

“Shaping the Future”

by

President Joseph I. Castro

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Good morning! Thank you Lynn for that very kind introduction and thank you so much for the wonderful welcome that you have given me since the announcement of my appointment back in May.

It's an honor to be here, and I want to acknowledge three key campus leaders – Grace Liu and Lynn Williams, who you have just heard from. Thank you Grace for your kind words, and I want to also acknowledge today Associated Students President, Moses Menchaca, who is sitting up front here, as our president, Moses, thank you. We're seeing each other every day, I like that, that's good, that's good. Fresno State is very, very fortunate to have these three individuals as leaders here in our campus community.

If you've read the many media reports about me in the last two months, and I apologize if it's more than you wanted it to see, you know that family is very important to me. Today, I'd like to have you meet my wife Mary, who is eager to get to know you and be involved in the Fresno State family. She is an incredible life partner, a wonderful mother to our three children and she's as happy as I am to be here today. So please, meet Mary! Mary you want to stand up?

I stand here today honored, humbled and thrilled to join you as the 8th president of California State University, Fresno!

It is my joy to assume the leadership position at one of the best universities in California and the nation, and today, in my first fall Assembly with you as we begin our 103rd year, I pledge to do my very best to ensure that the legacy of our university is secure. Like you, I am 100% dedicated to helping our students succeed at Fresno State and to continue their education in graduate school or move into careers of distinction and service. This work is deeply personal to me as the first Valley native to serve as President of Fresno State. Thank you.

Today, as we begin a new chapter at Fresno State and look forward to what I believe is a very bright future, I want to start by taking a few moments to look back. For the past 22 years, this university was led by a president, Dr. John Welty, who was one of the finest leaders ever to serve in the California State University system.

University historians will, I believe, credit Dr. Welty for the vision, creativity and gumption to take the intentional steps – and some were very difficult steps with all of you – to mold Fresno State into a premier, 21st century institution. So much of what we see on campus today was made possible by President Welty's leadership: new academic programs and strengthening of existing ones; many new buildings; a successful athletics program; and a community service program that regularly wins national attention.

And while Dr. Welty is not here today – my bet is that since he’s such an early riser he’s probably somewhere on the back nine– I would like us all to honor his service to Fresno State. I ask you to join me in a round of applause for Dr. John Welty.

I was born 46 years ago in the then-sleepy little town of Hanford. How many of you are from Hanford? Alright, we got a few! My grandparents were farmworkers – he was from Mexico and she was from Southern California – and my mother worked as a beautician to support me and later, my sister.

I grew up surrounded by a loving extended family; a family that told me and my sister that we should set our sights high and that we should plan to attend college.

I was a pretty good student, editor of the high school newspaper and the most valuable player of the varsity tennis team in my senior year. And I need to tell the truth, my coach actually made us most valuable player, we had a great year, great team. While I excelled at academics and on the tennis courts, perhaps my most valuable lessons came as I spent time after school and on some Saturdays in my mother’s beauty salon. “Embracing diversity” was not a catch phrase in those days, but it was an unmistakable lesson I learned from daily observation of the harmony of cultures and backgrounds in my mother’s friends and clients.

I was drawn to public service in high school through the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project, but I didn’t know what or how that would happen until the light bulb came on when I was an undergraduate at UC Berkeley. The vital importance to society of colleges and universities became clear to me at that time, and I committed myself to helping transform lives through a career in higher education. Probably sounds familiar to a lot of you if not all of you.

My journey to become Fresno State’s president started just 40 miles away and took me to five UC campuses throughout California and the UC Office of the President. On my journey, I encountered life and workplace lessons and experienced successes that combined to prepare me for my work here, with all of you.

And where will we go from here? What lies ahead for you, and me and Fresno State? As I said earlier, I believe a bright future is ahead – if we are willing to be proactive, creative, collaborative, strategic – and yes – bold.

Before we look into the future, let’s review a few of this university’s recent achievements, which make it clear to me that the foundation for the future is a very strong one.

- More than 4,900 degrees were awarded at our 102nd University Commencement in May. That included over 4,000 bachelor’s degrees, 794 master’s, 10 education specialist degrees and 38 doctorate degrees. Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, president of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., and a role model for deaf and hard of hearing students, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree recognizing his achievements, leadership and contributions on a national scale.
- A significant achievement was the completion of an important document called, “A Strategic Plan for Inclusion, Respect, and Equity,” by the President’s Commission on

Human Relations and Equity. As Dr. Welty wrote in a message about ASPIRE, “Fresno State is an institution where exploring the diversity of thought and opinion is valued as a means of enriching knowledge and thinking critically while discouraging marginalization during the process. The Commission developed a comprehensive plan to make sure this commitment is understood across our campus.”

