Remarks provided at the Black Hills State University Presidential Inauguration by Dr. Tom Jackson, Jr., the 10th President, November 15, 2015. FINAL

Acknowledgements

There was a moment a few months back where I was asked who could introduce me during the inauguration. Dr. Charlie Fey is the person who hired me not only once, but twice. He is a person who brought me into his organization fresh out of graduate school and coached me and mentored me into the professional I became. He is the person who taught me how to give back to a profession; and taught me the importance of higher education, balance, and the value of passion in our work. Next to Bud Neslin and my sister (both who are sitting up front), there are no other persons who have been with me longer. Charlie, thank you for your kind words and dear friendship.

Introduction and Honor

My dearest family, friends, and colleagues; Dr. Warner and the Board of Regents; our distinguished faculty and staff of B-H; students, alumni, and proud citizens – good afternoon and thank you sincerely for entrusting one of the greatest privileges on this Earth to me, the opportunity to serve as the 10th president at Black Hills State University.

Being a university president is an honor. Every day I wake up and have the chance to walk with the smartest people, the kindest people, the most ambitious people, and the most humble people on the planet. I get to work with scientists, and future scientists; teachers, and future teachers; business leaders, and future business leaders; and artists in all fields. It is the noblest of all professions – higher education.

Now, each day, every hour, a child is born. As all parents will attest, what happens first after your new child is born? What do you check for? Fingers and toes. After checking the fingers and toes, and finding a quiet moment…we begin to wonder. We dream. We hope. We wonder….What will my son or daughter become in life? Will they find happiness? Is jail in their future? Who will be their partner in life? Will they stay healthy? And for many, will they go to college? As Charlie Fey said earlier – we are in the dream business. We dream of a society that supports all its neighbors. We dream of a planet in balance with all of its inhabitants. We dream of cures for ailments, such as AIDS and Alzheimer’s. We dream of abundant water, air, and fuel. We also dream of happiness – and what it may look like.

Leading a university one sees all these dreams. The President carries these dreams on their shoulders. My shoulders. Our shoulders. The people here today know the value and importance of our work. The importance of creating an educated citizenry focused on serving for the greater good. This is why I am honored to serve as your president and sincerely thank you for trusting me to serve you the best way I know how. Now…
The Spirit of the Hills

I was asked very early did I want an inauguration. My answer, as most here would expect me to say was, “not really.” Honestly, I would have been happy with a barbecue and a community street party. Then, after discussing it with our leadership team we were convinced we needed one to raise awareness for more scholarships, our history, and the importance of education. We settled on the theme, “The Spirit of the Hills” so this event could be about you.

The Black Hills embody more than just natural beauty. The Hills speak to you. The Hills shares its joys and its sorrows with you. It greets us daily with hope and enables each of us to dream. It isn’t about seeing the hills – it is about feeling, truly feeling the spirit of the hills.

I asked colleagues to describe the hills to me. What was said included the following:

1. It is a place to rejuvenate, be centered, and emerge with new ideas and possibilities.
2. It is a place that calls out the sense of adventure in all of us.
3. It is a mystical and magical force.
4. It is a spirit that reveals itself as a majestic sunrise to the sound of the wind through the aspen and pine trees. It also reveals itself with the unexpected sighting of wildlife. Lastly, #5.
5. The spirit of the hills shows itself in the people that call it home. Our alumni and neighbors. Our leaders and mentors. Our teachers and businesses. Our clergy and parents. The stories we share between each other adds to the majesty of the hills. We are truly in a special place.

According to Professor Haivala, author of the Friendly College: The First 100 years, in 1877 Spearfish was an outpost at the edge of the Black Hills. The town had about 200 log cabins, three small stores, and a sawmill. There were no churches or schools… and remember, as Dr. Wolff has already stated, South Dakota was not yet a state until 1889. Still there were people -- People that dreamt of having a school to educate the region. That dream became our reality as Spearfish Normal School.

