President’s Speech

Good morning! I’m so happy to see you all here today.

I am also delighted to be with you in this historic auditorium. It was built in 1915 and named in 1940 after one of Eastern’s highly influential presidents, Dr. Noah Showalter.

There are so many people I want to thank and recognize for their role in making today a reality. JoAnn Kauffman, Board Chair, and the Eastern Washington University Board of Trustees: thank you for your support and confidence in me. I am so honored to serve as Eastern’s 26th president.

I want also to recognize my colleague presidents who have joined us here today. I very much appreciate your collegiality and support.

I thank my husband Jeffrey who has accompanied me on this wonderful journey to eastern Washington. Also thank you to friends, family, and former colleagues for traveling here today from Oregon, California and Louisiana. Thank you all so much. I’m very grateful for your friendship.

I also deeply appreciate George Pernsteiner for being here. I am so grateful to him for his kind words as well as his wisdom and counsel through the years.

I am also thankful to the Eastern faculty, students, and staff as well as the community members who have warmly welcomed me to this great university and to this beautiful part of the country. And I must mention my two predecessors, former presidents Rodolfo Arévalo and Steve Jordan. They can’t be here today, but they did so much to help Eastern Washington University become the remarkable place it is today, and they have been so welcoming to me since I was named president.
Thanks also to the many people who helped to organize and plan this investiture. They’ve been working since last fall to make today a success. Thank you all.

I am thrilled to be here. But today’s event truly isn’t about me. This is a celebration of Eastern Washington University. It’s a recognition of our rich history—and, with the pageantry and academic robes, a recognition of the historic roots of universities dating back to the Middle Ages.

Eastern’s own proud history goes back to 1882 when Benjamin Cheney invested in creating a normal school near a train depot so students could get off the train and walk up the hill to attain a higher education degree. Access was important to him—and has remained important as the institution has grown.

Commitment to access includes reaching out to individual students, to families and communities—to help students find a pathway to the university, to help them overcome the challenges that have historically blocked so many people from attaining their educational goals.

One of our current students tells her personal story. “For six generations,” she says, “my family had a cycle of quitting high school and working in the same business until the day they died. One day my teacher told me to apply for the EWU Honors Program. Three days before my high school graduation, I was told I had made it into the program and received a scholarship. Now I have the opportunity to break the family cycle and experience miracles.”

For over 130 years, Eastern has helped make miracles happen. From best-selling author Jess Walter to ESPN host Colin Cowherd to thousands of business leaders, artists, engineers, teachers, health care professionals, scientists—productive citizens who give back to their communities every day because Eastern provided them a path to success.
Today’s event is a celebration of our past successes. It’s also a celebration of our present and the promise of our future. Eastern Washington University is poised to become even stronger, even more of a critical asset to our region and our state, even more of a treasure for a wide diversity of students.

Our future is embedded in the qualities that we have always valued: commitment to student success and learning, to academic quality and rigor. We’re committed to collaboration—on our campuses, among disciplines and areas of the university, and in our communities. We’re committed to helping our students be engaged and productive citizens as well as thoughtful individuals who solve problems and think creatively, people who thrive in a world that may be quite different from the world we know today.

We’re committed to diversity, to a deep respect and support for diversity of ethnicity, background, experience, ideas, and personal goals. Eastern Washington is our home; we are a regional university in a very profound sense. But we reflect the variety and multiplicity of the world. Just last fall, our incoming students came to us from over 30 states and 14 countries. Our faculty and staff come from all over the world. Over 75,000 EWU alumni live in the United States, but they also live in 63 countries—from Argentina and Armenia to Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

One current Eastern student who is also an Air Force veteran came to EWU on the recommendation of one of her squadron mates in Germany. Four years later, she’s graduating with an honors degree in Biology, a published paper, and two major research projects on disease vectors. She’s starting a doctoral program in the fall.

As this first year of my presidency races toward June, allow me to share a vision for our next years together. We will continue to expand opportunities for personal transformation through excellence in learning. We will anticipate and be responsive to dramatically shifting
environments and changing needs of our students. We will continue to transform ourselves in order to effectively transform others.

