Ladies and gentlemen...It is a pleasure to be together this 15th day of April in Centre College's 180th year. We come together to celebrate the College's rich history and its bright future, and I am honored and humbled to be a participant in today's event.

Before I begin....I want to express my public thanks to the many people - family and friends, teachers and coaches, mentors and colleagues, both former and current - who have touched my life and helped me to have the opportunities that have been mine. I also want to thank all those who labored long and well to make this day of installation a success. I shall long remain in your debt.

With regard to the installation that brings us together on this 15th day of April, Mr. Chairman and members of the Board, I accept with humility and enthusiasm the opportunity to serve as president of Centre College. Still thinking of myself as a relative newcomer to this place, I need to thank the college community and the larger community for having welcomed my family and me with warmth and grace. As many of you know, I consider leadership to be an act of service, and it is in this spirit that I pledge to continue listening and learning, and - with you as my colleagues - providing leadership for this remarkable place.

And speaking of leadership, I have some very good news to share with all of you. This news illustrates well the commitment that Centre's Trustees have made and continue to make to this institution. It is my great pleasure, especially on this occasion, to announce that the $3-million Grissom Challenge has been met. Which is to say that over the past five months, more than $3 million has been given or pledged to match the Chairman's offer to give Centre a like amount. The success of this initiative puts in place a $6-million endowment in support of our faculty and their work with Centre's students. To all who participated in this focused effort I offer my thanks.

And, now to the business at hand, Founding the Future. Installations and inaugurations represent a moment in time when a college takes stock of itself. A time when the level of institutional self consciousness is raised. A time for reflecting, lifting spirits, and giving thanks. Today's ceremony provides us an opportunity to focus on this institution's history and its future within the larger context of American education. That will be the thrust of my remarks in the next several minutes. I invite you to join me in thinking about what it was to found a college 180 years ago and what the future may hold for Centre and for all of us who find ourselves at the dawning of a new millennium.

The founding of America's colleges stands in striking contrast to what we see today of the nation's system of higher education. There was nothing in colonial America to suggest that higher education was going to become an enterprise of some 3,000-plus colleges and universities. This system, despite its problems, is without question the finest the world
has to offer and represents a place of opportunity that has become a defining element in the American dream. We may need to be reminded that in 1776 there were only 3,000 living graduates of the American colleges. Harvard - our country's first institution, founded in 1636 - graduated a less than remarkable 63 students in the Class of 1771, a number that would not be reached again until the early 1800s.

One should never forget that young women did not become part of higher education's landscape until 1837, and the doors to education opened even later for African-Americans and Native Americans. In the 18th century the overwhelming majority of young men . . . stayed home, farmed, went West, or became – without the benefit of a college education – Benjamin Franklin or Patrick Henry.

And what of the founding of our beloved Centre? Receiving its charter in 1819, the College struggled through its first decade, having only 33 students by 1830. That was the year Dr. John C. Young became president at age 27, and remained president for 27 years until his death in 1857. One admirer said of him: “He infused life into the College, organized it anew, secured for it an endowment, spread its fame over the whole country, filled every profession and calling with its alumni, and left it with its halls crowded with students drawn thither by the report of his wisdom and the fame of his learning.”

I should add that the expectations I have for myself are not nearly so lofty. Simple as it may sound, my stated goal is to make Centre a better place, and I suspect President Young had a goal of similar simplicity when he began in 1830.

The countless other colleges being founded all across the Eastern U.S. at that time were much like Centre. When a college was founded, it often had a building, but no students. Or if it had students, the college often had no professors. And if the college had both professors and students, it often had no money. Indeed, many colleges founded in those earlier times had no president. (Some would still consider that a plus!)

Perhaps as many as 700 colleges were founded and failed before the Civil War. Yet Absalom Peters, a friend of the college movement, was unquestionably right when he remarked in 1851, “Our country is to be a land of colleges.” For against a record of founding and floundering, this nation headed into the American Revolution with nine colleges, and into the Civil War, less than 100 years later, with approximately 250, of which nearly 200 still survive.

This widespread founding of colleges — schools that mattered and lasted - was to be a distinctly American phenomenon and such was to be the legacy of our beloved Centre. Founded on the bedrock of the liberal arts and sciences - and devoted to teaching and changing the lives of undergraduate students - the College we serve has survived and has prospered.

Few colleges are being founded these days. But a great many colleges or universities in the last several decades have in some ways reinvented themselves by positioning or realigning an existing mission or broadening the academic focus of the institution or, in
some cases, even changing their names. American education has been and most certainly is about change in this century. Indeed, the nation's system of higher education in this century has grown and expanded the nature of its work in ways that Centre's founders, and countless other founders who labored in the college movement's first 300 years, could not have imagined.

So, if founding these days is more about positioning or aligning, then what might one say about Centre College as it approaches the new millennium?

While many colleges have made dramatic changes in their size, their programs of study, their very character, Centre College has sustained and enhanced its identity as a smaller, undergraduate college with an admired devotion to the liberal arts and sciences. It has maintained its extraordinary commitment to both excellence and access. And it has forged a record of outstanding teaching, scholarship, and preparing young men and women for a life of work and service in a wide variety of fields. The College's reputation as a national liberal arts college is growing, and several of the College's distinctive programs offer important educational possibilities in today's competitive environment. Centre has chosen not to pursue educational fads, which seem so quickly dated, but to add quality to its programs and facilities, to continue making teaching undergraduates its first priority, and to add further distinction to the transforming educational experience for which it is legendary in Kentucky and increasingly well known across the nation.

