

Looking Backward, Moving Forward

Spring Address - 2012

Good afternoon. And thank you for coming.

We're going to do something a little different today from previous convocations and addresses. Especially since I've recently provided you with a report on our budget situation, including some thoughts on how to effect a better way forward in this regard.

So, today, no numbers. No railing against the governor or the legislature. Well, maybe just a little at the end. Instead, I'd like to do a little time traveling with you. Not just to the past, where historians **spend** a lot of their time; but also to the future, where teachers and educators **devote** their time.

But something connects both journeys and that is the act of imagining.

We don't know everything about the past. Goodness, we don't know nearly enough about the present. But we can reconstruct the past from memories and physical evidence and then we can imagine the story that is revealed. We also, of course, try to make sense of that story.

The same thing is true about the future. Based on what we know now, based on experience, and, indeed, based on a sense of history and an understanding of human behavior, we can imagine what the future holds, what it will look like. And even more so than looking backward, imagination plays a greater role in looking forward. Because, in so many respects, it is our imagination that takes us there. And the questions we ask about the future we suppose, the future we choose, the future we compose, are in so many respects either bounded or elevated by the imagination we bring to the task.

In this regard, I am reminded of the words of the Brazilian grand prix race driver, Ayrton Senna, in Garth Stein's beautiful novel *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, that "the car goes where your eyes go." In other words, if all you are focused on while in a skid is the wall, well, that most likely is where you are headed. But if you can see, even imagine, the clear track beyond, your chances are better that you will get there. This is not a bad metaphor when thinking about budgets either, or anything having to do with our outlook or prospects.

So, let's go backward a little bit before we go forward. And our year is 1887. Imagine that.

Observing these and other events and developments in 1887 was a young lawyer and writer from western Massachusetts named Edward Bellamy. In an attempt to make

sense of his own world, he imagined the consequences and implications of what was happening all around him far beyond his current time. He gathered his thoughts in a book entitled *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, a book which instantly became one of the most influential of its time and ranked with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben Hur* as the biggest selling works of fiction of the entire 19th century.

Looking Backward imagines the strange case of Julian West, a young man from Boston who falls into a deep, hypnotic sleep and wakes up one hundred and thirteen years later. He finds himself in the same location, Boston, but in a totally changed world. For the United States has become a socialist utopia where people enjoyed a planned economy, security, and peace.

Notwithstanding the political aspects of his novel and its influence on organized labor and such political movements as nationalism and progressivism, the world he foresaw in 2000 from 1887 reflects a powerful imagination fueled by extraordinary skills of observation.

The telephone, patented only a few years earlier in 1876, has become a cable service for the delivery of music and religious sermons. And you thought Steve Jobs invented I-Tunes.

Wholesale mega-stores, which cut out middleman profits and waste, abound. Anyone been to Costco or Wal-Mart recently?

Cash has been supplanted with credit cards. But Bellamy's did not charge 18% interest.

The wonders within the Sears & Roebuck catalogue and other goods can be purchased almost instantaneously through the on-line cable service that has superseded the telephone.

Crime is treated as a medical issue, not to punish through incarceration but to cure through medication. No mention of marijuana in Bellamy's book, though.

He did not touch all the bases from 1887, but looking backward ourselves who can say that Coca-Cola was not the precursor to today's energy drinks? That Pratt's electric car did not anticipate the Chevy Volt? And as for Sherlock Holmes and Groundhog's Day, well, they're alive and well, thank you.

Bellamy's views on education provided a bridge between the ideas of Horace Mann and John Dewey, among the most influential educators in America from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries.

Mann, also from Massachusetts, set up the first teacher's college in the United States in 1839 and argued how the fortunes of the state were linked to broad access to education, in his words "the great balance wheel of society." The quality of teachers in schools was the key to the promise of access.

Bellamy took those views further, advancing the notion that education not only developed skills, but also cultivated a sense of great individual possibility. The collective power of this sense was a society characterized by optimism and focused on improvement.

Dewey hailed Bellamy as a "great American prophet" for his views and advocated a kind of "learn by doing" approach that tried to erase the line between the liberal arts and vocational or applied studies. Schools thus had a responsibility not only to develop a student's cultural interests and fitness for learning, but also to direct the student's education to the ability to solve problems and serve the needs of society.

