Mark Nunnelly Remarks

Good evening and welcome to this very special All-Campus Assembly. My name is Mark Nunnelly, Centre College Class of 1980, and I have the distinct honor of serving as chair of the Centre College Board of Trustees.

I welcome those fellow trustees who were able to join us this evening. Would you please stand when I call your name so we can acknowledge your presence? Crit Luallen, Jim Rouse, and Bobby Elliott, thank you for being here this evening.

In addition to serving as board chair, I had the humbling role of overseeing the recent search process for the 21st president of Centre College, which became necessary after the announcement this past summer by John Roush that he planned to retire the end of this academic year.

Fortunately, I was joined by 17 very talented colleagues as we sought his successor, and I can assure you that each member of the committee brought passion and integrity to this process, representing key stakeholder groups from across the campus community, whether it was alumni, trustee, student, faculty, or staff. Importantly, their decision was the fruit of many months of work, as you will hear from several of the committee members in a few minutes.

The search for a new president is an important event in the life of a college. In a single moment, it brings together a complex mix of constituencies and all of their hopes and fears about the past, the present, and the future. In a world that is changing as rapidly as ours, it makes all of these perspectives feel even weightier to all members of the community.

As a friend of mine who leads a large university once described it to me, being a president of a college is like driving a semi-truck down a very steep, curved, and narrow road with the alumni’s feet on the brakes, the students’ feet on the gas, and the faculty’s hands on the steering wheel.
Indeed, some have described being a college president as one of the hardest jobs there is.

Presidential searches don’t happen that often at Centre, which is testament to the legacy of leadership that the College enjoys. John Roush will have served for 22 years when he retires, for instance, and you may be surprised to know that despite this lengthy tenure, he is only the third-longest serving president of Centre College. John C. Young holds the record, serving for 27 years from 1830 to 1857, followed by Thomas Spragens at 24 years, who served from 1957 to 1981.

Because such a search process occurs rather infrequently, you can be assured that we approached our search for new leadership with due diligence, aware of all that Centre College has achieved over its now amazing 200-year heritage and cognizant of all the important work that remains to fulfill our aspirations long into the future.

Indeed, when the search process was announced, we were pleased — though I might confess, not surprised (I admit to being biased) — that it attracted so much interest.

Our search firm helped review some 400 potential candidates, then conducted screening discussions with approximately 150 of these individuals. As the initial interviews took place, we heard over and over about the important and prominent place that Centre College holds in American higher education.

This sends all of us a clear message.

All of us gathered here this evening should be gratified to know that we and all of those who came before us have, collectively, been good stewards of the College’s heritage as an academic community devoted to preparing students for lives of learning, leadership, and service. And just as we have done so for two centuries, I am confident in saying that the
21st president of Centre College will lead us boldly into our third century of service, building upon a firm foundation strengthened under the leadership of John Roush.

For my part, I came to believe that Milton Moreland was the ideal person to succeed John and lead us into the future when I heard him speak passionately about his liberal arts experience when he was a young undergraduate full of curiosity and ambition. He told the story of a faculty member who very early on became a mentor and friend, ultimately influencing what became his life’s work as a scholar of religion and an archaeologist.

It resonated with my own experience as a young kid from Kentucky who came to Centre and had a world of possibility opened up because of equally transformative experiences with mentors and friends to whom I owe an immense debt of gratitude.

But before you get a chance to meet President-elect Moreland directly, I know you will appreciate hearing from several of my search committee colleagues to offer their perspectives about our new president.

First, allow me to introduce the student member of our search committee, who played a significant role in our efforts. The outcome was much stronger for his contributions.

[COMMENTS AFTER JOHN ROUSH SPEAKS.]

I very much appreciate the observation by Professor Wilson, our faculty president, that while John Roush will leave very large shoes to fill, we can all have every confidence that Milton Moreland will meet this challenge, though perhaps with hiking boots.

And before introducing President-elect Moreland, I want to take this moment to express my deepest gratitude to John, as well as Susie, for all
that they have accomplished over the last 22 years.

Under John’s leadership — and this is just a thumbnail — Centre College has expanded its enrollment by nearly 50 percent, almost tripled its endowment (thanks to two successful capital campaigns), strengthened the College’s academic profile, and modernized the campus, all while increasing the diversity of the student body, including growth of our underrepresented, first-generation, and international populations.

As we witnessed this past Friday evening at the Centre Associates Dinner in Louisville, as part of our winter Board of Trustees meeting, John and Susie are beloved by the Centre community. And that fan base is large and strong for good reason. Approximately half of Centre’s living alumni studied and graduated here during the Roush’s long and enduring tenure. Thank you, John and Susie, for leaving this house, our College, in such outstanding order.

Now to his successor, and a few more observations from me on how I was positively impressed by his candidacy.

As President-elect Moreland rose through the academic ranks and took on administrative roles, we learned how “purpose” and “meaning” — two key words — were always at the heart of the educational experiences and opportunities he sought to make possible at Rhodes College. I am confident you will hear much from him about the importance he places on a “purpose-driven” education.

I am also confident that constantly striving to find ways to strengthen and enrich the student experience will be first and foremost on the mind of President Moreland, along with assuring that we are attractive to and supportive of students from all walks of life. We, together, under his leadership, will accomplish this by an abiding focus on constantly working
to strengthen a genuine sense of belonging, inclusion, and opportunity for all students, which should forever remain hallmarks of the Centre experience.

So, it is my great pleasure, on behalf of Centre’s Board and the search committee, to introduce you to our next president, Milton Moreland.