

**Remarks of Gordon Gee at The Ohio State Board of Trustees meeting July 12, 2007
(Taken from closed caption transcript prepared by VITAC)**

Chairman Cloyd:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my very distinct pleasure to introduce the 14th president of The Ohio State University, E. Gordon Gee.

Gordon Gee:

Thank you.

Gosh, the last time I got a standing ovation was when I told the people of Brown I was leaving.

I am so honored to be here, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your leadership. Yesterday I wrote to the Vanderbilt community, and its board, and I said the following: "I am not leaving Vanderbilt. Rather, I am following my heart and returning to a place that I consider home."

So I'm sorry this is an emotional moment for me. So I thank all of you for letting me come home. I really do.

In Luke 15, some of you can remember that New Testament story of the prodigal son. Well, I am that son. I left. I experienced the world. I made my way in a different way and a different time, but this place, this father, this magnificent institution never forgot me, and has now forgiven me and welcomed me home.

So how true today is that great refrain which I so dearly love, and that is, "Time and change will surely show/How firm thy friendship, O-hi-o."

I am honored, I want you to know, and I am sorry, I have two pages here, as a matter of fact, which is always the way that it is when you're trying to do things, but I do have some people to acknowledge.

I want to start with acknowledging the people of Ohio. They have built a great university called The Ohio State University. It is, and I appreciated what the judge [Marbley] had to say.

I came here because I recognized--and of course I've been president of half of the universities in this country, and I can say that--I recognized this is a remarkable institution. It is not just a great institution, it is a remarkable institution, and I think we should celebrate that, and we should celebrate it with all 11 million Ohioans. This is their day. This is my opportunity, but this is their day, and I want you to know that.

I want to thank our chairman. He and I didn't know each other. We had this kabuki dance we went through and he is a wonderful person. I just want to acknowledge that. One of the great pleasures of my life is going to be an opportunity to work with him, as it is with the rest of this board.

Alex Shumate was the chairman of the board when I took my sabbatical and left for Brown, and I can remember walking to John Wolfe's office then crossing the street and telling Alex, and I am amazed that you would actually even recruit me back, Alex. What a blessing he has always been to me.

To our board of trustees, some of whom I know very well, all of whom I will know very well over time, and I appreciate the fact, and I heard what you had to say and I appreciate

those words and may they be true, and may I make them true. I will work very hard to make that happen.

I even have a Vanderbilt father here. I'll continue to make sure you pay a very high tuition at Vanderbilt, I can assure you. The search committee, I met with them today, and they--this is a different process and that search committee showed a lot of trust in this process and for that I am grateful.

Citizen recruiters. There are a number of them here but there is no greater captain of the citizen recruiting group than one Jack Kessler. Stand up. Give him a round of applause. He deserves that, okay?

And then to my colleagues, some of whom look slightly older but none who have worn out, and who are doing wonderful things with this institution, and Joe, I really appreciate the leadership you're providing. Let me just say, I am the president-elect of the institution. There is the president of the university. He's doing a great job and make certain that you continue to support him as we go through this transition. I am honored to have an opportunity to work with him, as I am with the other vice presidents.

And Bobby, you haven't changed a bit. It's great. I can't wait to get out on the road with you again. Eighty-eight counties. I can remember when I came here, by the way, that I made this great announcement about the fact that I was going to visit every county every year and I turned to Alex and I said, "How many counties are there?" He said, "Eighty-eight." I came from Colorado, where there were 20. I hadn't realized that.

So anyway, I am grateful for the friends that I have here, and for the senior leadership to the faculty, the staff, the students of Ohio State, whom I meet in wonderful and strange places, whether it be London or Beijing . . .

I am in a hotel in Beijing, China, and I hear this big shout, "O-H!"

That's Ohio. That's Ohio State. That's its spirit.

To our alumni and our friends, I do particularly want to acknowledge my predecessors. It's been 10 years. Brit Kirwan is a great friend of mine and remains a great friend of mine. He did a wonderful job at this institution and I hope we continue to acknowledge that great work. He certainly takes great pride in his achievements, as does Karen Holbrook. I did not know Karen Holbrook as well, but I got to know her and admire her, and I know that she has done remarkable things and in this time, and in this effort, it is important for us to know that. So I appreciate that.

Obviously I must have left something upstairs, but I will continue here.

I want to make certain that we acknowledge that, and then I want to acknowledge the folks at Vanderbilt. This is a wonderful university. They embraced me. Seven years I spent at that institution, and I hope that they hear me today, that I love and admire the people of that institution. As I said, I am not leaving Vanderbilt; I'm coming to Ohio State.

Martha Ingram, the chairman of that board, is an angel. She's been my angel for all that time and given the university \$550 million, which is, I might note, the largest single donation of any individual in this country. I hope to eclipse that at Ohio State, I want to you know.