So, it was within these philosophical currents and educational theories that pressures mounted in the North State to bring to the region a normal school, that is, a college to prepare elementary school teachers. No pressure was greater than the realization, now broadly felt, that the future of the state and nation depended upon those entrusted with educating the future, that is, teachers. Indeed, teaching was regarded almost as a semi-sacred calling, its efforts as much devoted to citizenship development as subject mastery.

In the years after the Civil War, only one normal school existed in all of California, and that was in San Jose. But it had burned down in 1880. And a contentious legislature was slow to rebuild the school in San Jose, much less authorize a new one.

This was perhaps our first glimpse of a familiar script in Sacramento: denying funding for higher education.

But folks throughout the North State persisted to campaign for a northern branch normal school. Their enthusiasm for such was only matched by the competition among them to win the school for their respective home towns. And there were three main contenders: Redding, Red Bluff, and Chico.

Things got pretty ugly. Sort of like the Republican primary. And the fight to win the new normal school revealed a lot about the aspirations of these towns, whose future prosperity, they all felt, depended on gaining the school.

Redding argued that Chico was too far south to host a school in *northern* California. Moreover, said the advocates for Redding, Chico was simply not a fit place for any mountain-raised young woman to reside, as it was a place of fast horses, fast tracks,

fast women, fast men (and, no, they were not talking about our track and cross-country teams); a place of more public and private houses of sin and immorality, and more hoodlums than any other city of like population in the state. Such an environment would befuddle the minds of the innocent young maidens who went there to study and lead them into a fate worse than death.

Now, again, this was 1887, not 1987 during the heyday of Pioneer Days.

Redding's crowning argument for the normal school was a bit more positive, asserting that it needed it because the town would soon be "the Los Angeles of the North." They obviously thought this was a good idea in 1887.

Red Bluff similarly mixed local pride and some hard knocks on its neighbors in its case-making. Unlike Chico, they argued, the scenery in Red Bluff is picturesque and beautiful; the climate is mild, with only a few cases of sunstroke on record; and thunder and lightning are most unusual. No earthquakes or malaria either in Red Bluff, they said, something which the nearby towns – especially sin city to its south – could not say. And the ultimate warning to the good fathers of Red Bluff? Do not jeopardize the chastity and virtue of your daughters by sending them to Chico and its "pestiferous institution of ill fame." Yes, pestiferous. Look it up. It's not a compliment.

Well, as they say, the rest is history. John Bidwell donated eight acres of his cherry orchard as a free site, because, he said "every citizen must consider it his duty to do everything he can for the cause of education and his community." The good citizens of Chico heard him and anteed up \$10,000 (a quarter of a million dollars in today's currency value) to augment the legislature's appropriation. And, after several divided votes, the committee charged with making the selection finally voted unanimously to award the school to Chico. Word of the decision reached Chico in a telegram on April 8, 1887. "Chico has the unanimous vote of the board," it said. "Commence painting red!"

Bells and whistles throughout Chico proclaimed the good news; an impromptu parade began through the downtown; and the *Butte Record* exclaimed "The boom begins! Chico, the Queen City of Northern California."

By the way, our neighbors to the north did not handle losing the contest very well. One editor of the Red Bluff newspaper called on the town to sue for justice against the alleged foul tactics employed by "that malarial-ridden Butte County." Another borrowed the last stanza from a popular poem of the day, entitled "Casey at the Bat," my obligatory baseball reference, and wrote:

“Somewhere the sun is shining, and somewhere hearts are light.

Somewhere folks are laughing, and somewhere the day is bright.

Somewhere no rain is falling, but **this** to our knowledge,

There ain’t no joy in Red Bluff, since Chico stole the college.”

So, here we are, in all of our pestiferous, and otherwise, glory 125 years later, reflecting on how we got here and how we go forward from here.

Fortunately, we have a lot of help in this task and both involve closely looking at our past, especially searching for the continuities in our history. And they are powerful.

