

2017: A Prime Number for a Prime Year

Let me welcome all of you. I appreciate the time you have taken to be here.

To our many distinguished guests, including:

Mayor Drew Dilkens

Warden Tom Bain

Cheryl Hardcastle, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh

Taras Natyshak, MPP for Essex,

Corinne Allsop on behalf of Percy Hatfield, MPP for Windsor-Tecumseh

City Councillors Paul Borrelli, Fred Francis, and Hilary Payne

Patti France, President of St. Clair College

Matt Marchand, President, Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Welcome to Ambassador Auditorium. There is something about speeches at this time of year.

I remember one of the first talks I gave in the City of Windsor in January of 2009, shortly after Obama had been elected.

The economy had just collapsed, and the world, at least the world as I and many of you knew it, was trying to reconcile the historic election and the hope that it was won on, with the fear of an economic unknown that was about to disrupt countless lives.

Whether it be world events that unsettle us, the resignation that the New Year's resolutions we made have evaporated within the daily routine of post-holiday life, or the reminder that another year of life on this precious planet is forever gone, January is distinctive.

So here we are... 2017. And that is a prime number. A prime number, of course, is a number that be divided only by itself and by the number 1.

There are no multipliers within a prime number. In this way, it is a number that is unique. At a university, every year is unique.

Every year is a prime year. The people are different, as some students graduate and others arrive, as some people retire and others are hired, and as the institution itself, which is so much a reflection of society, adapts to changing needs and expectations.

No two years at a university are ever quite the same. So, 2017: A prime number for a prime year.

The mathematicians among you will no doubt already have come to realize that it will be a decade – 2027 – before there is another year that is a prime number. And as we all know, people also often draw significance to the idea of a decade.

You know, we often reflect on the arc of life by talking about the misery of our teens, how we messed up our twenties, how we were glorious in our thirties, worked our way through our forties and fifties, got a little reflective in our sixties, and in our seventies either became cynical about the whole mess, or started acting like we believed we were still in our twenties.

As proof of that last one about the seventies, I will tell you a true story. When I was in my teens I asked my grandfather, who was seventy, if when he looked at my grandmother he saw her the way she looked now, or if he saw her the way she looked fifty years earlier when they married and she was twenty.

He thought for a moment and told me he still saw her as he did when she was twenty.

Now I should add that my grandmother replied by saying she was fed up with his lying...

I can never give a speech without mentioning Debra, who by the way can call me out on things better than anyone, so let me do it early. For Christmas she bought me a book called “Bob Dylan: The Lyrics”.

It is a book with the lyrics to every song he wrote, and those pages validate why in my view he did deserve a Nobel Prize, although possibly it should have been shared with Leonard Cohen.

In a time when the world seems a bit more unsettled than it has been, and when the best that people can be is needed more than ever, Dylan’s lines from Forever Young, a song written for his child, touched me as they had in 1974.

May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift

May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung
And may you stay
Forever young

Those words - “May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift” – resonated with me in 1974.

Like many people twenty-one years of age, I felt the uncertainties of what lay ahead, and was trying to deal with the many personal changes and challenges that come with that time of life.

Today, I hear those words in a new but equally compelling way. In 2016 the word “post-truth” was named by the Oxford English Dictionary as the word of the year.

The dictionary defines the word, and I quote, as “relating or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.

In effect, in 2016, it seemed that the truth started to matter less.

I ask myself if the future books on human history will have chapters describing how the early 21st century era of social media and “fake news” and “alternative facts” was when the winds of change steered us from the Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, to a new age, the Age of Enchantment.

If those books do show this, I fear that other chapters in those books will recount stories of chaos and greater human suffering and inequities.

You, the faculty and staff of the University of Windsor, retirees, alumni and friends and people across this great community of Windsor-Essex, and beyond, are playing one of the most important roles there is in society.

Education is without question one of the foundations to which we must look when the winds of changes shift.

Education, and along with it the pursuit of truth and knowledge and creativity, is the ballast that can help keep a ship in high winds at even keel.

It can't always do it alone, but without education the forces behind those high winds have far less resistance as they try to disrupt society.

