Good afternoon, welcome and thank you so much. The real reason I wanted to be here this afternoon is - I think there was a song from my era that said that ‘I’ve been lonely too long.’

You see, my wife and I live on campus, the heart of campus, and it is a pretty special treat at this stage in my life to return to a college campus. But, this summer when everybody left, it got much too quiet here and we sort of feel lonely. So, being here with you today, knowing that our students are going to be returning in a few weeks and we have the possibility of opening those big blue doors that you saw in the video for another generation of Kentucky’s best and brightest, is what brings honor to what we do and the work that all of us do as a team at the University of Kentucky.

This is a truly remarkable place and it is remarkable because of the dreams that come true here. You heard Steven tell you about the dream that he is realizing, certainly saw the vignettes on the video of students who’s dreams are coming true and after lunch today you are going to hear from recent graduates and you’ll hear their stories. It’s these lives of meaning, purpose and promise that I hear about every day when I travel the state, when I travel the country and when I travel the world. You hear about the differences that our graduates are making because of the tools that they gathered while they were with us at the University of Kentucky.

I made a sneak visit to this campus when I was a candidate, nobody knew who I was. My wife and I walked here for a day and a half. If I could sum up what we learned in that day and a half which drew us to the University of Kentucky, and that is we are a student’s first university. And I see that every day I am here.

I tell students that are considering the University of Kentucky how unique we are. We have an array of disciplines that you can’t find at few places in this country and nowhere in this state. We have an array of programs that comes with being a flagship, top research land grant university that you just can’t find anywhere else.

A student at the University of Kentucky can walk 10 minutes in any direction and be working with a world class poet, a world class clinician, a world class scientist, a world class performing artist. It’s all here at the University of Kentucky at a time when you are going to have to go out reinvent and create your jobs of the future more than once. You need the opportunity to have that inner disciplinary exposure. It’s all here at the University of Kentucky.

Throughout my travels as I have told you, I have met so many people who live lives of meaning and purpose. And when I ask them how their souls were enriched to be able to do what they do because it’s their heart of values that take them into the communities where they live to do that work, they tell me that it all started here at the University of Kentucky not just in the classroom, but through the incredible array of experiences that are available from internships and co-ops, and yes the 450 student organizations that we have on this campus.

We’re a big place, but it becomes very small, very quickly when you develop that nucleus of friends with whom you learn to work as a team, who serve as your mentors, and I can also tell you that they will be your support network through life. You will develop relationships here that will serve you through life.
Last year we broke ground on our 600 bed residence hall and that is just phase one of what we are going to do here. In October, our board of trustees will receive our second phase of that plan which will be the immediate start of 2000 additional beds. And in the next five years we will probably have about 9000 beds on this campus. We are going to revolutionize the living learning experience for students and give you the twenty first century facilities in which to learn.

Let me assure you, you can go anywhere you want and you will not find a better twenty first century faculty. They’ve focused on undergraduate education. The first ninety days I was here I listened, I got others to listen, and said we are doing remarkable things here but where should we focus over this next year and the years that come after? And everybody agreed that we have this incredible array of assets, we have reformed our undergraduate curriculum, but we still have things we can do to improve the experience of our undergraduate students. That’s what you like to see at a university. People are never satisfied with great; they want to be even better, and that is what you find here at the University of Kentucky.

So we’ve expanded our scholarship programs, expanded our honors experiences, and are developing even more living learning communities so that you can learn in unique ways that prepare you for the twenty first century.

University of Kentucky is a passport to incredible possibilities. When I first arrived here a year ago, I was convinced that I had to travel to China. There were several programs we had been working on long before I arrived that were reaching a stage such that my presence would be helpful in advancing them to the next level. What an experience.

First of all we have dozens of experienced student studying abroad there. On the way there I read several books in preparation while en route. I read one book called China Airport, how China is trying to capture the aviation industry. And it reminded me again how we are best preparing students at the University of Kentucky. Because coincidentally, the jet I flew over on was described in the book as having designers from Russia, wing engineers from China, and switching operations equipment designed in Wichita, in the United States. And that students are going to have to be prepared to collaborate and work in teams at levels never thought of before; to be able to communicate with people in more places, to do more things to succeed.

And I found when I visited China that we have wonderful study away programs available there. One young lady I met had worked with LexMark here in Lexington, but as part of their international experience would be working with their companies in China over the summer. And to see our students who can move seamlessly and with ease through a different culture and language and country, I know that they are prepared for that twenty first century generation.

So we hope to see you here at the University of Kentucky. It would be our honor to open that blue door for you, to give you that passport of possibilities when you leave. And let me assure you we will do everything we can to prepare you for that life of meaning and purpose that you are going to hear about this afternoon that we having been serving this state through our Kentucky promise for over a hundred and fifty years to ensure that the next generations’ life and world is even brighter than those that came before it.

Thank you again and enjoy your afternoon at the University of Kentucky.