Some of them are literal, that is, explicit, in the physical appearance of our campus and the contribution that has made to our sense of place. Consider the lovely photos you are about to see produced by Professor Byron Wolfe’s students. These reflect a narrative photographic technique called “rephotography.” It essentially takes an historical photo and then places the camera today at the exact same location as the original picture and the images are blended. Our Guggenheim Fellow Byron Wolfe is a master of this genre and it’s obvious he has taught his students well in this method, encouraging their imagination and honing their technical skills.

[original photo + contemporary photo = rephotography image]

1. John and Annie Bidwell
2. Kendall Hall cornerstone laying
3. Original admin building/Kendall Hall
4. Chester Cole vision of campus (Kendall and Trinity)
5. Bridge/creek scene(s) [very old one and;
6. newer one taken by Edwin Wilson IV, whose parents, Edwin Wilson III and Margaret Huntsman, are the couple on the bridge]

Now, I tell you this story, and I show you these pictures, in order to emphasize some things that are key to an understanding of who we are and how that guides our future. First, the photos reveal continuity in the physical appearance of our campus. Second, our history reveals continuity in what has happened at this place. For within this story

and these pictures is the evidence of certain traits and characteristics that reflect our institutional DNA, that is, fundamental building blocks of our identity and behavior that cannot be denied.

Giving is in our DNA. For, after all, we began with a gift, in fact several. John Bidwell's gift of the eight acres from his cherry orchard, of course, but also the \$10,000 which his fellow citizens raised in order to demonstrate to the legislature the community's commitment to the school.

In our most recent gift-counting period, 2010-2011, on the eve of our 125th anniversary, we now count 25,500 gifts to our University, from over 14,000 individual donors, with a total value of gifts and pledges exceeding \$7 million. Even though our enrollment ranks 13th among the campuses in the CSU, we rank in the top five for the total number of gifts and top three for the total number of alumni donors. Those other places with more gifts are significantly larger institutions with many more alumni than us.

These gifts reflect the two dimensions of giving: that which gives back and that which gives forward.

Many gifts from our alumni and parents and friends, for example, are examples of giving back, expressions of gratitude for what the University has meant to them and done for them. Gifts that look forward encourage the direction in which the University is going and provide some of the means to get there.

The gifts of 1887 looked forward. They encouraged; they anticipated; they enabled. And they bound the school to the trust that accompanied the gifts.

So, a sense of **public trust** is in our DNA.

It, too, takes many forms. In 1887, it required students entering the normal school to sign a pledge affirming their purpose to become "fit for teaching" and their intention "to teach in the public schools of the state of California."

By 1921, the curricula of Chico State Normal School had expanded to meet the needs of the region through industrial arts and applied science programs. It now offered full baccalaureate degrees, prompting the name of the institution to change from Normal School to State Teacher's College.

This pattern of curricular expansion to respond to societal needs, accompanied by a change in our name, continued through such marker's in our institution's history as the designation as a full State College by the legislature in 1935 and then as a university in 1972, whose 40th year anniversary we also mark in 2012.

But some things have been constant in this progression and they underscore other aspects of how we fulfill the public trust. For also in our DNA are **service** and **civic engagement**.

It has been my great privilege and pleasure to sing the praises and to make the case for what we are accomplishing here on so many levels and with so many audiences. No story rings more true; no story connects more powerfully the work of faculty, staff and students together; no story underscores better what it means to be a place of purpose and performance, grounded in values that connect and inspire us, than the story of our service to our city, region, state and, even, beyond.

Yes, this story began with the simple proposition that a normal school in Chico would serve the needs of the entire North State; it would touch the future through well-prepared elementary teachers. No one, I think, not Edward Bellamy or John Bidwell 125 years ago, or John Dewey 75 years ago, or even Glen Kendall 50 years ago, could have imagined how comprehensive, accomplished, and respected our work would become.

Every issue of *Chico Statements* and *Inside Chico State* reveals this story. The most recent issue of *Chico Statements*, for example, highlights the work of our students in the Concrete Industry Management program to assist in the restoration of buildings and grounds on Alcatraz; the goodness of our student Koudougou Alfred Koala and his efforts to lift rural communities in Africa out of poverty and into the possibilities of education; and the generosity of Ed and Marion Floyd, who settled in Chico late in their years and who came to appreciate our University through the people and services that made their lives more comfortable before their passing.