In 1883 the first building was constructed for $4,591. The original 40 acres cost roughly $20 an acre, or $800. The annual appropriation from the territory was $2,000 to run the school. Today it is substantially more.

Each of the presidents over the years did not take this position to advance themselves. They took this position to help provide education to others and to help make B-H great. Today there are five surviving presidents of B-H: Dr. Gilbert Hause, Dr. Clifford Trump, Dr. Tom Flickema, Dr. Kay Schallenkamp, and myself.

Each president, as does this community, stands on the success of the other leaders in this community --- and on this campus. I squarely stand on the shoulders of Dr. Kay Schallenkamp and Dr. Tom Flickema, both who led this university with integrity, honor, and distinction. If the two of you would both stand as I ask all of us to please join me in acknowledging your commitment to the Black Hills and BHSU.
The Four I’s (sort of…): Inspiration, Engagement, Innovation, and Imagination.

Many of you have asked me about my vision of B-H. I have tended to respond by saying it is so many things to so many people. But the truth is I always had several pictures in my mind. At first I saw B-H as an international honors university where anything was possible. I still do. I also saw it as a place where, in the spirit of the hills, one could find inspiration, engagement, innovation, and imagination. So, allow me to share some thoughts on these four themes as we move forward.

Inspiration

The first is “Inspiration.” For the past five months I have heard many of you talk about our most strategic partners and initiatives. These include the Sanford Underground Research Facility, the University Center-Rapid City, the local community, and the Lakota people. I am not going to talk specifically about Sanford or the UCRC today, but allow me to say a few words about our relationship to the Lakota people.

Sometimes universities and leaders must do things because it simply is the right thing to do. Working deliberately to advance educational opportunities for the American Indian is part of our unique mission at B-H. The spirit of the hills does not belong to us. We are allowed to hear it, feel it, and share it. Its messages say to us we are all Earth’s children and to the Lakota people, this may be best articulated through the sacred medicine wheel displayed on our university seal. The sacred medicine wheel brings religious beliefs into one symbol, the circle, which stands for the Great Spirit who has no beginning and no end. The four directions are depicted by the colors: Black (for the West and fall and old age); Red (for North and winter and death); White (for East and spring which is rich with new beginnings and the rising sun); and Yellow (for South and summer, growth, and maturity).

Every day B-H, and the local community live the values of the Lakota people. Our generosity, respect, bravery, and wisdom are displayed through our community every day. We also see the impact of the elements in the Hills through water, fire, air, and earth.

Today we are forging new alliances with our neighbors to further advance opportunities for all citizens of this region. Our duty at B-H remains to help protect the elements while demonstrating daily our values. Working collaboratively to inspire education at any level for the American Indian remains our commitment.

Engagement

Next, as the second theme, allow me to talk about “Engagement.”

My late Grandmother used to say that one could learn a lot from a story. She was an amazing storyteller, and sitting and listening to her I learned many things about life and work. I also learned a great deal about selfless service.
Veterans distinguish themselves in many ways, and to each in this room today, we can think of someone, someone such as a parent or grandparent, who has served. These legacies have provided so much more than we often give credit. To many, the veteran is simply someone who takes orders and follows rules. It really isn’t that way. A veteran is the most patriotic and committed person you will ever meet. He or she is a person that stands for something often greater than themselves – service, patriotism, loyalty, honor, integrity, and intelligence. He or she is a person who would give their life for their buddy AND a country. I know. I am one.

A couple of years ago Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Louisiana and Texas coasts. It was devastating to those communities. As an officer in the Texas State Guard, who was also a sitting Vice President, I was deployed to help provide security for the shelters in Texas. These shelters, if you recall, were often sports complexes or churches where evacuees could come and live until the aftermath. These people were just like you and me. One day they had homes, cars, and some cash. The next day all that they owned either sat in a trunk of a car or in a Walmart bag underneath a 3x6 foot cot. Imagine…a 3x6 foot cot is your new home and all your belongings now fit underneath it. Whether they had $1.00 or $10,000 in the bank, they couldn’t access it because the systems were down.