To that end, we will work together as a campus and a region to ensure that, in our strategies for growth and development, we seize opportunities and anticipate the challenges facing us.

Eastern already provides rigorous, high quality academic programs. We pride ourselves on supporting personalized approaches, research and real-life experiences that help keep students engaged—and help prepare them for life after graduation. But that life after graduation is changing every day. Our curriculum has to be responsive and forward thinking. As the economic and social realities around us change, as our students change, our academic offerings and modes of delivery must and will reflect and anticipate those changes.

As we move forward, we will continue developing a powerful general education program that reflects collaboration across disciplines and prepares students for an unpredictable world. I commend everyone who has been working so hard on Critical Foundations and the first-year experience. That work will continue—and will continue to be innovative, intellectually rigorous, and forward thinking.

We will transform and modernize student advising. Again, I commend the work that has already been done on this initiative. Academic advising can no longer be a process in which a student checks in once a year before signing up for classes. Eastern has the opportunity to be a national leader in advising for the whole student, providing guidance that is functional, accessible, and incredibly valuable for the many types of students, the many needs of students today and into the future.

We will continue working to ensure that Eastern offers a welcoming, supportive environment that attracts and supports diverse students, faculty, and staff, campuses that present unprecedented opportunities to learn creatively, to grow professionally, and to work collaboratively.
We must provide a dynamic environment for faculty and staff, enhanced opportunities to share ideas, to learn together, to work together. Initial planning for a faculty learning commons, a modern approach to faculty support, has been thoughtful and highly innovative. I want to see Eastern Washington University known nationally for the exceptional ways we foster professional and intellectual life, providing support that reflects the challenges of academic life in this second decade of the 21st century.

Eastern is already an engine that powers the professional workforce and the economic and cultural life of the region. We will strategically strengthen connections with educational and business partners, marching arm-in-arm to promote robust educational pipelines as well as strong college attendance and completion rates.

I am creating a President’s Regional Advisory Council composed of leaders from the region and from around the state. This group will work with us to identify issues important to the future of the university and will provide counsel regarding the university’s community engagement and long-term strategies.

As part of our commitment to our region, Eastern will be a leader in promoting environmental sustainability. I am particularly delighted that we’re exploring fundraising opportunities for a living building, a nationally recognized sustainability center that reflects the most advanced approaches to sustainability possible today.

We are also continuing to craft a fundraising campaign for the Gateway project, transforming our stadium to be an even more vibrant addition to the university and community. Building on our recent athletic achievements on the national stage, this initiative will move forward in the coming year.

A crucial part of the vision for Eastern’s future rests with fundraising for scholarships. Affording a college education is a huge challenge for many
of our students. It’s a moral imperative for us to build on our fundraising success, to dramatically increase funds for student scholarships. This is one of the most important initiatives we can have.

Our advancement office as well as the EWU Foundation have been working hard! In the fall, we will launch Inspire Awesome: the scholarship campaign for EWU students. The campaign will build on the tremendous good will and support that has been growing exponentially for EWU. It will reach out to thousands of people around the state and around the globe as well as close to home.

The goal is to generate in three years $5 million of additional scholarship support over what we now provide for students. We will meet and exceed this goal! For the campaign, Jeffrey and I are very excited to provide a matching lead gift of $50,000. For every dollar that comes in from EWU faculty and staff, we will match dollar for dollar up to $50,000.

I’m delighted to help launch this campaign that will propel EWU and our students to even greater success. It will truly Inspire Awesome.

Today we celebrate Eastern’s past, present, and future. This is our time, our opportunity to envision our future and make that future a reality. Together we will focus on creating powerful academic experiences, unparalleled support for students, faculty, and staff, enduring and significant partnerships throughout our region and state. Together we will ensure that Eastern is recognized nationally for outstanding work to ensure students’ success.

This vision for Eastern Washington University builds on our strengths. It builds on each of you, on each of us. We’re not just starting something big. We’re doing something big. Benjamin Cheney would be astonished to see how his vision has flowered. President Showalter would be delighted to see the university’s growth and success.
Thank you again for joining us today. I’m so glad you can be here to celebrate the past, present, and future of Eastern Washington University. Together we’re transforming lives.

Thank you!