



**Minnesota**  
STATE COLLEGES  
& UNIVERSITIES

## *Serving Minnesota: Commitment, Courage and Creativity*

**Installation of Steven J. Rosenstone as  
Chancellor of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities  
October 19, 2011**

Gov. Dayton, Leaders Koch, Dean, and Thiesen, distinguished members of the Minnesota House and Senate, commissioners, trustees, presidents of our colleges and universities, students, faculty and staff, dear family and friends.

We gather today in this hallowed place – our magnificent state Capitol – a place where generations of Minnesotans have come together to debate the great challenges our state has faced. This is a place of passion and purpose.

Consider the four Civil War heroes who are celebrated in this remarkable Rotunda – people who came to Minnesota from other places, who made significant contributions to our territory and state during the 1850s and 60s:

Col. William Colvill who went on to be Minnesota's attorney general;  
Gen. John Sanborn who served as a state senator;  
Gen. James Shields who was elected to the U.S. Senate; and  
Col. Alexander Wilkin who was Minnesota's territorial secretary.

These people were not only military leaders and elected officials; they also led their communities.

- Wilkin was a founder of the St. Paul Mutual Insurance Company (now Travelers).
- Colvill edited the *Red Wing Republican* newspaper.
- Sanborn was president of the Minnesota Historical Society.

They and their generation – leaders with names like Pillsbury, Washburn, Hill and Mayo – overcame adversity and distance to build a great, new state.

At about the same point in history, public higher education was emerging in Minnesota. In 1858, what is now known as Winona State University, opened to prepare teachers for the children of pioneer families.

Mankato Normal School followed in 1868, and St. Cloud a year later.

Mankato, by the way, was the first public college in the United States to be led by a woman, suffragette Julia Sears, in 1872.

So why the history lesson?

There is a serious and compelling answer to this question.

These early leaders – in these young communities – made decisions based on a set of unwritten principles, a set of core values that bound them together and established the foundation of the Minnesota in which we live. Through their actions, they emphasized:

- **Commitment** ... to the people, to each other, and to the state
- **Courage** ... to do what's needed when it's needed; and
- **Creativity** ... to make the impossible possible.

These same values hold today, having survived wars, economic collapse, global instability, floods, drought and more than a few dreadful blizzards. These values have been fundamental to Minnesota's quality of life.

They are also the values that drive Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. And, they are the values that are key to our future.

## **Commitment**

Our colleges and universities are committed to:

- Ensuring access to an extraordinary education for all Minnesotans;
- Being the partner of choice to meet Minnesota's workforce and community needs; and
- Delivering to students, employers, communities and taxpayers the highest value, most affordable option.

### Commitment to students

“Commitment” to our students is first and foremost core to our mission and close to our hearts. Keeping the doors open to an extraordinary education – for ALL Minnesotans – is, and will remain, our top priority.

We measure our value not by the number of students we turn away, but by the number of students we educate. And each year, more than 400,000 Minnesotans from all walks of life attend our colleges and universities – for degrees, for training and retraining, for graduate programs, for classes to enrich their lives. That's one in every 13 Minnesotans.

These are not only students fresh out of high school; they are also adult learners, workers, and professionals retooling for the changing economy. Thanks to the hard work and inspiring dedication of a tireless faculty and staff, we have a profound impact on each student's life.

To you – our students – I have heard you on tuition and I get it. I have also heard the excitement in your voices as you describe your hopes and your dreams. As the next generation of Minnesota's leaders, you deserve our best, and you can count on us to deliver.

I'll confess, though, that I'm deeply worried about the darkest cloud in the educational sky – the shifting of costs from the state to students. People across Minnesota have expressed concern that this trend is pricing students out of college, and ultimately, out of a job.

The stark reality is that state funding per student – in constant dollars – has been cut 48 percent since 2000.

True access will only be possible if we work together to make it financially feasible for all Minnesotans not just to attend our colleges and universities, but to graduate and succeed.

I think often of my grandfather, a son of Russian immigrants. He didn't go to college, but he began saving money for his grandchildren to go to college on the day we were born. He wanted us to learn. Every week he'd send me, via my dad who worked in the family business, the Sunday *New York Times*. He bought me a subscription to *Scientific American* when I was way too young to understand even the pictures.

My grandfather had one message for my sisters and me: "If you graduate today, but stop learning tomorrow, you will become ignorant the day after." His point was that education is not a one-shot occurrence, but a lifetime of learning.

A lifetime of learning for all Minnesotans? What an inspiring goal.

### Commitment to the state

For more than 150 years, our colleges and universities have prepared Minnesota's workforce. We have supplied skilled workers and professionals to lead new and growing companies, and we have educated the Minnesotans who knit together the fabric of our communities – from teachers and social workers to police officers and nurses. That role cannot diminish in the face of current financial challenges.

I've been traveling Minnesota over the past eight months – logging more than 6,000 miles to 31 colleges and universities. In every single town, in every single community meeting, I hear about the importance of our work. Minnesotans don't see us as the problem; they see us as the solution to their most important challenges.

