

Dr. Patricia Maguire Meservey's Inaugural Address

April 11, 2008

It is with incredible pride that I come before you today as the 13th president of this distinguished and historic institution. Thousands have passed through Salem State's portals, from gifted scholars and dedicated administrators and staff to selfless volunteers, amazing students, and involved, supportive members of our community. All have played a significant role in creating the institution of vision and commitment we celebrate today.

As beneficiary of the efforts that have preceded me, let me say "thank you" for the honor you bestow upon me today, for the opportunity to lead, and for the trust you have placed in me. I greet you now as the newest member of the academic institution that is not only a New England icon, but a standard bearer for the successes of our Commonwealth's public education system.

Salem State is a remarkable school on the brink of true greatness, poised and ready for its next period of growth and achievement. Rest assured, I do not make that prediction lightly. Though I have been on campus for just eight months, it has been ample time to recognize that Salem State is at a special time in its history:

- Our roots in the communities of the North Shore are deep and entwined.
- Our academic programs continue to grow in number and national recognition.
- Our alumni continue to provide irrefutable evidence of the success of their public education—as CEOs, nurses, lawyers, entrepreneurs, artists—and yes, many public officials.

Those of us who work in higher education know how very fortunate we are. We enjoy many traditions, and none is more enduring than that of cooperation. The academy has described itself as "a community of scholars" for the better part of two centuries, and our profession continues to benefit from collaborative scholarship, collaborative research, and collaborative governance.

This means that no matter your role—be it alumnus, student, neighbor, or civic leader, to cite just a few examples—you have a voice at this school and you are part of a community, a community where ideas flourish, where voices are heard, where theories are tried and tested, and where results are readily apparent in the young men and women we send out into the world.

I'm delighted to report that the spirit of collaboration is alive and well at Salem State. It is a core value that I will protect and promote vigorously in the years ahead, for within its structure lies that which makes the sum of our individual parts even greater.

Great challenges lie before us, many of which are large and complex. Together, however, we will meet them, and together we will resolve them. How we accomplish this will require all our collective skills, talents, time and efforts. I firmly believe that if we invest in the future, it will be ours—and subsequently, our grandchildren's and their children's. The very least we owe them is a legacy upon which to build. Our first investment priority will always be our students and our campus, and rightly so.

There are an alarming number of young people unable to pursue the life-transforming benefits of a college education for the sad, stark reason of cost. This year, the average New England family will spend 30 percent of its income to send a child to college. Low-income families will spend nearly 75 percent of their annual incomes. For many, it is a financial investment they are forced to make if they are to educate their children. They—more than anyone—know the impact a college education will have on their lives.

As a public institution, Salem State is in a unique position to take a leadership role in this important cause. Let us use our privileged position as a public institution to light the way. Let us expand our commitment to need-based financial aid so that we reverse the economic discrimination inherent in rising costs. Let us work hard to make our fiscal budgets more efficient. Let us work hard to increase private philanthropy, improve our ability to attract grants and foundation support, and create public-private partnerships.

To that end, it is my great pleasure to announce today that Salem State will, from this day forward, dedicate itself to reducing the need for tuition and fee loans for all students in need of financial support. Let us put an end to the crippling debt that higher education places upon the shoulders of our young people and their families. Let us eliminate the true barrier that denies students access to the education that is rightly theirs. Let us open the doors of higher education to students of all economic means.

It will take a collaborative effort to achieve this, but I have confidence in the strong allies we have in Congressman John Tierney and Governor Deval Patrick. Each will bring to bear on our behalf the many resources of the federal government and the Commonwealth. We will also have private benefactors who contribute to our scholarship needs. Jack Welch is a stellar example with his support of our business students. We will need more—much more—private support to fulfill our commitments to all of our students.

Education does not happen in a vacuum. To enhance learning opportunities, our students must have facilities that support their efforts. Although there has been much expansion, and many improvements at Salem State over the past decade, we are also experiencing the results of deferred maintenance and limited funds

for capital improvements. The closing of our library building last fall made clear the very real need we have to invest in our physical campus.

I would be remiss at this point if I did not applaud Governor Patrick for his commitment to, and vision of, public education. He has clearly demonstrated it through his Capital Bond Bill for Higher Education, which would provide \$2 billion in capital improvement to our state college and university campuses.

When the bill passes, Salem State will receive over \$90 million for a new science and learning common that will also house a new library. These are critically needed capital improvements for Salem State, so in addition to recognizing Governor Patrick, I will also ask our state representatives and senators to continue putting their talents and support behind this important legislation.

I also commend four alumni and friends of Salem State College for their generosity and commitment to our campus. The support of Henry and Donna Bertolon and Bernard and Sophia Gordon has been instrumental in the development of the Bertolon School of Business, our future Center for the Creative and Performing Arts, and the planned evolution of the Weir property. It is exactly through this combination of public and private funds that we will achieve our goal to build a world-class public university on the North Shore.