There can be nothing more important than challenging young minds to broaden their awareness and perspectives, and supporting those minds with a campus life and a campus environment and services that reinforce our belief in the potential that everyone has, and our belief in the importance of civility and fairness to all.

It is a university's role to encourage learning, to create excitement about discovering things that you did not know, and to expose people to ideas with which they might not be comfortable.

It is the role of a university to be a place that helps people discover the promise within themselves. It is the role of the University of Windsor to be a Place of Promise.

Nine years ago, almost to this day, I stood in this exact spot and was introduced to all of you as the next President and Vice-Chancellor of the University.

I was asked to contribute in whatever way I could to continue the path begun by the Basilian Fathers of Assumption University, and built upon by Father Eugene LeBel, John Francis Leddy, Mervin Franklin, Ron Ianni and Ross Paul.

It has been a path that has not wavered from our foundational values. And it is a path that must continue.

The second part of Dylan's quote has also taken on a new meaning for me. While it struck me first as words of encouragement to a young man, it strikes me now as a reality check for all of us:

May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung
And may you stay
Forever young

These words made me reflect on why people make such a big deal about marking each new year, much less a decade. At midnight on December 31st, a lot of people get a bit light-headed and light-hearted.

It seems to me that a New Year's celebration has every appearance of being an opportunity to start fresh, a party time that acts as a surrogate for staying forever young.

Dylan might have said – "May your heart always be joyful, may your song always be sung, and may you live each day like it's New Year's Eve". Apologies to Bob...

And organizations like the University of Windsor must also on occasion have the equivalent of a New Year's party, an opportunity to make new resolutions, make new commitments, maybe share a few kisses under the holly, and in effect re-acquaint itself with the dream of being forever young.

And so I have made the decision that it is time for you to have that opportunity to take a step of renewal. It is a step that has happened along the University's path four times since 1963. It is time for a fifth.

At the end of June, 2018, I will leave this extraordinary position I hold, and make way for the next person to help continue the University down its path. It is a decision I have made only after long reflection.

It will be a decade that I will have served – yes that decade thing again – a decade during which I have given this job my undivided attention. It is a decade during which Debra has enabled me to do so, as she has given this community her all, in her own way.

It will be a decade of you listening to me ... always patiently, sometimes frustratingly I am sure, but, with very few exceptions, always listening to me respectfully. I am and will be forever grateful for that. It is a decade the likes of which I will never again have.

It will be time for me – and the mid-sixties will not be a bad age to make a shift in one's life – to turn my thoughts to what might lie ahead for me and Debra, and see where life might take us.

I am immensely proud of what the University has accomplished since I have been here. But it is all of you who have done it, and the biggest task and the biggest joy for me is to applaud you.

To my office staff and administration colleagues, it has been and continues to be a true privilege to work with you. From the light-hearted moments to the pressure of dealing with a crisis, you have made me a better person.

The University of Windsor has been exceptionally well served by outstanding volunteers on the Boards of Governors I have worked with.

When the Board has debated and approved motions at meetings, it has enabled the University to move forward, and provided the stewardship entrusted to it by the laws of Ontario with compassion and a steadfast commitment to the public good.

The University Senate I have had the privilege to chair has continued to be the forum where great speeches are made, and motions that affect our academic mission are debated. Thank you to all who have served on that body.

And our Chancellor Ed Lumley has been an exceptional friend and champion for all of us.

Your energy and ideas, day in and day out, from classrooms to laboratories, from the Dennis Fairall Fieldhouse to sports fields, from secretarial offices to mechanical rooms, from student service centres to faculty councils, from IT centres to teaching and learning support rooms, from alumni engagement to groundskeeping, from catering to snow clearing to residences.. day in and day out it is you who are making the University of Windsor a Place of Promise.

You have all made my decision to step aside a hard one.

I can offer you the highest praise I am capable of offering. In February of 2008 Debra and I told our friends we were moving to Windsor, and they asked us why.

It is not unusual for people not from Windsor to ask why you are moving there. My answer?

As many prairie folk like me would have said, I told them I wanted to go to Windsor because I felt it was the Saskatchewan of Ontario.

