June 8, 2009—Thank you, Nicolette. It's great to be here tonight and talk with you and learn about the history of Georgia Tech and the role all of you have played in that history. Val and I have now been here in Atlanta for approximately two months and several of you have asked me how we're adapting—the answer is quite well although it is a bit of a change. Val and I have been married for 35 years and we have spent most of that time in places like Manhattan Kansas, College Station, Texas, Troy, New York and Boulder Colorado and now we live in mid-town Atlanta, the real centerpiece for the Southeastern U.S. We're very excited to be here and to have the opportunity to work with many of you.

We have a lot of things to be proud about, with Georgia Tech particularly things related to diversity and underrepresented minorities. We’re the largest producer of African American engineers, and Hispanic engineers in the country, and that's something of which we can all be very proud.

While we've made progress in a number of areas, we still have a great deal of work to do. We have in the past 10 years gone from 30% of our graduates who were students of color (i.e. Asian, Black, Hispanic and Native American) to 40%. The percentages of our student population who are Asian or Hispanic have increased to 27% and 5% respectively. And while we have slightly more Black students on campus compared to 10 years ago, the actual percentage has decreased from 9% to 6% due to the fact that our overall enrollment has increased from 14,075 in Fall 2000 to 19,413 last fall.

I frequently get asked a question 'what do I mean when I talk about diversity?' I like to think about diversity from four different perspectives. There are the ones that always come to people's minds, the issues of gender and ethnicity, but there is also intellectual and geographic diversity. All four of those types of diversity are important for essentially the same reason.

Dr. William Wulf, past president of the National Academy for Engineering drove home the importance of diversity in a lecture I had the privilege of hearing several years ago. One of the things he said was that aside from the social, moral and ethical rationale for having a diverse workforce or a diverse group in any organization, it just makes good sense. Basically, his point was that if you don’t have a diverse group that you’re working with then you have designs that are never thought of, ideas that are never imagined, and dreams never dreamed. It really does take a diverse group of people to come up with the best ideas and the best designs. We see that over and over. That in and of itself is an excellent justification for diversity, aside from the fact that it is just the right thing to do and it makes us better people. It makes our society a better society.

I look forward to working with all of you. We face a number of challenges have a great deal of work ahead of us, but I am confident that working together, we can make significant progress. Clearly there are some things that have been tried at other places that have been successful in terms of increasing diversity and I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that Georgia Tech retains its national leadership position with respect to diversity.

Thank you.