And what of founding the future? The future - what might we expect? Just how remarkable might it be? Forecasters tell us that the number of American men and women over 85 will double before 2020. They report that the impact of information technology in our day-to-day life will outdistance anything we might imagine today. They speculate that we may finally move away from our near total reliance on fossil fuels. They report that an environmental disaster of proportions we have never known is somewhere between possible and probable. They predict that children will be less fit in the next century though exercise equipment will offer virtual reality options that will make one's workout unbelievably lifelike. They judge that the United States' remarkable diversity will grow and spread more evenly across the nation. They speculate that our country's renewed interest in matters of faith will continue to grow even as church attendance declines.

We also know that those who speculate about the future should be heard with some caution. Remember that Charles H. Duell, Director of the Patent Office in 1899, said, and I quote, “Everything that can be invented has been invented.” That Lord Kelvin, President of the Royal Society in 1895, was quoted to have said, “Heavier than air flying machines are impossible.” That Nobel Laureate in Physics Robert Milikan said in 1923, “There is no likelihood man can ever tap the power of the atom.” Remember, too, that no one imagined that the telephone, the laser, and the computer would have such a profound impact on our world.

If the history of those who predict the future tells us much, and I believe it does, then the
future we might expect will almost certainly be strikingly different than we imagine. And, my friends, there is reason to believe our world's future will be even more extraordinary than the millennium we soon leave behind.

But now, allow yourself to step back in time and be reminded of events in Centre's rich history. This college was founded on solid ground. While many colleges changed location, some more than once, these acres in the Bluegrass and in Danville have been Centre's only home. That, too, is part of the magic of this place, and makes its story all the more splendid. Join me, then, as we listen to the voices of Centre's founding.

[At this point, the installation program featured a break in President Roush's remarks for a dramatic presentation about the history of Centre. The mini-drama featured vignettes on Isaac Shelby, Kentucky's first governor and one of the founders of Centre; Elizabeth Patterson, a Danville woman whose Civil War diary revealed her concern for neighbors of varying political views; and John Marshall Harlan, a Centre alumnus and U.S. Supreme Court Justice whose forward-thinking, dissenting views in the 1890s later provided a legal foundation for the Civil Rights movement.]

And what might we know of Centre's future? How remarkable might it be? As I have watched the history of Centre College unfold before us on this stage today, I have felt awe - and a strong sense of obligation to our predecessors. If Isaac Shelby and his friends could found a college on the frontier, what will we do to honor their effort? If Elizabeth Patterson had the compassion to understand the plight of her neighbors during the Civil War, how will we emulate her kindness? And if John Marshall Harlan could discover truth and stand alone against prejudice, how will we find inspiration from his courage?

Those men and women were about founding the future, though I suspect they never gave thought to it. How about us? We have been at work for many months in a strategic planning process that is, in fact, about founding the future. I judge it would be premature for me to talk in great detail about the College's future, as we are still in the process of discovering and deciding on many of these goals and objectives — the very dreams of what Centre will become in the next century.

Yet even now, without benefit of having completed our planning process, I can speak confidently about some commitments that are fundamental to the character of Centre College. Here are some aspects of the institution I know will be part of its future.

The College will continue to believe that students come first. Centre will sustain its high-quality, undergraduate program in the liberal arts and sciences, claiming excellence in teaching as a defining value and treasure of the institution.

The College will expand its reputation for being a smaller, prestigious institution. We will vigorously pursue the ideal of educating the whole person; students who come to Centre will be touched in spirit and soul as well as mind and body.

The College will recruit and graduate a more diverse body of students prepared to be
citizen-leaders in a global society, men and women ready to distinguish themselves in a variety of fields. And Centre will maintain its commitment to its international programs, knowing that educated persons must be prepared to become citizens of the world.

The College will retain and recruit a treasured and highly accomplished faculty and staff, taking special care to insure these men and women are provided with opportunities for professional growth and development.

The College's Board of Trustees will include persons of exceptional achievement, diverse talents, experiences, and backgrounds, and will continue to advance Centre's cause through their influence, reputation, knowledge, and giving.

The College will focus its attention on maintaining and improving a number of its physical treasures so that its alumni, faculty, students — current and prospective — will find the grounds and buildings and classrooms and laboratories to be a source of even greater pride.

The College's learning resources in technology, instrumentation, and library materials will be competitive with like institutions, and in time Centre will be recognized as a national leader in these areas.

And in everything we do, Centre will continue to excel. That is our heritage, and we will not abandon it.

I have to tell you that I am old fashioned enough to believe in the concept of “duty.” The idea that what you can do, you must do. Centre has a duty to excel - an obligation to lead, because our founders and our forbears created a place of strength and opportunity.

I am excited about the chapters yet to be written and the moments yet to be lived on this campus. Our founders showed a capacity for courage, commitment, and idealism. I see that same spirit in the people associated with Centre College today.

Centre's prospects for the next millennium are exceedingly bright. I am confident in claiming that this college will be in position to continue its legacy of transforming lives and making an uncommon difference for good in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and these United States. Centre has always been about Founding the Future, and so it is on this day.

I thank all of you for being part of this day. I thank you for letting me become part of Centre's story. I thank you for what you have accomplished and what we will accomplish together as we go about the business of founding the future.