- For the fourth straight year our faculty and staff have joined students in achieving more than 1 million hours in service to our community. I congratulate all who have participated in making our region a better place to live and I pledge our continuing commitment to community service.
- This fall we'll welcome a record 22,710 students. Isn't that amazing? We will have a record number of first-time freshmen and a record number of upper division transfer students. And additionally, over 700 new graduate/credential students will begin classes. We believe that having a state budget approved early and no fee increase has made it easier for families to plan for this year.
- Another record in enrollment is the 300 new international students. That brings the total number of international students to more than 600, about 130 more than last year.
- Through the dedicated efforts of faculty search committees during the past academic year, the campus community pursued aggressive recruiting strategies to seek and attract the most qualified candidates with an emphasis on reaching a diverse body of candidates. Our successes in this area have resulted in attracting 48 highly qualified professors and the most diverse team of new faculty in decades. I met many of them at new faculty orientation last week. And I'd like to ask all of the new faculty stand to be welcomed to the university. We've also welcomed many new staff members that I've not yet had the opportunity to meet and I'd like our new staff members, who joined us in 2013, to please stand. Thank you.
- Our dedicated plant operations staff helped get the campus through a major power outage in January. We recovered from that episode, but our infrastructure needs are urgent. We are developing a plan to address the first priority related to the electrical infrastructure and safety. This is a very big deal for us and we are determined to get this work done as quickly as possible. I will share more plans with you as they progress.
- Scores of Fresno State students, faculty, staff and alumni won awards and honors over this past year. I Googled the word “awards” on our FresnoStateNews.com website and it came up with 3,570 results. That's pretty impressive. Then I tried the word “honors” and it listed 3,430 results! So it's clear to me that our campus community is filled with amazing people who are being recognized for their work, everything from being selected for a United Nations project in the Kingdom of Bhutan, to being named recipient of the National Character Education award, to being named a U.S. Department of Education Teaching Fellow and I remember this not too long ago, to winning the first Gilroy Garlic

Bowl Championship. I have to say it again – this is an amazing community! Join me in congratulating all of them.

- The list of awards and achievements is also long for our Athletics programs, both in the classroom and on the playing fields. Fresno State Athletics began its journey in the Mountain West Conference with two championships – in football and women’s basketball. We also had six individual conference champions in swimming and diving and in men’s and women’s track and field.

The Bulldogs had their first unanimous All-American in football, with three All-Americans overall in football and two All-Americans in baseball. And overall, six student-athletes were named Players of the Year in their respective sports.

In the classroom, the excellence of our student-athletes is even more dramatic. Combining the fall and spring honors, 133 student-athletes were named Academic All-Conference. In addition, Fresno State won the Mountain West Student-Athlete Advisory Committee Community Service award for outstanding work throughout the Valley.

- And while the list of campus excellence could go on and on, there’s one last major achievement I want to recognize: Fresno State made history this year with the successful, over-the-goal completion of our first comprehensive fundraising effort, the Campaign for Fresno State. Having done fundraising throughout my career, I know just how challenging it can be. And this Campaign was conducted during the worst economic downturn in decades! But our Advancement Division persevered, and blew past the \$200 million goal and completed the campaign 7% above goal at \$214.2 million. I think that deserves some applause.

During this nearly 8-year effort, we received 163,000 gifts from more than 34,000 donors. And while this Campaign is completed, we will continue our efforts to bring in gifts and grants to the university to augment our state funding. This year’s state budget is stable, but it’s not adequate to meet the increasing demands for a Fresno State education from people in our region and throughout the state. Private support is crucial to our mission to serve students and our fundraising efforts will continue in earnest.

I will have spent the last two months, almost three now, “friend raising” for Fresno State, as I’ve prepared to move into the presidency. I’ll continue to do so throughout my presidency, and I believe this will set the stage for our fundraising efforts to come.

In addition to fundraising, we also must continue our efforts to improve our budget in order to provide access to students who want to attend Fresno State. Along with other CSU officials, I will work with our elected officials and all stakeholders on securing increased state and federal investment for student success.

Now, turning to the future, you might be wondering about my plans and priorities as your president. It’s okay if you’re not.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I've been on the job 19 days so I don't yet have a wide-ranging, comprehensive plan!! But seriously, it is premature for that to happen anyway.