We will need private financial support from our alumni and friends to realize all of our goals. Today, I ask each of you to step forward and invest in Salem State College. I promise you a great return.

We must also work together to grow our regional economy and invest in our communities. The evidence is overwhelming that colleges and universities play a major role in a region's economic prosperity. New knowledge, new technologies, and sometimes entire new industries are born within the halls of academia. Today's new industries run on a special-octane fuel called knowledge, and nothing generates knowledge quite like a university.

This is why I was pleased to announce recently that Salem State will expand its role in the region's economic development. Joining forces with North Shore Community College, the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, and business and civic leaders, Salem State will help create a new economic development coalition charged with branding and advocating for this wonderful area we call home.

As a teaching tool, I believe this new collaboration will prove useful for our students, providing them with a unique view of the relationship between economic development, regional planning, and civic engagement.

It is that last ingredient, civic engagement, to which I would like to turn your attention now. It was no less a visionary than Thomas Jefferson who made the

case for public schools nearly 200 years ago, saying that without public schools "no republic can maintain itself in strength." Although we are a strong nation because of his vision, we still face many challenges. Of one thing, however, I am certain. Our best hope for tomorrow lies with the young people we educate today.

It is our duty to ensure that students understand the importance of community involvement, and that they are well versed in the privileges and responsibilities that come with citizenship in a democratic republic. To strengthen this college's commitment and build upon its legacy of service, I am announcing today the creation of a center for civic engagement at Salem State College.

I think all of the public servants here with us today will agree with me that this is an ideal time to engage young people in community. This year's primaries have enjoyed record turnout across the nation, fueled in large part by the emerging voice of a younger generation.

I have been privileged to work in academia for over 30 years, and have watched with great joy the rising tide of community service and volunteerism prevalent once again among this country's youth. For years, I have witnessed students taking time out to give back, and it's been nothing short of inspiring.

Spring break is no longer a day at the beach, but a week of swinging hammers along the Gulf Coast, tutoring in a village in El Salvador, or riding a bike across the country to raise money for cancer research. Every day, in the city of Salem and neighboring communities, our students, faculty, and staff can be found lending their time and talent to senior centers, hospitals, non-profit agencies, and other community projects.

Since so many distinguished leaders from government and academia are in attendance here today, I would like to put forth an idea. I propose that all our public education institutions establish a hall of fame for community service. By so doing, we create an opportunity to honor those who give of themselves in the spirit of civic engagement. I predict that a collaborative effort such as this will resonate throughout the Commonwealth. Salem State would be honored to give this idea a permanent home.

A final area on which I seek your assistance today was started long before I arrived at Salem State, but it is a cause I am proud to shoulder. Initiated by my predecessor, Dr. Nancy Harrington, and her talented team of faculty and administrators, Salem State seeks to change its official designation from "college" to "university." This is not merely a name change, but rather a long-term investment in Salem State that will return impressive dividends to the North Shore and the Commonwealth. Let me explain.

Salem State has placed before the state's Board of Higher Education plans to offer doctoral degrees in two important disciplines—education and nursing. They will be the first doctoral programs ever offered on the North Shore, and will respond to career areas that suffer from a shortage of talent.

With these programs, Salem State will prepare the next generation of leaders in these two important fields. Upon completion of their studies, these alumni will bring new expertise to the workforce. In turn, their knowledge and research will spread to colleagues, providing inspiration for others to expand their education.

Senator Berry, thank you for making Salem State University one of your top priorities. Chair Clark and Commissioner Plummer, thank you for your support and encouragement as we move forward.

Let me close now with a message to our students. I am delighted to see so many of you here, and I commend you for taking an active interest in the governance of the institution to which you have entrusted your education. The inauguration of a college president, complete with colorful robes and much pomp and circumstance, is a tradition that dates back hundreds of years.

Although there is much symbolism in our ceremony today, please know that this is not a celebration of the symbolic transference of institutional powers, nor is it a celebration of one person's rise to the top of an organizational chart.

Rather, we adorn ourselves in full academic regalia to pay formal tribute to the very heart and soul of an ideal—an ideal that brings nearly 10,000 people to this campus on a daily basis.

We come here for the chance to learn, to teach, to listen, and to be heard. We come here to broaden our horizons, to sharpen our vision, to enlarge our hearts, and to train our minds to untangle problems and confront the challenges before us. We come to discover that which inspires us, to find what motivates us, and to connect our personal passions to a larger communal interest. We come to discover new ideas, new ways of working, and new ways of thinking.

Education is the most powerful tonic ever created. It is the tonic that can change a single life and—in turn—move the entire world in new ways.

Thank you very much.