I am pleased to be with you tonight at this, the last of the Presidents’ Dinners of my fourteen years at Georgia Tech. I am proud that Anne, Matt and Ann-Marie, and Eliza and Blaine could be here for this special occasion. Anne, Matt, and Eliza were last at such a gathering of Georgia Tech people when we celebrated my inauguration. I owe much to my family for allowing me to serve as president and for helping me along the way with their love and support.

Beginning July 1, I will walk up the steps of the Castle Building of the Smithsonian Institution to go to work, after fourteen years of walking up the steps of the Carnegie Building to go to work. This will be a strange feeling. To my right will be a carousel instead of a football stadium. The grounds will be covered by seventh and eight graders rather than a group of young adults intent on getting a college degree. A stuffed tiger will be featured as you enter my office, instead of a picture of a yellow jacket.

At five till the hour absolutely nothing will happen in the Castle Building, while back on campus the whistle will continue to blow. After a round of drinks nobody will sing the Smithsonian fight song since they don’t have one. And this fall, it is very unlikely that a bunch of excited and somewhat crazy students will show up in our front yard with a goalpost and proceed to cut it up into pieces for souvenirs, since the Smithsonian does not have a football team, at least not yet. Needless to say, both Anne and I will miss Georgia Tech in our daily routine and in a larger sense, because it has been such a significant part of our lives for such a long time.

There are different ways to look at what fourteen years means. For me it equates to 47 graduations and 51,000 graduates, most of whom shook my hand enthusiastically. Fifty-one thousand graduates, by the way, equates to more than 35 percent of the total number of graduates who have received a degree from Georgia Tech. Fourteen years also means fourteen football seasons or 168 games. More than half of these were home games, for which Anne and I hosted the President’s Suite, joining many friends to catch up on old times and cheer for the Yellow Jackets.

Fourteen years add up to a lot of memories. All my graduations were fun, but the first and the last were special. Our students provide a large stock of fond recollections, and I have enjoyed getting to know so many of these special folks. It was great to celebrate with them at athletic events, to be with them and their proud families at honors programs, and to join with them and their families at Freshman Convocation. And I was blessed to be able to work with many outstanding student body leaders and SGA officers. They were a resource throughout my tenure.

The many building projects of the last fourteen years were often painful to bring to fruition, but the positive part is to see them in use. I am thinking of the Olympic residence halls, Tech Square, the Campus Recreation Center, the Biotechnology Complex, the Student Center Commons, and our child care center. These facilities are all about people and helping them develop their potential.
Joyful celebrations highlighted the past fourteen years, including my inauguration, the successful conclusion of the Campaign for Georgia Tech, the opening of the renovated Bobby Dodd Stadium, and the recent ice cream social the students held in honor of Anne and myself. There were somber and meaningful celebrations as well. Among these were events to mourn the tragedies of 9/11 and the shootings at Virginia Tech, as well as “When the Whistle Blows,” our annual ceremony of remembrance for those who passed away while active at Tech. A campus is one of the few places that bring people together in times of sadness and times of joy, and Georgia Tech serves this role well.

Many fun moments over the past fourteen years revolved around athletics. For example, having people call me for tickets to football games after nobody called in my first year when we went 1 and 10. Upsetting Auburn before a sold out crowd when we opened our renovated stadium. Watching Derek Mills and Derrick Adkins win gold medals in the 1996 Olympics, being in O’Keefe Gym when our women’s volleyball team won the ACC, and almost having a heart attack when we beat the UGA football team 51 to 48 in overtime in 1999. Two particularly special times were watching our women’s tennis team win our first NCAA national championship in Athens, and following our men’s basketball team to the championship game in 2004. There are many others I will cherish, but it really comes down to the opportunity to have known so many really fine student athletes and their terrific coaches.

Fourteen years of memories certainly include academic accomplishments that make us proud. Our improvement in the rankings, increasing the number of faculty in the National Academies from 12 to 30, growing from five national centers of excellence to 21, and seeing our new biomedical engineering program go from nonexistent to ranked second in the nation. But more than this are the memories made in meeting new faculty at the reception that Anne and I held at the President’s Home each year to welcome them to campus. And then later, to see these faculty achieve tenure, win awards, and become great teachers and researchers was rewarding.

Our fourteen years also include memorable moments working with our great alumni, the Alumni Association and the Georgia Tech Foundation. We are here tonight to celebrate Roll Call and alumni giving, and what it means to Georgia Tech. Think about this: In my fourteen years, Roll Call contributions have totaled over $99 million. Reunion classes have contributed an overall total of almost $175 million, and their giving specifically for class projects has reached almost $10 million. Class projects have helped us build scholarship programs, improve the library, beautify campus, create recreational facilities for students, restore classic landmarks like the stained glass windows in Brittain Dining Hall, support improved teaching, and launch our Eco Commons sustainability initiative.

Roll Call and reunion-class giving really helps to make Georgia Tech a great institution. Think about the opportunities that would have been missed if we had not had this support. Think about a lesser Georgia Tech than we have today if we had not had this support.

In closing, I want to express my profound gratitude to each one of you and all of our alumni for what you have done for Georgia Tech and her faculty and students. Many people have said positive things about what “Wayne Clough did,” but you can see that Wayne Clough could have done little without the very considerable help he received. Thanks to you, Georgia Tech is well
positioned, strong, and on the move, and I believe that this forward momentum will carry the Institute through the coming months of transition into the next era under a new president. I encourage you to continue your support of Georgia Tech during the transition period and for the next president. My good wishes to all of you and your families for the future.