Good people who have done great things without pretense, people who have come from far and wide to make a better life for themselves and their families, a place understated and overlooked, a place that is flat, a place I could put my heart into.

It is the right time for renewal to occur. The rebuilding of the campus, the integration into the downtown, the investment in new faculty, the need to make the rest of Ontario more aware of us, and most importantly the need to never waver from our history of letting students know that they come first... these were the things I saw as being important when I began.

The capital transformation plan – a \$300 million dollar refurbishment of the campus that began with the new engineering building and continued with EPICentre and a new Co-op, Career and Employment Services hub for students, a Welcome Centre for recruitment and alumni outreach, a downtown campus, greater access to pedestrianized green spaces, and more – the reality is that this plan will be completed.

This coming year will see the completion of the hiring of fifty new faculty. They will chart a new course for our students, and new discoveries for our world.

And after much consultation and dialogue with members of the First Nations community, we will officially open Turtle Island Walk where Sunset Avenue once ran. It will be one of several signature events to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada, the so-called sesquicentennial.

We must never forget that our campus sits on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations – the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatami – and this event will be one way of acknowledging that something does not seem right about how First Nations people were in effect only spectators when this country was forged in 1867.

And Alistair MacLeod Walk will be officially designated, to remind us that our campus has been and is the home to extraordinary gifted people.

This past year the University finalized our policy on sexual misconduct. In September of 2017, we will invest in a pilot that will make training under the Bystander Initiative available to 500 incoming first year students.

This is in addition to the many hundreds of students in all years of study who take the workshop in their courses.

And in the fall of 2018, it is planned that every first year student will have this opportunity. It will be a first in Canada.

The pilot this fall and the full roll-out next year have been developed by Charlene Senn, Anne Forrest, and Emily Rosser, and many students have become involved as trainers.

The data show that by having more people trained in how to watch out for the danger signs that precede sexual assault, we can make university campuses safer for women.

If we cannot make university campuses safer for women, we cannot claim to be here equally for everyone, regardless of their religion, skin colour, nationality, gender identity, or ability. And it is our responsibility to be able to make that claim.

I could go on with examples of what has been done, what is now in place, and what wheels have been put in motion.

Yes, as I was weighing the decision I have shared today, I asked myself if I have finished everything I set out to do.

I came to the answer that I had not. But I also came to the answer that it never would be finished, and never can be finished by one person, because a university is never static.

I have given it my all. It is time to think about dusting off my guitars, stepping aside, maybe recording another album, and letting you gather under the holly for a New Year's party.

The University must continually change and adapt, and to do that there must continually be renewal.

This morning I informed the Board of Governors of my decision, and it will now immediately begin the process to undertake a search for the next President and Vice-Chancellor.

This afternoon, the University Senate will be officially notified, and asked to ready itself for how it will be engaged in the search.

What I want to do now is turn my attention to what I will focus on for the remaining time I have.

I will of course continue to do what I have been doing over the years, recognizing that when a new president is announced everyone's attention will very appropriately shift to that individual.

Matters of government relations, budgets, public outreach, and trying to be out and about on campus as much as I can be will occupy me as they always have.

But there are five things that will draw more of my attention, and I want you to know what they are.

First, I will be working with colleagues to put in place some of the key recommendations emerging from the broad consultations that Jim Black and his firm, SEM Works, conducted over the past four months on how to optimize our enrolment in an increasingly competitive postsecondary environment.

Enrolment management is emerging as one of the most important priorities for universities across Ontario and Canada as shifts occur in demographics and in student expectations regarding the job market.

Those of you on Senate will have heard the conversations about Curriculum 2020 – those conversations must continue throughout Faculties.

The academy of the future must embrace the best approaches to teaching, and build upon the value that opportunities for work-place experience can create, as we prepare students for an increasingly multidimensional world.

As we develop the 2017/18 operating budget, we will be making investments that will provide for greater administrative support to recruitment efforts and to Faculties as they seek to manage their enrolments and develop new programs for tomorrow's students.