But I do have many ideas, and some questions to ask you, and I think they can provide a framework as we work together in the coming weeks and months. They are questions I'll be asking often as I meet with individuals and groups on campus:

- So here's question one – Will you join me in honest communications? I really want to hear from the members of our campus family and the community at large. I'd like you to tell me what you love about Fresno State and I'd like you to tell me about your ideas, about how we can improve Fresno State. To make this communication easy, we have created a new Web feedback page where you can easily and anonymously enter your ideas. We'll compile the ideas and publish them so we can continue the dialogue on making Fresno State an even better university. The webpage is already ready for your feedback. Please go to www.fresnostate.edu/president/feedback and please share your thoughts.
- Then, will you please join me on Twitter to enhance our communication with each other as well as our students who are digital natives and live in a social media world? Several of you were tweeting last night about today, and I really appreciate that, I appreciate your support. So I'd like you to ask you to join me on social media. You're up for that?
- Will you join me in embracing the latest technology for 21st century teaching in order to effectively engage the complex, evolving learning styles of today's students? I am on record already supporting the idea of getting computer tablets into the hands of all our students for academic uses. Lynn told me he likes it. We need to explore the idea thoroughly with appropriate consultation, but I think we can make this happen. I believe students will enjoy a savings in textbook costs and find convenient and modern ways to collaborate with each other and faculty with their tablets. Also, will you join me in embracing the latest technological tools and cutting edge methods in our administrative processes and student services to enhance engagement and interactive dialogue across the university community? Now, I know for some of you technology is new. Lynn and I were talking about this the other day. Both of us share a lot of things in common, but one thing we were laughing the other day, is that our mothers both just bought tables within the last month and the good and not so good things about that. I just wanted you to know that I'm seeing that change within my family and so is Lynn.
- Will you join me in stretching ourselves to try new ways of doing business – and to be willing to discard those things that fail so that we can embrace those that serve us well?
- Another question, will you join me in building a new sense of well-being and community at Fresno State? And I agree with some of the prior comments that we have a wonderful community. I am committed to investing in our people and making our campus one of the best places anywhere to work – a community that is free from bullying, so no bullies anymore, and full of affirming, collegial relationships and where cultural competence is

embraced throughout the university. A community where it's not "me" or "them," but all of "us." As we continue to recruit and retain the most talented and diverse faculty and staff, we will continue to invest in all of you. I hope you will take advantage of professional development and wellness programs that will be rolled out in the near future. And I've asked Provost Andrew Hoff and Vice President Cynthia Matson to co-chair a committee that will work on this in the coming weeks and months.

- Will you join me as an ambassador for our University who's ready to tell the Fresno State story to those outside the university walls, and to ask them to help us in our work? To reconnect with old friends and to develop new ones in our city, state and nation; with our alumni; and I was just with the Alumni Board in Cambria over the weekend, a wonderful group of leaders, with business and industry partners who can invest in our students and programs for the valuable return of a highly educated workforce?
- Will you join me in raising awareness of the university and all the fabulous people and programs here? As the faculty and staff who have committed our careers to this university, we must be its biggest advocates and ambassadors. If we want people near and far to know about the good work of Fresno State, it really is up to us to tell them about that work.
- And last – and most important – will you join me in considering new programs – academic and administrative – that will provide innovations to help students learn, achieve and graduate ... in higher numbers and shorter time frame? Our Valley economy needs and our communities deserve our very, very best effort in this area.

Our focus must always be on student success. The best definition of that – and one that you'll hear often from me – is timely completion of coursework and graduation. We must, and I believe – we will, together – increase our graduation rate.

I know there's been much hard work and success in recent years in this area, and that this is a CSU-wide priority. Now I'd like to amp up our efforts. I don't pretend to have all the answers. I'm asking lots of questions and I have a lot of ideas, but what I'd like to explore with all of you, what are those things that we're doing that we can continue to do, what are the things that we are not doing that we could be do to really accelerate progress in this area. What ideas do you have? I really want to hear from you about this. I'm asking all of you to join me in making student success our primary focus.

I know this is possible because I participated in such successful efforts in the past and because I have great confidence in our campus community. I believe that we can do it together!

And as we help students succeed, will you join me in focusing, too, on faculty and staff success? That means providing and taking advantage of professional development programs of wellness programs, a commitment to development personal, professional and leadership development.

So I've asked a lot of questions today and in a minute hopefully you'll ask me a few questions. I'm ready to take on these challenges! I am thrilled to be here with you. I ask you will you join me as we shape the future of Fresno State and all of Central California?

I hope you will, because I believe that if we work together, we have the power to propel this great university to new heights.

And as I close today, I want to leave you with one glimpse into my presidency. Immediately after I was named the new president of Fresno State on May 22, I participated in a press teleconference to introduce myself to the community. I told the press that day, and I will say it again today: I intend to be the president for every student, every faculty member, every staff member, hundreds of thousands of alumni and friends. I want to make sure that everybody succeeds and thrives.

So one last question, will you join me – your first Fresno State president from this great Valley?

I know with your help, we can make Fresno State an even greater university for our children, our grandchildren and all the generations to come.

Thank you very much for joining me this morning.