art Financial Investing and Research Lab.

In the College of Education and Human Sciences, Dean Leslie Griffin and Dr. Merideth Van Namen wrote and received a grant from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) for Delta State to participate in the “Teacher Residency Program.” There will be approximately 20 Delta State students from the Indianola area who teach in the schools there while enrolled in our program. Their tuition is paid by the grant from MDE. In short, we will have more students for DSU, we will be working with area partners to ameliorate the teacher shortage in the Delta, and we will help students who may have financial need—all while we receive full tuition for each student—a win, win, win! In the recreation area, Dr. Todd Davis and the Recreation program hosted OKRA Kids Camp for more than 300 participants, and the Delta Down and Dirty “mudder” for more than 380 children.

From the Robert E. Smith School of Nursing, good news comes in the form of extraordinarily high percentage pass rates for RN and nurse practitioner certifications. And, our nursing program was ranked in the top three in the state, and among the top 100 online programs nationally.

Graduate and Continuing Studies had a very busy year full of changes. More than half of our 30 graduate programs moved to a streamlined admission process. Graduate school applications are up 7% over last year, and graduate school admissions directly from our December 2018 graduating class increased 2% over last year. Through its third year, the Teach For America (TFA) Graduate Fellows Program has enrolled 30 Fellows who have positively impacted 12 communities throughout the state of Mississippi with their Social Entrepreneurship Projects for which they raised \$205,000. We are pleased that the fourth cohort of Fellows, made up of 12 Teach for America alumni, are beginning the program this fall. For our McNair Scholars program, designed to encourage traditionally underrepresented students to pursue graduate work and obtain terminal degrees, DSU graduated 15 Scholars with an overall average of 3.50 GPA, and all 15 will attend graduate school this fall, including some here at Delta State.

Continuing Education brought more than 950 K-12th grade students to Cleveland and the Delta State campus for a number of events, including Regional Science and Engineering Fairs, Fusion Gymnastics training and its first sanctioned meet, the fourth year of hosting the Chick-fil-A Leader Academy, and collaboration with the United States Geospatial Intelligence Foundation to begin a certificate program in Geospatial Information Technologies. And, our Quality Enhancement Plan—QEP—sponsored or co-sponsored more than 50 cultural competency events for DSU faculty, staff, and students.

To address a decline in summer and graduate school enrollment, task forces worked hard this past year to identify ways to improve student numbers, and make some changes. I thank Graduate Dean Dr. Beverly Moon, her task force members, and many of you who contributed to these good efforts, which are paying off in numbers of students and in revenue to the university.

Also, we continue to employ multiple strategies to support student success and improve retention, and I commend our Student Success Center for its efforts to support our students and classroom instruction. This program commenced seven years ago, and has undergone terrific positive changes that assist our students to stay in school and graduate.

And, our friends in the Library—our quiet partners in this educational venture we all share—report more than one million electronic database searches performed last year by DSU students, faculty, and staff! Over the last five years, more than 16,000 students have attended face-to-face instructional sessions offered by the library staff. Despite funding challenges, the library has also averaged above a 90% satisfaction rating from students for the past four years.

In the international arena, Delta State, through the Social Sciences and History Division, hosted our first-ever visiting Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, Dr. Katarzyna Mackowska, from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in Poland. Also, several faculty, staff, and students from across campus traveled to teach, study, or recruit in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, France, Italy, Poland, and South Korea.

In our online programs, we are looking for new opportunities to expand our offerings and reach new markets, and we are adopting *Quality Matters* national standards to assist us in designing and reviewing our online courses.

Delta State is being intentional in identifying and cultivating outstanding students to compete for national fellowships and awards. Our Honors Program Director, Dr. James Gerald, is coordinating that effort, so please contact him if you know students with exceptional academic abilities who would be good candidates for Fulbright, Truman, and other similar programs. Our students deserve that opportunity.

Welcomed change has come in the form of a new staff development leadership program that can help open doors for upward mobility. The LEADS program, which stands for Link, Empower, and Develop Staff, is just cranking up, and 10 staff members were recently selected for the first cohort. I salute them and wish them well, and I congratulate and thank Dr. Christy Riddle and the Administrative Staff Council for establishing this exciting new program.

A major change this year was a complete makeover of the Office of Admissions. Thanks to Vice President Vernell Bennett and new Director of Admissions Merritt Dain and his staff, we are significantly improving our student recruitment practices to meet today's needs, and the results are already proving positive. I ask Dr. Bennett, Mr. Dain, and his entire team to stand so we can acknowledge your good work.