My second priority will be to negotiate a new Strategic Mandate Agreement with the Province before this summer.

Every university and college must have one, and this will be our second such Agreement.

We know already that the province wants enrolment and the student experience to be a central focus.

We know we will be asked to commit to metrics related to things like our research and creative activity, our community engagement, and employment success of our graduates.

Importantly, this Agreement will also herald the arrival of a new funding formula for universities in Ontario.

In this new formula, the bulk of the government grant that a university receives will be based on an agreed-upon domestic enrolment number, plus or minus three percent of that number... the so-called enrolment corridor.

In addition, a portion of funding will become performance-based, using the metrics that have been agreed to.

These negotiations will be very important for the University's future, and I will keep the campus informed as they progress.

I want to take a moment to show you at a macro level how enrolment has been trending. As the enrolment patterns shift, so too does Windsor-Essex shift.

Many students work and volunteer throughout the region, and many international students seek opportunities to stay. Students make a big difference to the City and County.

Looking over the past fifteen years, total full time enrolment at the University expanded during the double cohort years, but has been relatively stable since then.

What is changing is the ratio between undergraduate and graduate enrolment. In the year 2000, 93% of the students were undergraduate. Today, it is 78%.

And the graduate growth is almost entirely from international students. In 2010 we had 1658 graduate students, 71% of whom were domestic.

In 2016 this had almost doubled to 3044, but now only 43% were domestic. As full time undergraduate enrolment has declined by 1300 students over the past five years, full time graduate enrolment has increased by close to 1300, an increase due almost entirely to international graduate enrolment.

Our work on enrolment management must be vigilant about these trends, and establish practices that reduce the risk of sudden changes that could negatively impact us.

My third priority for the coming year relates to collective bargaining. I am very grateful to our CUPE and UNIFOR bargaining units for working with us to successfully complete seven agreements this past year.

In spring we will commence collective bargaining with the Windsor University Faculty Association.

The administration is committed to ensuring that faculty compensation remains fair and competitive, and safeguarded by the Windsor Salary Standard, which ensures that faculty are paid on average at the median in the province.

That principle of ensuring that salaries are at the provincial median has in fact now been adopted by the Board of Governors for executive compensation.

And as is true whenever we collectively bargain, we are mindful that while it has been possible to secure a variety of funding sources for capital renewal, the operating budgets of virtually every university, and indeed of all levels of government and the public sector, remain challenged by the very hard realities of cost escalation and limited revenue growth.

It will be the administration's goal to successfully conclude bargaining with faculty by the end of June when the existing agreement expires.

To that end, in spring we will be bringing forward to the Faculty Association's bargaining team an offer that will underscore our desire to be fair, to be fiscally responsible, and to be serious about getting a deal by June 30th.

My fourth priority will be to work with colleagues on the completion of some key infrastructure projects. This summer, across from the new David A. Wilson Commons, we will develop the River Commons where there is now a closed parking lot.

The concept of the River Commons was developed during consultations that led to the campus Master Plan that was approved by the Board of Governors in 2013.

The River Commons, with its meandering path, reflects how the Detroit River has defined our region for as long as people have lived here, and it will provide an aesthetic connection between Turtle Island Walk and Alistair MacLeod Walk.

You will all be aware that late last fall we had the official opening of the new building that houses the School of Social Work and the Centre for Executive and Professional Education.

Our architects, CS&P, did a remarkable job to reimagine the site where the Windsor Star once stood.

This fall, we will open the new home for the School of Creative Arts. The Windsor Armouries is well down the road of being transformed into a dramatic new home for the School, again through the vision of CS&P, and the new building on the site of the TBQ is well underway.

The opening of the new home for Creative Arts will also coincide with the sesquicentennial anniversary of Canada.

It will be an opportunity to reflect on the Armouries' history, and to think forward as this historic building takes on a new purpose in the service of community and country.

As the School of Creative Arts prepares to move downtown, we are strengthening our ties with the arts community. This year, the University and the Windsor Symphony Orchestra signed a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines steps for the two organizations to collaborate more closely, and to create opportunities for students in our music program to perform with a professional orchestra.

