

## **Acceptance Remarks from UNC President Margaret Spellings**

I can't wait to call North Carolina home. Thank you for the warm welcome.

I am looking forward to living here and learning more. I already love the state motto: "esse quam videri"...to be, rather than to seem. I love that. It issues a personal challenge for all of us...and for higher education.

As I look around the room at the portraits of so many great public servants ...I am truly humbled.

The state of North Carolina has long been known for its leadership in education and being asked to lead the UNC system is such an honor.

Having spent most of my career in public service, I know both how challenging it is...and how rewarding it is.

I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan where my parents met while my dad was pursuing a PhD in geology. His interests led us to Houston, Texas – where I grew up as the oldest of 4 girls.

I worked through high school and college at a local grocery store and lived at home while attending the University of Houston. In some ways, I was a non-traditional student before the term was invented.

All of my formal education has been in public schools. I very much relate to the experience of many of the students who attend college today – those who commute, work, have families and are concerned about costs and what that investment of time and money means to their future.

I graduated from the University of Houston with a degree in political science – which led me to Austin, Texas and many years of work in the Texas Legislature where I served members of both parties and two Republican Governors – one who became President of the United States. During my time in Austin, I also worked for the Texas Association of School Boards and for Austin Community College.

I have been happily engaged in public policy and improving education for three decades.

I believe, as I am sure you do, that there is no more important area of public policy than education. It is not an overstatement to say that education is not only fundamental to each individual North Carolinian, but to the success and future of this state, our country and to peace and stability in the world.

I believe this with every fiber of my being and that is why I will work tirelessly – with all of you – to ensure that each and every student in North Carolina has not only access to higher education but the skills and abilities to fully access the American Dream.

Today in our country, we are far short of achieving this – especially for our poor and minority communities. We must continue to excel at research, scholarship, public service, and innovation...and we must close the achievement gap at all levels. We can and must do both.

My time working for then-Governor and later President Bush afforded me enormous opportunities and fascinating challenges...

From working to develop, enact, and implement policy at the state and federal levels – things like No Child Left Behind – to running the Domestic Policy Council at the White House, where the job was to serve as an honest broker on issues like immigration reform and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in Africa.

After four years in the West Wing, President Bush asked me to serve as Secretary of Education. Running a large and multi-faceted Federal Agency is, of course, its own adventure.

One of the most rewarding things in my time as Secretary was driving an agenda with the creation of The Commission on the Future of Higher Education announced, by the way, in 2005 at UNC Charlotte. Some called it the Spellings Commission. It was bold and audacious. We started a conversation that had not taken place before and we delivered a seminal report on many of the issues still before us: affordability, access, completion, transparency, and productivity – all while being mindful of nurturing and protecting vigorous intellectual pursuit and academic freedom.

At the Department of Education, we were also called upon in ways we could have never imagined: Leading response efforts to Hurricane Katrina, the Virginia Tech shootings and the Financial Crisis of 2008 with its implications for student loans.

These experiences have taught me to tackle big, consequential challenges in straightforward, common-sense ways.

These experiences have taught me to stay focused, to use information and data to drive improvement and chart progress...to anticipate issues and be prepared for unexpected challenges.

These experiences have prepared me for the role I'm about to take.

We are in challenging times for higher education. While there are no easy answers or an obvious road map for the way ahead.... the opportunity before us is clear: To firmly establish the University of North Carolina as the finest university system in the country.

To accomplish this mission, we must be productive, accountable, agile, and transparent.

We must keep a firm grasp on our obligation to innovate...to remain the engine that drives North Carolina's growth...and assures such great quality of life here.

We must nurture and safeguard our relationships with all of our stakeholders, starting with the faculty. It is the members of our faculty, after all, who give our universities their intellectual vitality.

Elected officials, especially the General Assembly, policymakers, the business community...and the many public servants doing important work across our 17 campuses must all know they are valued and play a vital role in our success.

As we move forward, let us always remain grateful to this state and its taxpayers for establishing a proud and distinguished history of generously providing the resources required for excellence in higher education.

And, above all others...we must never forget the students and families of North Carolina. Every one of them. Our promise to them is the opportunity through hard work and rigorous study...to earn a college degree that is both affordable and meaningful. One that enhances their prospects and gives them real opportunity and a fulfilling and successful life.

That's our shared promise to our students. My promise to you is that I will give you my best. Every single day. I only ask that when I move to this beautiful state, you will help me to be successful. Together we can achieve so much...and provide unlimited opportunity for the people of North Carolina.

To the Board of Governors...the Search Committee ...Thank you for entrusting me with this high honor...and this big job.