Thank you. It is truly an honor to stand in front of you as Eastern Washington University’s 25th president. I would like to thank Mr. Tanaka and the rest of the board of trustees for their confidence and trust; the platform party, the university delegates and all of those faculty representing EWU departments, for their participation this afternoon. I would especially like to thank the investiture committee and its Chair, Dr. Jane Pimentel, and all the other guests that are here from within and outside the university. I would also like to recognize the numerous musical groups and choral groups that will participate this afternoon, and would especially like to thank the EWU students who had an event earlier this week and those of you that are here today, along with the faculty and staff that have been extremely supportive to me.

What I’d also like to do is introduce to you members of my family that are here today, so I would ask you to please stand and be recognized: My wife, Nadine; my three daughters, Krista and her husband Wesley Wheatley; Jamie and Brian Schmidt, and their daughter Dannica, which you just saw earlier; and Kimberly and Billy Terry, and their two sons, Dylan and Brandon.

Thank you all for being here.

I want to tell you my vision for Eastern by telling you a short story; a story which was part of my graduate education. I’m sure that there are a few in the room who will recall and remember how turbulent the times were in the late 60s and early 70s. Those years also gave me the opportunity of a lifetime as I became part of what was called the educational change team, where the concepts of learning in the classroom came alive for me in the community.

The educational change team was a group of social scientists, community organizers and conflict resolution experts who were funded by the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. The period of the late 60s and early 70s resulted in the U.S. experiencing a time of civil disobedience within educational settings. This resulted in social concerns that were dealt with by direct confrontation and student walkouts in public schools and university campuses.
The educational change team was formed to assist schools and communities to resolve these issues. This experience allowed me to learn about, a great deal about, conflict resolution, assessment of social issues, negotiating skills and political motivations. But most importantly I learned the importance of public education’s role for fostering and encouraging student engagement. The idea I explored in graduate school came alive for me in the field as I traveled in those days from coast to coast. It was a life changing experience for me, a community based learned opportunity that is the essence of person-centered education.

My vision for Eastern Washington University is that we provide such a life-changing learning for all of our students. During this year that I’ve been here, I have seen faculty and staff work hard to make this vision a reality. Together our job is to give Eastern students the opportunity not just to learn, but to do. This is at the heart of what I look forward to accomplishing with all of you in the years to come. To create a learning environment that gives every EWU student a chance to intern, to do research and to make a difference in the world.

As I imagine the future for Eastern Washington University, I see an increase in its civic engagement by its faculty and its students. I see an EWU returning to its roots by having a strong commitment to teacher preparation. I envision a fully developed group of engineering programs that will enhance the development of engineering firms in the state. And further, I see the development of new programs in health science and human services, and an expansion of our college of business and public administration as it continues to expand economic development efforts in the region.

I see a university that will make a significant mark in the education of first generation college students and become the most diverse campus in the state.

And at the heart of this vision for Eastern that I have, students and their dreams is at the core. Which brings us, quite frankly, to this large red cube that you see before you, and are probably wondering why it’s here. I’m quite frankly stealing the trick from Alfred Hitchcock, who also was famous for keeping secrets in his films in plain sight. Some of you may be wondering what’s inside. Some of you may be wondering what will
be put on top of it. And some of you may be wondering if a surprise will pop out of it. Quite frankly, my staff wanted ME to pop out of it.

   Well, what’s inside may be different for me than it is for you. For me, it symbolizes my vision for Eastern, which I’ve tried to briefly state. This is filled with all my dreams for Eastern, but there is plenty of room for your dreams too. This is a tangible reminder of all the possibilities of our dreams. But this is not only a repository for our hopes and goals, it is a reminder that those dreams that start here need to be driving everything that we do. I’ve told you my big picture dreams for eastern, and now I will share three actions which we can do together to make them possible.