While deployed I used this time to walk around and talk to people in the shelter. Seeing the uniform brought a sense of safety to people. They knew it wouldn’t be great, but they would be taken care of. They were safe. One gentleman told me a story that I will never forget — and it is the longest story I have to share with you today. He talked about the day he was enjoying his family in their home and how they carefully secured their home and braced for the hurricane. He talked about how he was relieved the day after — only to be shocked when the levy breached.

Water was pouring into his home. He talked about how he and his wife raced to gather their two children because there was now no way to escape. He prayed and hoped the water would stop rising. It didn’t.

He moved his family to the attic to get above the water. It kept rising. He kicked out the vents to climb to the roof to get above the water. The water kept coming.

He was grabbing the gutter with one arm and holding his spouse and children with the other. Using all the strength God would give him, he held on. But the water would not stop. He was trying to survive — trying desperately to survive. Nobody in the family could swim, and it probably wouldn’t have mattered given how fast the water was moving.

As the water kept pushing he and his wife realized he no longer had the strength to save all his family. He had to let someone go. His wife floated away. As her arms flared in all attempts to swim and live, he clutched his children with his remaining strength, praying for life. As the water eventually slowed he found the strength to hold on. He and his children were later saved by the Coast Guard.

You know, all of us here today make a lot of decisions every day. What to fund. What to teach. Who to hire. What to purchase. Truth is, these decisions seem to pale in comparison to deciding who lives, or whether a spouse or a child lives.
To those individuals devastated by Katrina, many were saved by people willing to put the individual’s life ahead of their own. There is a saying that you can learn a lot about a person and how they care for an aging pet. Some would say that how you care for that aging pet is an indication for how one might care for an aging person. Well, I think we can learn a lot from how our societies, or our campuses, show their care for a veteran. Those actions say a great deal about us and our values. Now…

I am a very proud veteran. I believe strongly that we should do all we can for those individuals that are seeking an education after serving their country. There may be others in this room who have proudly served in our armed forces. If you ever have served, or have a close family member that has served, please stand (if able) to be recognized.

Black Hills State University is the absolute best at serving veterans in the state of South Dakota. There is certainly more we can do and we will continue to find ways to demonstrate our commitment to this loyal group.

Innovation

Now “Innovation.” Last week I had the pleasure of joining Ella and Junior Schloe for breakfast. During the conversation Junior shared some of his many experiences and places of residence. Leadville, CO and flying. Spearfish…and, working for the Homestake Mine. He told the story of years before how many would line up for the $5.00/day jobs in the mine, because that was outstanding pay during that time. We also talked about their upcoming international trip.

Recalling what the mine was then and what it is now is a testament of innovation. Nobody would have ever thought that one day that mine would become a world-renown research facility and underground classroom. 40 years ago the Schloe’s didn’t envision traveling the world either. Few would have expected even a decade ago that we would have students playing interactive games with someone from South Korea or Croatia. This world we now live in is integrated. Providing opportunities for our students to gain global competencies, research skills, and a way of thinking to believe anything is possible is what we must continue to do to stretch our innovative spirits.

How many people here today have traveled internationally? One of the nicest feelings in international travel is seeing that friendly face, that host, as you walk out from customs or baggage. When you see that welcoming face you know you have help to maneuver the language, the culture, or the driving. For our international students coming to the United States, that friendly face, that host, is BHSU.

Nearly all in this room are descendants of immigrants to this country. For immigrant students, Dr. Eunyoung Kim in her ACPA article suggests the college education is regarded as a means not only to become a productive citizen in today’s globalized society, but also to become culturally competent in the American way of life. Interestingly, in many respects, today those are the same reasons we site for our children attending college. At B-H, I picture a place where not only international students learn, but a place our domestic students learn international competencies, so they, too, can be competitive throughout the world.
Will all of our international students, and all those students that have ever traveled internationally, please stand to be acknowledged.