Also in the Student Affairs area, the DSU C.A.R.E.S. online reporting system has been deployed. It is a means of reporting and tracking students in various forms of crisis. In partnership with Extra Table, Student Affairs will be opening a food pantry in the Union. This weekly Pop Up Pantry, called the Statesman Shelf, was funded with a corporate donation. Student Affairs will be seeking donations from the campus and community to support this effort.

Ever mindful of the priority of safety on our campus, we invested in the addition and upgrade of security cameras in key areas, and we now have more than 300 cameras strategically placed across campus to help keep our students, employees, and visitors safe. Many thanks to Chief Jeff Johns and our police force for all you do to keep the campus safe and secure.

One huge recent change on campus is the engagement of a new food services company to improve the quality of food and service for our students. Our Finance and Administration Office, under the direction of Vice President Jamie Rutledge, negotiated the new multi-million dollar contract with Sodexo. If you haven't tried their fare in the cafeteria, you are really

missing out. Sodexo is also making changes in the Union food court that include Starbucks and Burger Bistro, both coming this Monday. A full menu Chick-fil-A and a Firehouse Subs will be coming by the fall term of next year. And, the Grid, a convenience store in Young-Mauldin Cafeteria, will open on Monday.

Over the Christmas holidays, we saw a major change and improvement in our telecommunications system as Delta State and CSpire communications replaced Delta State's 25-year old campus telephone system. By converting our, the university saved more than \$650,000 when compared to purchasing traditional telephone equipment. Many thanks to Dr. Edwin Craft and our great OIT team for helping us through the transition.

Delta State is also now a participant in the Mississippi Optical Network, referred to as the MissiON network, which delivers redundant internet access to campus with speeds 20 times greater than previously provided. The new network also offers access to the educational research network, referred to as Internet2, which was previously not accessible to the non-research universities in the state. The core network on campus was also upgraded at the same time, and the new backbone provides up to 10 times greater speed to many of the major buildings on campus.

Last summer, we upgraded the wireless internet system in the residence halls. That upgrade, combined with the addition of the MissiON network, now provides our residence hall students with the fastest Internet in the state. Efforts to enhance the wireless speeds in our academic areas will continue in the coming year.

Our Student Business Services office reports more than \$1.5 million in debt collections from student accounts and outstanding loans. And, its Director, Kelvin Davis, hit two professional homeruns: 1) He was recognized as one of the state's Top 50 Under 40 in business by the *Mississippi Business Journal*, and 2) he graduated from the Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Bolivar County program. Mr. Davis, please stand and be recognized.

Our colleagues in the Office of Human Resources created a retiree orientation program and website to provide our retirees with valuable information to ease the transition into retirement, and they promoted healthy initiatives and retirement strategies through wellness and retirement seminars.

Change also means a fair approach to allowing non-Delta State entities and individuals to use campus venues and equipment for a fair market fee, while also resulting in thousands of dollars of new revenue for Delta State. Some folks in the community have had a little difficulty adapting to this change, so I want to make sure you have the facts, and can explain to our surrounding communities why there are fair market fees charged for use of university venues and equipment. We certainly try to be good community partners, and we enjoy a great relationship with the city and surrounding areas. But, we are a teaching institution, not a rental company. As a public service to our community, we do make some venues and equipment available for use by non-DSU organizations or individuals. But, a reasonable fee must be charged to offset our investment and replacement costs—the cost of labor, upkeep, security, and utilities—and to safeguard and be a good steward of property and equipment entrusted to us by the state. These are just good business practices, and we have to be mindful that renting space or equipment is quite secondary to our primary mission of instruction and running a university.

On occasion, change can also come in the form of personnel changes that are necessitated by competency issues, underperformance, ethical challenges, or just a change in direction or focus.

I feel compelled to add a comment on ethics at this point. A public university is a public trust, and all university personnel must respect that trust by safeguarding its resources, which are the property of the state and the taxpayers of Mississippi—and certainly not utilize those resources for personal benefit or gain. We had an unfortunate situation this past year in which someone crossed that line, and, consequently, that person is no longer a part of the DSU family. Please be vigilant and don't let your guard down. Years of hard work and trust can be destroyed by five minutes of dishonest or unethical behavior.

In private fundraising, we had the best year on record, with gifts totaling more than \$9.1 million. We received some significant gifts for scholarships, including a half million dollars from FedEx for aviation scholarships, \$300,000 from the Norm and Celian Lewis trust, and, our largest gift ever—more than \$4 million from the Pittman trust. In the grants category, Delta State received 58 grants, some new and some recurring, totaling \$4.4 million. And, we said farewell to Mr. Keith Fulcher, who served for many years as the Executive Director of the

Alumni-Foundation area and who had a lot to do with many of our fundraising successes over the years.