Whether it's

- **Central Lakes College** helping industry partners develop new sources of renewable energy; or
- **Alexandria Technical and Community College's** partnerships with Douglas Machine, Alexandria Extrusion Co. and The Aagard Group to provide the next generation of technology and workers; or
- our work with Generals Shellito and Nash to establish the campus veteran centers that now serve nearly 10,000 veterans and active duty members each year; or
- **Minnesota State University, Mankato's** and **Mesabi Range Community and Technical College's** Iron Range engineering program developed with 10 industry partners to meet the needs of Minnesota's mining industry; or
- thousands more examples like them across our entire state, it is our faculty who partner to solve real world problems facing business and communities.

Everybody benefits, and that's our value to Minnesota.

Several months ago, while meeting with community leaders in Willmar, one man, probably not much more than about 40 years old said to me, “Six months ago I was unemployed. I came to **Ridgewater College**, and they helped prepare me for a new profession. I’m working again. We kept our house. I kept my family together. This place saved my life.” He was in tears. So was I.

I keep thinking about this example – who was helped here?

Yes, it’s the man who told me his story. But it is also the business that was able to hire a highly skilled worker. It’s the community that benefited once again from the taxes he could now pay as an employed person. It’s the stores and shops where he and his family buy groceries and clothes. And it’s the taxpayers who no longer have to pay his unemployment compensation or provide his food stamps.

Everybody benefits, and that’s our value to Minnesota.

Minnesota is counting on us to build the workforce of the future. Our success is Minnesota’s success, and we cannot fail.

### **Courage**

As I think about “courage,” I know it will be required of every one of us as we lead Minnesota back to economic prosperity. Courage is not optional; it is essential to our success.

To me, courage means making difficult decisions and sacrifices; being a responsible steward – not just making expedient choices for today, but rather, focusing on smart decisions that will last long after we are gone; and taking calculated risks to accelerate progress.

We are blessed with a courageous Board of Trustees that is willing to engage in the sometimes painful conversations that will define our future. These dedicated trustees understand how great the opportunity is and how great is the risk of inaction.

Minnesota is counting on us to act courageously. And I am prepared to do so.

### **Creativity**

It is no big news that innovation is the key to the success of organizations in change. Innovation is common in business. It needs to be more common in education, and I suggest innovation is the single most important factor for sustaining and growing our contributions to Minnesota. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that created them.”

Yes, we will continue to improve efficiency and look for additional revenue, but that won’t be sufficient to keep college affordable and our programs strong. We must find more innovative ways to educate students and manage operations.

We need to embrace new ideas to advance educational quality; redesign the way we do things and empower presidents, the faculty and staff to be entrepreneurial – keeping many important decisions at the local level.

The good news is that we have an amazing faculty, talented presidents and remarkable staff. And they are full of creative ideas.

There is no lack of creativity in this system. But, inertia – “doing things the way we’ve always done them” is a serious and even dangerous risk because we are facing tectonic changes and challenges. This is a “perfect storm,” but much worse, it’s a perfect storm that’s not going away. We must do business differently.

Minnesota is counting on us to act creatively and creative we must be. I agree with Walt Disney when he said, “If we can dream it, we can do it.”

### **Collaboration**

Before I close, I want to add one more value to those of our forefathers and mothers: the value of collaboration.

In today’s world, no person...no organization...no single college or university can accomplish alone what needs to be done. There isn’t enough money, nor is there enough time.

To complicate matters, today’s issues are wildly complex with consequences that impact a large – and growing – number of people. Whether you are from Southwest Minnesota or Moorhead, Thief River Falls, Fergus Falls or Austin, from Duluth or the metro, or from communities in between, it is absolutely essential that all of us in this great Rotunda join forces to meet this call. We must get the right people together around the right questions to drive the right solutions.

Effective collaboration also means, among other things, partnering with K-12 to strengthen the pipeline to ensure that students from all walks of life – young and old, rich and poor, black and white, immigrants and fourth generation Minnesotans – are college ready.

We must put away old prejudices and outdated approaches and focus on our shared commitments to access, quality and affordability to build Minnesota’s workforce of the future.

Minnesota is counting on us. And we must work together starting now.

Over the past few months, many people have asked why I would want to be chancellor given the “perfect storm” of challenges. My answer rests in the values of those leaders who came before us – a commitment to people, a commitment to Minnesota and a commitment to our ability to harness the courage and creativity of everyone here today and in communities across our state.

Winston Churchill once said, “A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.” I confess to being a card carrying, blue-blooded, optimist.

I want to conclude by saying thank you. Thank you for this opportunity to serve Minnesota. Thank you trustees and presidents; thank you students, faculty and staff; thank you community and business leaders; and thank you, Gov. Dayton, commissioners and members of our Legislature for being our partners in this vital endeavor.

Dear family, thank you for your love and support and profound generosity. Without it, this journey would be impossible. Finally, my friends, I want you to know I am energized by the chance to clear the obstacles from our path to ensure a future of prosperity and opportunity for the people of our state. I am heartened by the enthusiastic support I've received and also heartened by the enthusiasm of our partners – many of whom stand with us today in this hallowed place.

To all of you, I am honored and humbled by the confidence you have placed in me. We are leading at a critical moment in our state's history. And as we leave this great hall together, let us do so as partners, with a renewed sense of dedication and a renewed sense of commitment to serve the people of Minnesota.

Minnesota is counting on us, and we must lead.