   First, we must take our vision and commitment to opportunity for first generation college students. Eastern has a long history of opening doors for students from all backgrounds. But we can do more. It is not just enough for us to join or get first generation students on campus. We must deliver on our promise of providing higher education by doing a better job of helping them succeed while they are here. To accomplish this, we must redesign our outreach program, improve our student support activities, assess our retention programs, not just for first generation college students, but for all of our students.

   Eastern has always been an institution of opportunity in this region, and we still have an important role to play on that front. In addition, we must address how students are prepared for their years here at Eastern. We must be concerned about the kindergarten through college pipeline. We must be an integral partner in the development of K-16 strategies to prepare students before they arrive on campus. We will implement a K-16 initiative that will connect EWU to its roots of enhancing public schools and assisting our community college partners.

   I see the development of an institute for teacher mentoring, and teaching excellence. I will be asking for an all university commitment to K-16 education. We best serve first generation students by giving them the tools to succeed in higher education before they even set foot on our campus, and I know that we can do that.
Secondly, we must take our dreams and connect the campus to the community and the community to the campus. Our links to the Spokane community is vital. Riverpoint is the focus of those efforts, and getting our students into the classroom, business offices, and laboratories in the region’s real world professional environment and connecting faculty to apply their research and scholarship to our region’s challenges to make a difference, and encourage the Eastern community to be leaders in volunteerism, philanthropy and community stewardship. To encourage this as a priority, we will integrate ourselves even more deeply into the Riverpoint campus, constructing a facility with a larger footprint and greater amenities than the current Spokane Center. I will establish a center for community engagement at Eastern Washington University at our Spokane campus which will connect our students and our faculty to our community partners.

The center will provide opportunities for service learning, applied faculty and student research, and collaboration on economic development efforts. I will spend time at Riverpoint each week, to shine a spotlight on our continuing commitment to the EWU Spokane, and work more effectively with local leadership. I will soon name an individual who will lead the day to day operation at the EWU Spokane so that the community has one single point of contact.

We will focus a programmatic array in Spokane around signature programs such as the study of the Spokane River and its ecology, developing health science and community wellness programs, and connecting our faculty and students with the urban communities of Spokane.

Thirdly, our dreams will lead us to foster a more global perspective for our students. A strong understanding of diversity and experiences working with an environment filled with people from all walks of life is necessary. Our local businesses and corporations are becoming more global. As an example, look at Itron’s recent European acquisitions. Thirty factories, located around the globe. And our Engineering department’s working with DeSault, a French manufacturer. Those people with the essential flexibility to communicate and collaborate with a diverse world will prosper.
Eastern, I believe, is poised to become a leader in preparing tomorrow’s globally flexible workforce. To that end, within ten years I want 30-40% of our student body to be ethnically and culturally diverse. To maximize the opportunity that that level of diversity affords Eastern, we need to actively transform our curriculum, establish a centralized diversity structure, and expand our access to international students.

The international partnerships we’re currently developing with China, Latin America, Japan and Saudi Arabia, are important to the experience we must deliver to our students. To be successful in the ever-flattening world, students must learn how to thrive under the stress of new choices and ideas. This can be achieved through transforming our curriculum to embrace both rigor and breadth and to facilitate student exchanges.

These actions I have just outlined involved renewing Eastern’s promise to provide all those we serve with opportunity, connections and a learning environment built upon 125 years of academic excellence. This is the start of something big for Eastern, and I hope it is also the start of something big for each one of you. Every one of you here today affiliated with Eastern will get your own red box. Every student, every alumnus, every faculty member and every staff member.

What is the something big that you will put in your red box? Perhaps your dream of becoming a musician or artist? What about the dream of becoming a successful businessperson? Is that what you will put in your box? Maybe it’s the dream of seeing your students move into the world to become successful. Is it the dream of making every EWU student feel at home when they come to this campus? I promise you, I am committed to helping every one of you realize your dream at Eastern. I invite you all to join me in making that a possibility.

Friends, colleagues, it is time for Eastern Washington University to start something big. Thank you.