

OLLI General Membership Meeting

September 18, 2018

Good morning! Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

It's been a pleasure learning about the tremendous service OLLI at Auburn provides to East Central Alabama. And it's an honor to help open your membership meeting.

I had planned to speak to you earlier this year ... but the snow kept us from getting together. On a warm day like today ... it's hard to imagine a time with snow on the ground in Auburn!

I like to spend about 40 percent of my time outside the office engaging with the campus community, alumni clubs, business leaders or civic groups. One of the reasons I like to spend time engaging with groups like OLLI at Auburn is because it gives me the chance to meet and talk with great people. It's an added bonus that you are friends of Auburn University.

It's always great to be with a group of dedicated and engaged citizens because it's your involvement and participation that helps make Auburn such a wonderful place for us to live and learn. And OLLI at Auburn is such a special group to me because it offers our community members a vibrant lifelong learning experience. These opportunities—coupled with expanding Auburn's impact—is music to the ears of a university president!

I find it easy to talk about Auburn, it's truly an extraordinary university and I am proud to be a part of it. It's certainly a privilege to serve as president.

Janet and I have been here a little over a year, so while we're not brand new to Auburn, every day we discover something new about the university and our community that makes us even more thrilled to call Auburn home.

Since arriving at Auburn, I've had the chance to talk about my long-range goals. And it starts with enhancing and strengthening the student experience. Let's face it—we're all students, regardless of where we are in life. So, I especially appreciate your commitment and participation in OLLI at Auburn.

There are a lot of things that make Auburn truly special, and it starts with our students.

At Auburn, we educate students who go on to engage, influence and lead, and we are committed to continue offering our students a first-class education that will help them achieve both professional and personal success.

In fact, Auburn has the highest job placement rating of any university in the state, so that means that 9 out of 10 Auburn graduates get jobs. Employers tell us that our graduates show up on day

one with a tremendous work ethic, a willingness to learn and a strong character—skills that are essential for success. An Auburn degree can truly be transformational for our alumni.

But the power of higher education is not only evident in students' lives and their success. Colleges and universities contribute tremendously to economic growth and regional prosperity. Universities like Auburn bring prosperity to our communities by creating practical solutions through research.

At Auburn, we are focused on discovering solutions that make a meaningful impact on our communities, our state and beyond. It's amazing what Auburn scientists and engineers are doing that benefits the world around us. They're bringing solutions to the challenges that Alabamians face every day.

Auburn is a driving force in our state's economy, and we want to make a bigger impact. We are preparing students for the workforce they enter when they graduate, and we're also preparing them for the workforce they'll be a part of in the middle of their careers. So we are constantly looking for ways to respond to where our economy is headed.

We're making groundbreaking strides in health sciences, cyber security, agriculture, advanced manufacturing and many other areas that have practical impact. But we can do more. So, Auburn has several new initiatives in place to advance and accelerate our research endeavors.

One example is the Presidential Awards for Interdisciplinary Research program, or what we call the PAIR program. With 5 million dollars in seed money, the 11 teams are moving toward discoveries that will make a meaningful impact on the lives and economic futures of Alabamians.

For example, one of our PAIR teams is leveraging additive manufacturing, more commonly known as 3D printing, to help make medical implants safer and more affordable. Another team of researchers is working to help make housing more accessible to poor citizens living in our state's rural areas. And another one of the PAIR teams is studying the positive effects of olive oil on those suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

The goal for all of the PAIR teams is to secure external funding. With additional resources, these innovative researchers will deliver practical solutions. Solutions that have the potential to make a mark on the lives of citizens right here in our community and throughout the state of Alabama. We're well on our way to seeing a return on our investment, and we're expecting great things from the PAIR teams.

Auburn is also increasing funding for our graduate researchers. We welcomed 25 top-tier PhD scholars to campus this fall. These exceptional scholars are recipients of Presidential Graduate Research

Fellowships, and they're partnering with Auburn faculty make advancements in established and emerging fields of research.

To support our scholars and foster innovation, we're recruiting 500 scholarship- and research-focused faculty over the next four years. We're recruiting innovators, problem-solvers and those who have existing relationships with private and public partners.

We are also committed to our land-grant mission of outreach. To fulfill this commitment, we must increase access to educational opportunities and lifelong learning across the state, including OLLI at Auburn. Because when we expand the capacity of individuals and communities, we encourage innovation and create new opportunities to elevate our economy and our quality of life. OLLI at Auburn is one of the best examples of our dedication to improving the quality of life for people across diverse populations.

Another thing I learned after arriving here is the commitment I see every day to Auburn excellence. And I see that same commitment in OLLI.

To ensure we remain committed to Auburn excellence and to advancing our land-grant mission, we are engaged in a strategic planning process that will create the roadmap to carry Auburn into the future. We just finished a series of 14 listening sessions across the state, and we received valuable input from stakeholders inside and outside of the Auburn Family. We're kicking off another series of sessions on campus this week. This feedback and input will help as we continue to address our regional challenges, while embracing emerging opportunities to address the growing economic needs of our state.

Another crucial part of our new strategic plan focuses on improving our outreach efforts. We want to ensure we're continuing to serve our communities in inspiring, innovative and transformative ways. This commitment to outreach is at the top of my mind and will continue to be a priority as we move forward with the plan.

As we think about where Auburn is headed in the future, it is most certainly inspiring to see your efforts to expand volunteerism and professional development. There are many examples—too many to list this morning—but your efforts are noticed and appreciated. We're looking for ways to strengthen our partnership and the expand the opportunities this partnership can bring.

I understand that the fall term has a wide array of academic, social and service-focused programs. I trust you will enjoy the fall term. And I wish you all the best.

Now, I'd like to ask you: What should I know about Auburn? What's on your mind?

Thank you all for inviting me to speak with you today. Thank you for being such active and engaged members of our community. War Eagle!