Chairman Wilkins, let me first offer to you on behalf of the Clemson University Faculty a very special thanks for the hard work you have done as Board Chair. We are most grateful for your leadership. Also, I want to acknowledge that many of my comments echo statements made today by both Chairman Wilkins and President Clements.

In May I spoke to the University Faculty at the end of semester faculty meeting. I told them that I was honored to represent such a world class group of dedicated teachers and scholars. I reminded the faculty that, together with our staff and students and administration and our Board of Trustees, we and our predecessors have created a place that is unique on planet Earth. A place that promises a life worth living and it’s built upon honor, service, and integrity. A special place where lives are changed and futures are envisioned. It’s a place where careers emerge, and often, new families begin. This hallowed ground that we call a High Seminary was built in order to better our economy, our quality of life, and to support the citizens of our state.

Clemson’s core mission is about students and teachers, and it’s also about staff, and it’s about our administration and our Board, and it’s about our alumni and about parents who nurture the next generation. It’s about our shared experiences and our shared values. We are all mutually dependent on each other to preserve our most sacred traditions, to create new traditions, and to build the Clemson of the future.

Yes, we all depend on each other. And I feel we each have a covenant with the citizens of our state. This is not always spoken out loud, but the students, the faculty and staff, the administration and the Board each have a covenant with our state. Here are some of the terms as I see them:
Our faculty have a covenant to provide the highest quality education, to generate new knowledge, and to instill in our students the wisdom to lead. Our duty is to be honest brokers, to teach our students how to think, not what to think. Our duty is to inspire, to search for objective truth, to embody academic integrity. For integrity is our stock and trade. And the faculty have a duty to prepare our students for wise leadership. When Harvey Gantt spoke at a recent convocation, he said that our job as teachers is to make our students uncomfortable. Yes, I want my students to be uncomfortable… uncomfortable that the great challenges of our society desperately require long term and comprehensive solutions.

Our students have a covenant. Theirs is to earn their Clemson degree, and to earn it based on hard work and integrity. And they must prepare to lead the next generation. I sometimes lament to my students that their duty will be to fix the great problems of society, which my generation now hands to them.

University administration also has an important covenant with our citizens. We depend on our administration to be good stewards of our resources and to lead us in new and exciting directions. We expect collaborative leadership designed to deliver the highest quality of education to the citizens of our state. Our administration has a covenant to keep a Clemson education affordable… to actively manage the costs while simultaneously maximizing education quality and excellence.

The Board of Trustees also has a covenant with the citizens of our state. From that first meeting under an oak tree by Fort Hill, the Board’s covenant has been to turn Thomas Greene Clemson’s vision of a high seminary of learning into reality. And today the Board is charged to maintain the reality of that vision. And we all depend on you. We depend on you to set policy and approve budgets, and to apply your collective wisdom to help us address the great challenges of our society. In my 18 years here, I’ve learned some things about those of you who take on the great responsibility of Board membership. I know you are proven leaders, I know you have shown great bravery in your leadership, and I know that each of you love this institution with all of your heart.
And I also know that while the Board and the Faculty may disagree at times, our goals are the same. We are all absolutely dedicated to maintaining and nourishing this great institution.

I now realize that you, the Trustees, are the ultimate guardians of the Clemson ideals. We rely on you to be the protector of our academic integrity. And we rely on you to help us envision and secure a future where the Clemson experience will be preserved for our children, and our children’s children, and so on down the ages.

Several years ago, our leaders asked the Clemson Faculty to stand and deliver. And we did. We are a Top 20 institution with a Top 20 student body, and staff and administration and Board of Trustees. But that is only part of the story. We are much more than Top 20. If you consider our academic performance given our limited endowment and state support, Clemson University moves above most of those schools ahead of us in the rankings. Those efficiency numbers are proof positive of success in our joint covenant to provide the highest quality of affordable education to our citizens. I pit the quality of a Clemson education and the operational efficiency of our faculty, staff and administration against most any institution in the world.

The primary university mission is teaching, research and public service, but we also have a covenant to be the driver of economic development for South Carolina. However, there are areas of our mission where we have much work yet to do. Minorities and persons of color comprise a significant proportion of our state population, but remain a small, underrepresented percentage of students and faculty at Clemson. South Carolina’s African American communities, for example, often have lower rates of education, and higher rates of crime, disease, poverty, mortality, and dependence on public assistance. We as leaders, have a covenant to make Clemson University the engine of economic mobility in South Carolina, to raise our state-wide standard of living so more of us share the good life and contribute to statewide economic prosperity.
In the past, a large segment of our population was actively and purposefully disenfranchised in South Carolina, and they remain so today in many ways. Despite a history of slavery and suffering, they now show us that in the wake of the horrible tragedy at Mother Emmanuel AME Church, love and forgiveness conquers racism and hate. Seeing the community come together to reject violence and promote the power of love, I have never been more proud to be a South Carolinian.

And I am also proud of the actions of our Board and our President to help push for removal some of the statewide symbols that are used by others to define us and to diminish us. And I am especially proud of the leadership by the Board in this room today.

As we build the future of Clemson University, we must find ways to create a campus climate that better embodies a message of hope for a life worth living, a climate that encourages and welcomes South Carolinians of all faiths, of all circumstances, and of all colors. We know there are no easy solutions. And for the youth in our most impoverished areas with more concrete expectations of a Clemson education, a good job, and financial independence, there will be a viable alternative to a future of poverty, crime, disease and dependence. This realistic alternative future can produce a large and positive effect on our economy statewide. A welcoming, future-oriented, and forward-facing Clemson can surely be the rising tide that lifts all boats in South Carolina.

For example, I co-chair a committee designing an entire month of activities to enhance the connections between campus and community. This celebration of diversity and inclusiveness includes cultural events, music, food, and workshops for faculty and students to help facilitate difficult dialogues in classroom settings.

So, working together, we will find the solutions because we are Clemson, and we are the premier land-grant high seminary of the south and beyond. And as we face the challenges of the future, we can stand united by the Clemson ideals of integrity, honor, and service to all the citizens of our state. Mr. Chairman…that concludes my report.