And very shortly, construction of the new Science Research Innovation Facility will commence on the main campus on the west end of Essex Hall. It is to be opened in the spring of 2018.

New laboratories for our Faculty of Science are already spawning fresh new ideas for research and academic programs in health, the environment, advanced materials, and data analysis.

And there are projects yet under consideration, the fate of which will be known very soon. The University of Windsor Student Alliance is running another referendum next week regarding the proposed Lancer Sport and Recreation Complex, a facility that would allow us to address many of the current shortcomings in the St. Denis Centre.

Governments typically do not fund athletics facilities. Every university relies upon student athletic fees, set through referenda, for facility upgrades, and the University of Windsor is no different in that regard.

I encourage every full-time undergraduate student to get out and vote in the referendum. Whatever the outcome, it would be reassuring to know that it is an outcome based upon a high turnout.

And there remains the question of whether the Law School will have an opportunity to relocate to the city centre, to the historic Paul Martin Building.

There will be an answer to this question soon, a question I have been working on with the mayor's office and the province for close to four years now.

The City's offer of financial support for the project has been very important, but the project cannot be contemplated without the province being a significant partner.

So let me now turn to my fifth priority. But first I want to share two little stories, personal stories.

You have heard about earworms... you know, you hear a song and you can't stop humming it for the next two weeks.

The first story is about an earworm. For some reason, almost every day there is a moment when I recall a short little poem.

It is a poem about hopes and dreams, about not travelling life's journey alone, and about the personal sense of achievement that comes from even the most humble accomplishment:

We dug our wishing well, drew up our little plan
We drank the bucket dry, still drinking when we can
Black furrows in a field, and secrets in the dark
Just our little story, just our little mark.

Like each of you, my life has been a journey of hopes and dreams, and a journey enriched because of those who helped me dig my wishing well, and who with me made furrows in the field my life has traversed.

The second story happened over this past holiday season. I decided it was time to open a trunk in the basement that I had not opened in many, many years.

Among the random items dating back to 1971 there was a brown folder, and inside of it were letters from the Awards Office of the University of Saskatchewan, dated during the years I was a student there.

Those letters were informing me that I had been awarded a bursary or a scholarship, and the name of the donor or organization who had provided the gift.

Those letters were alongside birthday cards my mother wrote me when I was living in France in my thirties, a little book my grandfather gave me just before he passed away in 1991, and other things like that, that we cling to, because they mean the world to us.

I had kept those letters because they had meant the world to me. They meant I had to borrow less money to complete my degree, and they further motivated me to do my best.

They made my wishing well a fuller one, and somehow, through the long dotted line of the arc of my life, they helped bring me to the University of Windsor and this remarkable position I still hold. Finding those letters reminded me how important they had been.

Each of you has the story of your life, and it is a story made richer because someone believed in you.

And that belief in you might have enabled you to uncover the promise you had within yourself to be something you didn't think you could be, and to do something you thought you couldn't do.

And that is what Promise@UWindsor is all about. When a student comes here, we are committing to sharing a journey with them, to helping them discover the promise within themselves, to helping them draw from their own wishing well.

For all of us... we want the University of Windsor to be the spot where we can imagine the potential within ourselves to make the world a better place.

That sense of place, that importance of place, is a human yearning that we see manifested whether it be a park bench with the name of a loved one on it, a furrow in a field, or a love of the country of our birth.

In case any of you are starting to worry, I am not getting soft and poetic and turning to mush in the evening light of my days as President. But I am moved with ever greater emotion about the importance of this sense of place.

I am moved with ever greater belief in the mission we all serve, and an ever greater realization that universities – the University of Windsor – and colleges – St. Clair College – and all places that endeavor to lift human thought and creativity and hope, are places of promise.

Significantly rebuilding the campus has been about significantly rebuilding the place where promises are fulfilled.

And so my fifth priority for my remaining time is to recast our fundraising efforts around the theme of Place of Promise.

We cannot create this place alone... the University of Windsor will always be the creation of the people who work and study here, our community, our alumni and friends, our governments – all who give of their money and their time and their talents.