These stories – and countless others: the autism clinic, CAVE and CLIC, AS sustainability and recycling, Cindy Wolf’s nutrition program, our rural nursing program, the free concerts for thousands of school children that are a regular feature of Chico Performances, the Gateway Science Museum, the participation of Tray Robinson and others of our faculty and staff in the annual AIDS/Life Cycle ride from San Francisco to LA, Passages Adult Resource Center, our efforts to encourage collegiate aspirations from the Grindstone Rancheria east of Willows to the Coachella Valley in the California desert, the children’s day care center, the work of HFA and the music department to support the cause of music education in northern California, the Center for Economic Development, Up til Dawn, the Blitz Build, the Sacramento River clean-up after Labor Day, Cesar Chavez service day – these stories reveal the truth in our University Values Statement:

“We acknowledge not only the obligation of service, but also the value of service to others in defining institutional character and measuring institutional performance.”

In these matters, we are part of a great tradition in American higher education that goes back to the colonial colleges and which found new arguments in our nation around the time of our founding. For in the late nineteenth century, a new vision of the marriage between the intellectual and the utilitarian had emerged, emphasizing the role of the academic disciplines in helping the country address the daunting challenges of an era of rapid social, technological and economic change. Throughout American higher education, a proud service mission matched the mood and needs of the nation. A strong consensus of public policy and institutional engagement formed to underscore the critical role of colleges and universities, both public and private, in serving the needs of a democratic national community. For faculty, in particular, public service increasingly became regarded not only as legitimate work, but privileged.

This remains the case today. Our state and our university must invest in the currency of our faculty in their disciplines, and in the connections among those disciplines, in order to strengthen the capacity and the performance of our institutions of higher education to serve critical societal needs all around us. No institution, of course, can serve every need. But as an American university and as the University of the North State, our future is tied to the traditions of the former and the obligations of the latter.

It is for these reasons that I have appointed a North State Initiative task force as one of the concrete expressions of our 125th year. Its job is to help the University reaffirm its role in our region and to explore ways in which we can be even more valuable to our neighbors who count on us. This task force will help us to look at our orientations and achievements from the perspective of the public and other external constituents. It will help us look at ourselves from the “outside in” not just from the “inside in.”

We will also publicize our service engagements this year in a fairly dramatic and fun way through the My Service Counts challenge. Its goal – which I think we will blow through well before the year is over – is to challenge the campus community (students, faculty and staff) to perform 125,000 hours of community service in 2012. We will also be asking parents of current students, Chico State alumni, and members of our advisory boards to match the campus efforts with an additional 125,000 hours of service. We will keep track of all of this on a public scoreboard and highlight many of the stories behind the hours. Our goal is to set the bar high through this challenge, effecting an even broader recognition of our record as a place where community service and civic engagement matter.

Both the North State Initiative and My Service Counts speak to two other elements of our institutional DNA: **promise** and **high expectations**. That is, promise offered and promises delivered; and the high expectations that others have in us and which we have for ourselves.

As the banners on the stage proclaim, today marks the official launch of our 125th anniversary celebration, with new signage up on campus today and an attractive new website going live <http://www.dev.csuchici.edu/125/index.shtml> that expresses the high expectations we have this year. You will find much information and many features on the website. Just two of the features on the web site are on the Wildcat Cruiser bike and an invitation for the community to come to campus on April 14 for Chico State Expo 125, an open house for our neighbors to tour campus and see examples of the great work of our students. No campus I know is closer both in proximity and in spirit to its surrounding communities than Chico State. Yet another element of our DNA.

As I've already shared with you, there were high stakes and great expectations attached to winning the normal school in 1887. Because, back then, as is the case now, the promise of a university is most clearly revealed when we connect the benefits that students receive individually from their time and study in our institutions of higher education with the gains that our society ultimately realizes. Make no mistake about it, one of the main reasons we are here is to enable our students to become gainful members of the workforce of our community and state in the 21st century; to prepare individuals with the capacity to anticipate, adapt, and succeed with the challenges ahead of them in a world of work where so many of the jobs for the mid-21st century haven't even been invented yet.