And to the board of trustees and my senior colleagues and the faculty and staff and students, it has been a love affair for me, but I am home, and I'm grateful for that, but I do acknowledge them.

I want to now acknowledge two people who are so central to my life. First of all I want to introduce my, who just came back in, my daughter, Rebecca. Rebecca, stand up for just a second. Rebecca was 14 years old, and she did not want to move from Colorado. In fact, I still remember this. I had to give her a root canal on the day we came. Literally, we gave her a root canal to tone her down a little bit. But she came, and she fell in love with this place. Rebecca Gee today, whenever she signs where she's from, she says, "I'm from Ohio," and that is who she is.

Rebecca has gone on to do wonderful things. She went to Columbia. She went to Cornell Medical School. Rebecca went to Harvard to do her residency and met her wonderful husband who I'll introduce in a second there, and Rebecca is now a Robert Wood Johnson clinical scholar at University of Pennsylvania. She's making the tour of the Ivy League, and will continue to do that.

Dr. Alan Moore, her husband: Alan is a graduate of the University of Virginia, then a graduate of the Vanderbilt University Medical School. One of the two of them has a great degree, and the two of them met at Massachusetts General Hospital of Harvard University, and he is a fellow in endocrinology there.

They are fabulous, young people. They are the future of this country. I am proud that I am her father, and his father-in-law, but they are great young people and you're going to love them as much as I do. I'm glad they're here to celebrate with me.

And so the question is, why am I here?

Why am I here?

I want you to know, and what I said before, I am returning to be part of one of the most exciting, and let me just say this--I want to underscore this; I want everyone to hear this--I am returning to be part of the most exciting, academic environments in American higher education.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is Ohio State's time.

This university since 1990 has moved from good to excellent. So thanks to the good work and great leadership from the deans and from the vice presidents and certainly from the presidents themselves, I believe that due to wise decisions and thoughtful Academic Plan, that this university is now poised--and, Joe, you and I will talk a lot about this--we're poised to move from excellence to eminence.

Let me say that again--and Judge, I think that's where we are. We are poised to move from excellence to eminence, and that is an aspiration very few institutions in this country can ever have, and we are there. And I am glad that I can be a part of that.

This is the most comprehensive, complex university in this country, and therefore, we should be a beacon on the hill, for all of higher education. We have the opportunity to set a standard for excellence and set a standard for leadership and a standard for direction that few universities in this country can and will have, and we will do it right here.

I also want you to know I am returning as a different and more mature, I hope, and more thoughtful academic leader.

This is a much different university than I left in 1997, and I'm a much different person. This is not "back to the future." This is not *Halloween II*, either. And I do not intend on being the Grover Cleveland of university presidents, but, but I have had the opportunity to lead and learn from two of the most highly respected and academically distinguished universities in this country, Brown and Vanderbilt. As a result, and I hope will you see this in me, I have developed a clarity of purpose and an ability to understand, identify,

sustain, and create excellence. Hold me to that standard. Expect that of me. Make certain that I say what I am and what I will do, and that is the maturing process.

I want you to understand, even though it's a great joy for me to be here, and it's a great honor, this is a different place, and I am a different person, and I hope that those two will come together again in a wonderful event. And I'm also returning at a time in which the people of Ohio, and, by the way, I feel this, this is one of the great recruiting moments for me, when the state legislature passed unanimously--Madam Speaker, it didn't happen in our time, did it?--when they passed unanimously a state budget and in that budget they said, "We are going to support higher education; this is our number one priority."

Why not? It should be. It's about time.

But also it's a great recruiting opportunity for me, I can assure you, and the people of this state are demanding leadership of their university, and I believe that we have now the tools and ability financially and politically to make that happen.

Our governor, whom I know, is doing a terrific job, and I just wanted to acknowledge him. The president and the speaker of the house and [president of] the senate, I do not know them as well, but I will get to them know them, I assure you. Most importantly, they showed commitment and leadership--unprecedented leadership and commitment--and we should be grateful to them.

Chancellor Fingerhut, I knew him in his senatorial days. I've had opportunity to speak to him at length about the future of higher education, a magnificent voice for quality and excellence, a person who will make the difference to this university and difference to the state.

Of course, I want to say this. This is a larger board, this is a different kind of board than I worked with. This is a reorganized, revitalized, reconfigured, and I think a perfectly logical way to now run a university, and I am delighted that I can be here, be part of that. This trustee reorganization is important.

So I clearly believe that a confluence of common sense and commonweal is occurring, recognizing that one cannot have a vital and progressive state, and let me say this again, one cannot have a vital and progressive state without the leadership of a great university. It is impossible.