Whether gifts are made for the support of students, for the campus learning environment, for our community integration, or for helping our research have greater impact, they all contribute to helping promise be fulfilled.

Place of Promise is an opportunity to unify the reason to give with the call to give.

Putting a name on a fundraising drive is always tricky business. Each year, the University has had a name for the annual Faculty and Staff giving campaign, an effort that over the past seven years has now, remarkably, raised more than two million dollars from those who work here.

For the past five years, as we have gone out to major donors and foundations, we have referred to the fundraising effort as the UWill campaign, but this is not a name that we have gone out with publicly.

It has served us well as a placeholder for discussions with donors, but we have not, as the saying goes, put it in neon flashing lights.

Place of Promise will be public, and you will begin to see it appear over the next several weeks, with a dedicated web site and material that will be used by major gift officers and staff in alumni and donor relations.

I am mindful that as soon as you say you are in a fundraising campaign, everyone immediately asks how much you are trying to raise. It is a curious curiosity that people have. Well, here is the answer.

If a potential donor, or anyone, asks me how much we are trying to raise, my answer will be that we are trying to raise as much as you feel you are able to give, for what is important to you. It is individual donors who make the difference, not a target number.

There are many opportunities to give and many needs... support student scholarships, support the Library, support the Armouries project, support the new Science Research Facility, support the LSRC, and more. Give a dollar or give a million. It all counts.

Since we began the capital transformation plan in 2010, close to \$180 million dollars have been raised from public and private sources, contributing to capital costs and contributing to our endowment that supports our students.

Of this amount, \$67 million has come from private donors – alumni and friends – and our city. I thank everyone who has helped make this happen.

The Place of Promise campaign will have as one of its central themes the celebration of champions... particularly alumni who are giving back of their money and their time, and who can provide a testimonial about why the University of Windsor has meant so much to them and why they want to give back.

The campaign will run until the Spring Convocation at the end of May, 2018. It will be for the next President to decide whether the concept of Promise@UWindsor has a longer lifespan.

So those are the five priorities that will guide me in my final year. As has always been the case, any successes that derive from them will happen not because of me alone but because of the many people who will be engaged in them with me.

And we have no shortage of extraordinary people. You have seen, as you go east on University Avenue, the student on the poster on the law school. Her name is Tasha Donnelly, a third-year law student.

In addition to her academic studies, she is the lead student editor on the Canadian Bar Review, and she will be clerking next year in the Ontario Superior Court.

She was one of the Canadian Women's March National Coordinators and has been active in promoting women's rights, LGBTQ rights and ending the stigma against mental health issues at the law school and in the city.

Engineering students Hamed Kalami and Andre Khayat just won the Young Researcher Award at an International Intelligent Manufacturing Systems meeting in Austin, Texas, for their work on a 3D printable hand brace to assist people with mobility challenges.

These are just a few of the remarkable people among our student body. I wish I could tell all fifteen and a half thousand stories.

You will have seen the profiles of faculty we are running in the Globe and Mail this winter. Jennifer Johrendt, Kevin Milne, Shijing Xu, Bill Anderson, David Tanovich, Charlene Senn...

We want the country to see a sampling of the faculty at the University of Windsor who are inspiring students and making a difference in the world. I wish we could run hundreds of such ads.

And I can't begin to describe the varied ways that staff are helping us be a Place of Promise. They are the glue that keeps so many of the pieces in place.

Just this week, Pascal Calarco, University Librarian, sent me a list of testimonials from students about how Leddy Library staff had helped them with data analysis and thesis preparations.

And I have lost track of how many visitors have told me to thank the grounds keeping staff for how the campus looks. I could go on and on, and on and on, and on and on.

I have given this annual community address every year since I arrived. In it, I have talked about what is important for all of us for the year ahead, as I have done today for the coming 2017/18 year.

Let me close my address with a confession. As I was writing this speech, I realized that I didn't know how to end it, because I didn't want it to end. But like my time here, I know it must.

My call to action is this... this year, and next year, and in the years ahead, let us all safeguard the University of Windsor and each other with caring and compassion.

And from my wishing well... may you stay forever young.