**Imagination**

Finally, allow me to talk about the 4th theme -- “imagination.” B-H is a place where anything is possible. It embodies the “can-do” spirit that says if we want to achieve something – we will. It is a special place filled with caring and motivated faculty, staff, alumni, and students. Pound for pound, person for person I would place our faculty, staff, and students beside any on the planet --- for their “can-do” spirit.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have these pictures in my mind I hope to share with you. These are pictures of a campus, and a place, that will continue to flourish the next hundred years because this community, all of you, expect nothing less.

I have this picture in my mind where B-H is perceived as being the absolute best in the region at teacher preparation. I have asked hundreds of people what they think about when I mention BHSU. Their answer – teachers! In South Dakota there are 1,800 physicians, 1,400 attorneys, 1,000 engineers, and 440 dentists – all taught and inspired by who? Teachers. We are better than most at preparing teachers to motivate and inspire those we care most about inside the classroom – our children. I see a place where we welcome this strength. Anyone who ever saw themselves in this noble profession would come to B-H to earn their degree because of our strong reputation.

I have this picture in my mind that B-H will be regarded as the place where students come because of our outstanding academic quality in the sciences, business, and arts. One of our more popular degrees is biology. What do many use that degree for upon graduation? Many enter the health care fields. B-H is the cultural and intellectual center for the Black Hills, and quite possibly West River. Our theater, music, and photography…and the faculty who lead these and other areas are above reproach. But the big secret is our business program. Imagine a program where students from this region could come knowing it is the best in the world. A program better than nearly all others in the world. That program is our business program, one of the top five percent on the planet. Yes, you heard me correctly…on this earth…top 5%.

I also have this picture in my mind where older returning students, honors students, and all other students find enormous support and engagement from B-H. Some of you already know the numbers: 1,200 students attending the University Center in Rapid City. The largest number of veterans of any university in South Dakota. A rapidly growing international program that boasts of 98% retention of all international students since 2007. And, a growing honors program.

Lastly, I have this picture in my mind where the community and all of its visitors share in the “can-do” spirit of Black Hills State University. We have the most attractive and arguably most historic surroundings in the state. Let’s show our B-H pride and show-off our community and our outstanding university.
Will all the students and alumni that came to B-H believing in our faculty and our ability to deliver on our outstanding academic programs please stand to be recognized. All students and alumni please stand.

Closing

In closing I would like to talk about my family and share with you our decision to join this wonderful community. When we were offered this opportunity to come to Spearfish we discussed this frequently at our home in Louisville. We looked at weather. We looked at how far the airport was from Spearfish. We also looked carefully at the town, the schools, the skatepark, and waterpark. That skate park, and the schools, were critical to move our two young kids to Spearfish.

Later my pretty cool family will be acknowledged. But right now let me say that the kindness of each of you in welcoming us ---- and the kindness of both the middle school and high school students, counselors and principals convinced us that we belong in Spearfish.

- The spirit of the hills is strong.
- The spirit of the hills is about giving.
- The spirit of the hills is about humanitarianism.
- The spirit of the hills is about kindness. And,
- The spirit of the hills is about believing.

We felt those words and are here because we believe -- we believe in the people of the Black Hills. We believe this is a wonderful place with wonderful and kind people. We believe we are at an amazing university that has and will do more amazing things in the future.

The spirit of the hills is all of us….and it allows us to believe anything is possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve you as the 10th president of Black Hills State University. I will do my part to lead with honor, integrity, and a genuine commitment to this special place. Thank you.

Dr. Tom Jackson, Jr. is the 10th President at Black Hills State University. He may be contacted at tom.jackson@bhsu.edu.