Delta State itself changes our surrounding communities every day. Our Office of University Advancement and External Relations, under the guidance of Vice President Rick Munroe, recently sponsored an economic impact study, and the results are stunning. Delta State's positive economic impact on the Mississippi Delta totals \$175 million for fiscal year 2018 alone. That \$175 million equates to \$44 million in direct spending and \$21 million in secondary spending, plus \$110 million in knowledge impact—\$81 million in increased alumni earnings, \$27 million in social benefits, and \$2 million in cultural benefits. Delta State supports 543 jobs (441 full-time DSU employees and 102 other people who owe their jobs to DSU). And, Delta State provides more than 207,000 hours in community development activities such as health, education, and civic outreach. As you can see, Delta State is a major contributor in the 18-county Delta region to economic prosperity, job opportunities, quality of life, and service to the community, along with educational attainment. We have heard it anecdotally for years, but it is clear from this study that Cleveland, Bolivar County, and the entire Mississippi Delta would not be as successful and prosperous without Delta State University. And, we will continue to foster great town-gown relations in the years ahead.

The University Colloquia program continued to bring outstanding speakers to campus. This past year featured NCAA President Mark Emmert and media mogul Steve Forbes. Both were hallmark events for the university. Stay tuned for information about our speaker for this fall's distinguished lecture.

In collaboration with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and other experts in the field, Delta State sponsored a terrific Child Safety Summit in January that covered vital topics ranging from child trafficking and exploitation to abuse and neglect. As a result, our Department of Social Work has developed a new set of professional contacts and engagements that will benefit our teaching and scholarship, and they have been asked to coordinate the development of a new interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Studies Certificate Program.

On the entertainment front, the BPAC presented several sold-out performances on this very stage, including John Prine, The Beach Boys, Trace Adkins, and the national Broadway tours of JERSEY BOYS and THE WIZARD OF OZ. Artists on the 2018-2019 Main Stage represented a combined six Academy of Country Music awards, six Country Music Association

awards, 11 GRAMMY awards, 10 Junos, 10 TONYS, two Billboard Music awards, and three American Music awards—with artists receiving more than 100 more award nominations. The BPAC also served more than 12,000 students and teachers through its Arts Education programming, and our BPAC Ambassadors, the volunteer group of ushers and ticket takers, donated in excess of \$22,000 worth of their time during the past season to serve patrons attending events at the BPAC. And, this upcoming BPAC season is filled with great performances to meet all tastes.

In athletics this past year, we paid tribute to retiring Athletic Director Ronnie Mayers by naming the Aquatics Center for him and bestowing on him an honorary degree, and we welcomed longtime baseball coach Mike Kinnison as our new Athletic Director. New coaches include Mike Nienaber for men's basketball and Rodney Batts for baseball. Men's basketball won the Gulf South Conference (GSC) tournament, the swim/dive teams placed high in the national meet, and baseball won both the Gulf South Conference and South Region tournaments. Golfer Zach Zediker became the first Statesman and fourth golfer in Gulf South Conference history to capture back-to-back GSC Individual Championships, and Cross Country star Sarah Mumme was named a Top Ten GSC student-athlete.

There have been a lot of changes in campus capital improvements and renovations over the last year, and there are several new projects slated for the coming year. We opened the newly renovated Zeigel Hall last fall, along with our spectacular dining hall. Five million dollars of work will be done this year, all from state-provided bond money allocated in 2018. Major roofing projects are underway on Fielding Wright Art complex, Hugh Smith Facilities Management headquarters, and Walter Sillers Coliseum. The Coliseum will also receive a new heating and cooling system, as well as a new sound system. And, a new heating and cooling system will be installed in the Aquatics Center.

A total of \$7.3 million in bond funding allocated in 2019 will be used for roofing projects for the Nowell Student Union, the Whitfield building, where DMI is housed, and Brumby-Castle and Lawler-Harkins residence halls. Heating and cooling systems will be improved for Nowell Union, Chadwick-Dickson Athletic Building, Ewing Hall, and Brumby-Castle and Lawler-Harkins residence halls. Elevator repair and replacement will take place in the Roberts-LaForge Library, Broom Hall, Nowell Union, and Ewing Hall. And, we will initiate the planning process for an addition to the School of Nursing. You've probably noticed that construction of the new

president's home is coming along nicely. The new residence is being financed with funds from Delta State's building fund, which is used solely for the purpose of supporting housing facilities on campus. Nancy and I hope to be able to welcome you to the new abode by this time next year.