But, well beyond this responsibility, our promise to them and our democracy also focuses on preparing our students for the challenges and obligations of citizenship. This, too, is an expression of how higher education is a public good, not just an individual benefit. Yes, our students as our alumni will make significant contributions to enabling a stronger economy, a healthier population, a cleaner environment, a more just and caring society. We hope that is the case, not just because they've passed their courses here, but because they have left us more autonomous, more tolerant, more curious, more imbued with habits of the heart, than when they first arrived on our campus. We hope these qualities will always mark them and define us.

But, how are we doing in this regard? Do our students leave us with these attitudes and values? Are they grateful for this place and the people who have taught and served them?

I will be convening a study, jointly led by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, to help us answer these questions. The charge will focus on one question in particular: What mark does the Chico Experience have on our students?

We know they love this place; that they have had, for the most part, a great time here. But to what extent are the markers of our institutional DNA – service, civic engagement,

altruism, sustainability – a part of their individual value structure and behavior upon leaving us?

By this time next year, I expect this study will be completed so that we can convene a broad University conversation on their findings and recommendations.

Another and related conversation that we will continue will be on academic reorganization. But it will be re-focused, in effect, re-centered, around a sharper understanding of the kind of academic culture we have and its strengths, the kind of academic culture and areas of greater distinction we choose to pursue, and the steps we need to take to build that academic culture. It will acknowledge the worthwhile thoughtful and engaged conversations we have been having for many months about academic reorganization. But it will re-orient itself to finding broader consensus on what we are trying to accomplish for our students and the professional environment we are trying to achieve for our faculty and staff. We will do this before we decide on the organizational structure we need to strengthen our performance. Along with the North State Initiative and the My Service Counts challenge, these discussions are other efforts designed to give some legs to our 125th anniversary celebration.

In many respects, the task I am asking them to undertake gets to the heart of the matter: **student learning and success**. And this, most assuredly, is in our DNA.

The first curriculum of the Chico Normal School emphasized mathematics, history, science, music, and the art of teaching. That is, the arts and sciences and their applied accomplishment in the classroom.

The informal curriculum, though, that is, the lessons beyond the classroom, emphasized civility, respect, justice, unpretentiousness, integrity, responsibility and enthusiasm.

Moreover, the school expected that students would succeed in both curricula because of the quality of their faculty. I know, sometimes, you may tire of hearing me say that the best faculty teach as much from command of their discipline as the force of their personal example. But, guess what? We've been emphasizing this understanding here since 1887. It's in our DNA.

[photos of early faculty and current faculty who have been honored as outstanding teachers, etc.]

Let me conclude by circling back to where these remarks began. To the importance of imagination. And its complement: daring. Because to imagine is to dare. To dare a new question about the past or a new vision for the future. To dare a different path, a different direction. To dare a new level of aspiration or accomplishment. Even to dare

an affirmation of why a place like Chico State is a vital part of the larger landscape of American higher education.

And to be reminded of the observation of the Southern writer Eudora Welty that we are all capable of daring, even the most quiet and secluded among us, because “all serious daring comes from within.”

Yes, it does. It comes from deep within us. It comes from our values and our character, what defines us, what makes us tick. The things that are undeniable in our identity. Our DNA.

Daring fired the imagination of those who championed the normal school in 1887. It drove those who imagined our role as the University of the North State when the CSU was founded in 1960.

And it must accompany us forward.

For all that we have become and achieved, we must continue to ask ourselves, and those whose support we seek and need, imagine what more we could accomplish – if we had the resources restored that we have had removed; if we had more friends and donors and partners aware of our story and joining it; if we never forget that people, not organizational structure, are the basis for team work and trust and effectiveness; if both the manner and the spirit of our work reflects a robust and unambiguous celebration of and commitment to the diversity of our community; if we are both opportunity-conscious and values-based; if we clearly understand our strengths and boldly play to them; if our bottom line is student learning and success; if our guiding rules of conduct are respect, civility, and community; and if we dare to be great.

Yes, we look **backward** from 2012 to 1887 to discover a lot about our history and character and achievements. But the past is prologue. We look **forward** from 2012 to design something both mindful of what we have inherited and worthy of our best intentions.

Imagine that.

Again, thank you for your attendance here this afternoon. And, as always for your support and commitment to all the good things we do, and dare to do, on this campus and in our community.

ONWARD!!