But at the same time, this university must recognize that we have an essential and incredibly significant stake in the future of this state. We are wed. We are The Ohio State University, and a great state and a great university can make a difference, but only together and only if we work together.

Perhaps the most compelling reason I am here, I can now sleep at night.

I have spent 10 years, not in the wilderness, because I love those institutions, but I woke up every morning, I said why am I here? A private institution has a particular role to play, but 80 percent of the students in this country are educated in our public universities. They are the front door to the American dream. They represent what life is about. They represent what this nation is about, and I have returned to the great opportunity that exists. I believe, I believe in every fiber of my being, in the public university, in the land-grant mission of this public university.

You know, Ohio State is unique. There are very few institutions in this country that are both land-grant institution and the state's leading institution. What an opportunity for me, and what an opportunity for us, but I am going to be able to sleep at night, because I will

never ask again that question of why do I exist and what am I doing, why am I doing what I'm doing?

Of course, there are challenges. There are many, but the fundamental challenge--and I'm going to spend a second on this and then turn myself over for questions--the fundamental challenges center around people and ideas. You'd expect me to say money and a variety of other things. That will come. Open your wallets, I'm here. No wallet is safe in this state. But that will come. We will make that happen.

But the fundamental challenge, I believe, centers around people and ideas. We must capture the hearts and minds of the people of Ohio to believe in the fiber that they have in their being that this university will make a difference in their lives, and then, and then we must do so.

At the same time, we must convince the people of this university, this wonderful university, this great, magnificent institution, the faculty, the staff and the students, that this university is not a job. It is not a job. It is a calling. It is a responsibility. It's a remarkable opportunity each and every one of us has.

We have that opportunity at this time in this institution in ways that very few people do. So we must create a climate of dignity and respect for each and every one. We must not be pugilistic with each other. We must celebrate our differences and we must make sure in celebrating that we understand the value of this great university. We must engage and win the battle of talent. It's all about talent. We don't make cars, Joe. We don't make widgets. It's all about talent. The most talented faculty teaching the most talented students.

We will win that. I'm predatory. We will win that.

But it is going to require a lot of hard work. That's what it is about. It is bright, wonderful faculty engaged in libraries and in their laboratories, about the world, that they are engaged in, and it's about them engaging those wonderful, bright students.

We will win that battle for talent. And the corollary is that we must win the battle of ideas. You can't run an empty vessel. There can't be a great university unless we are a place of great ideas and those ideas are found in our laboratories.

This institution has marched in a truly distinguished way. It's made a dash for distinction by creating an environment in which research is celebrated and which gives opportunities for people to make a difference in terms of what their research does in the lives of people around the world. We are a magnificent research university, but we also recognize and encourage a whole level of creativity that few institutions can and will do, and I think that that is Ohio State.

Let's not think "we are the largest university in the country." When I used to talk about the fact this was an aircraft carrier and I'd moved to a speedboat—and let me tell you speedboats can be dangerous. But we must not think of size as an impediment, but as an opportunity. Size is not an impediment at this institution. We are the most massive intellectual platform in America, gathered on one campus.

We will only be that if we can think and act and operationalize ourselves as one university. We can't be 18 colleges connected by a heating plant. We can't be a series of departments connected by telephone lines. We have to act—and you're going to hear this theme from me a lot--we have to be one university.

If we are this massive institution and we can think with agility and act with simplicity, even in our complexity, we are going to be enormously successful. And no one else is doing that.

No one else is doing that. No one else is doing that in this country. We will, and we can, and I am so bound up in that, in that notion, and I am thrilled that I believe we have that opportunity, and we must remember that we're about creating ideas.

We must be equally passionate about passing along those ideas. If we create ideas, if we have this great research mechanism, and then we just have it narrowly defined in those laboratories or in those libraries, then we have done ourselves very little good and maybe even some harm. Therefore, we must pass along those ideas. We must be a student-centered university. Teaching and learning is our mission, and we must make that happen.

And so those whom we teach, and those who teach and learn here, must also reflect the diversity racially and economically and socially and culturally that allows difference to flourish, that allows us to celebrate those differences in ways that will truly make us better.

So Mr. Chairman, members of the board, ladies and gentlemen here on this mid-summer evening, as we celebrate a great university, these are just a few of my thoughts.

I had many today, but I wanted to limit my time.

This is the one thing I want to say to each of you that I believe absolutely: This is the university of the American dream. This is the university of the American dream.

I can remember still one time when I conducted commencement I just happened to ask here of all of these people gathered having a great time, I said, "Would all those who are first generation students stand up?" Over half of those students graduating.

This is the American dream.

I'm a product of that. I grew up in a very small town--Vernal, Utah. Without a great public university, I would not be here today.

This is the American dream, the front door to the future, and today, I stand before you because you have fulfilled my dream, so I thank you very much.