Another huge change on the horizon is the commercial development of the old golf course. It's taken a while, but we are now working with a developer to move the project ahead. A feasibility study will soon be underway. One possible feature will be a conference center with lodging, an idea that was stimulated by strong faculty and staff interest. Stay tuned as the development progresses. It will certainly be a terrific addition and benefit to Delta State and to the City of Cleveland, while also producing a new and steady source of revenue for the university.

And, just look around our beautiful campus to see the great work our Facilities Management colleagues do to keep our buildings and grounds looking sharp. Would all Facilities Management staff please stand?

So, when we look back over the past year and take stock of changes and progress, we have a pretty impressive record. There are a lot of things to stoke Delta State pride. And, we are doing this every year...for our students...as we should. Let's not hold back or slow down.

As I have reflected on my first six years as president, and on some major benchmark accomplishments and significant changes we have put in place, I feel the pull toward the tradition of excellence I envisioned and articulated when I first arrived in 2013—the goal of making Delta State a regional university of national distinction. As change has occurred, I believe we have made a great deal of headway and progress, but there are infinite ways we can continue to build a better university for our students. I ask you to help me identify the building blocks for that future Delta State. Help me program the GPS that will guide us on the path to sustained excellence!

In preparation for today's remarks, I looked back at my spring 2013 commencement address, delivered only two weeks into my administration. As I was reviewing that document, I made note of seven of the priority items, which I had identified at that time, as things that I wanted to pursue during my presidency. Then, I compared them to the progress and changes we have made. Here's the list:

1. “Celebrate our faculty and maintain high quality teaching.”

We now have a Center for Teaching and Learning, more faculty traveling abroad, and a new professional development program for administrative staff.

2. “Focus on students and their success.”

Our student success programs and extracurricular opportunities for students are top notch and have never been stronger.

3. “Host an international conference on the blues.”

We will stage our sixth conference on the blues this fall.

4. “Sponsor a major conference on racial reconciliation.”

The Winning the Race conference just completed its sixth successful edition.

5. “Establish creative international programs.”

International programming and student numbers have never been at a higher rate.

6. “Bring business, government, and education leaders to campus to speak.”

The Delta State Colloquia Distinguished Lectures Series has brought 20 thought leaders from business, government, and education to enlighten the campus community. Additionally, the annual Abney International Business Symposium is a gem.

7. “Collaborate with business, governments, and our communities to advance this place we call the Delta.”

Delta State’s collaboration and partnerships with our communities have grown, with the addition of the annual mayors’ summit, OKRA Works student jobs program, the TFA graduate fellowship program, and the Local Government Leadership Institute, and other programs such as the Child Safety Summit.

But, we can’t stop here. There is so much more we should be doing and need to do as we support our visioning principles with new goals and objectives in the months and years ahead.

For your department meetings tomorrow, please dust off Delta State's 10 Visioning Principles. They can be found on the President's Office webpage at www.deltastate.edu/president. I thank my fellow administrators and you, our faculty and staff, for supporting our shared vision, and for continuing the good work of advancing Delta State every day in all that we do. Year to year, we need only measure our actions against these visioning principles to determine our progress, success, and productive change. Notwithstanding everything I have said today, here is the bottom line: let us always keep our mission and focus as a teaching institution top of mind, and academic excellence and student success as our top priorities.

Colleagues, I encourage you to live, work, and excel in the moment...this semester... this academic year. But, I also ask you to ponder the changes that will be required for this university to reach its potential. Each of you—no matter your position—is a change agent and an ambassador for Delta State. Together, let's be game changers.

And, for each of you, please know fully that, because of your good work, there is a famous saying that applies to you: "Fifty years from now, your position in life and material possessions will be of little consequence. But the world will be enriched because you were important in the life of a university." This one!

Change is certainly upon us, and it's here to stay. I ask for your help in making changes that are well-considered, forward-looking, and bound for success. How can we make *change* our friend at this university? In your departmental meetings tomorrow and in your work throughout the coming year, I ask you to consider answers and solutions to those queries.

Socrates, not the Greek philosopher, but a character in the book "Way of the Peaceful Warrior" by Dan Millman, said it best..."The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

In closing, I have two questions for you: 1) *How* will *you* change for the better this year, and 2) *what* will you change this year in the best interest of Delta State?

Here's to a year full of meaningful change and grand success for all of us!