Dr. Harter’s Comments  
February 2, 2006

Members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor Rogers, members of the Foundation and Alumni Boards, distinguished guests, and especially members of the UNLV campus community… I am truly overwhelmed to see so many of you here today – the people with whom I’ve been privileged to share such an extraordinary experience at UNLV.

As a university president, there are days you really look forward to with great anticipation, and others that give you great pause and even some sadness. This is a day of truly mixed emotions, as I have the occasion to reflect on the strides we have made together for UNLV – but also to look ahead to a different chapter in my life, and in the life of this great university.

First, I would like to say to all of you, that I was deeply saddened by the way that news of this coming change reached the campus via media speculation last week. That was not the way I hoped or would have chosen to communicate this news to the people I care about on this campus, and in the university community, but it was unfortunately not in my control.

So I thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

It is with decidedly mixed emotions I stand before you to announce formally that I will be retiring from the Presidency at the end of this academic year – just about eleven years to the day from the time I assumed that role… and it’s been an incredible ride.

I remember coming to visit UNLV for the second time back in 1995; this time my dedicated and long-suffering husband and greatest supporter, Mike, accompanied me. It was February, and when we departed for Las Vegas, it was one of those frigid, snowy upstate New York days. But in Las Vegas the sun was shining and it was about 70 degrees – Mike jogged in shorts and thought he’d died and gone to heaven. In some ways that image - that beauty, that brightness, that singular Las Vegas-ness was a great metaphor for my experience at UNLV.

I cannot begin to tell you what a once-in-a-lifetime experience it has been to be at this university during its most formative stage of development. Having come from Ohio University and SUNY Geneseo – two institutions steeped in well-established traditions, the opportunity to be a part of a young university just establishing its shape, its vision, and its own traditions has truly been an honor.

Just think about how far we have come together – in a remarkably short time, especially in the context of the typically glacial pace of academia.

Together we have grown from a campus of 19,000 students to more than 28,000. That means that in just 11 years, we’ve grown by an amount equivalent to the size of the entire undergraduate population of the University of Pennsylvania, and more than twice the size of the undergraduate population at Princeton. That is quite simply an amazing statistic. The challenges such growth produces cannot be underestimated.
We have also increased doctoral enrollment by an astounding 265% since 1995, and our focus on establishing graduate programs and research opportunities at UNLV has truly paid off.

In anticipation and support of that growth, together we set in motion the university’s first-ever strategic planning process, and held provocative, campus-wide discussions of how we wanted to grow, what our academic priorities should be, and where the best opportunities for meaningful teaching and research could be found.

Many of you in this room today have taken part in those efforts, making our annual Planning Retreats some of the most productive, enlightening and exciting sessions I’ve had the opportunity to experience. Several community, alumni, and Foundation Board members also attended those sessions and we learned from them, as they learned from us.

Strategic planning also meant taking a hard look at infrastructure – and undertaking the difficult, and again unprecedented task of campus master planning… looking at the infrastructure we would need to support our students to create the best possible learning environments.

And here we are with 23 new or completely renovated buildings, including our wonderful Lied Library; the new Student Union, Student Recreation Center and Science, Engineering and Technology Buildings under construction… and plans for many more exciting new facilities, such as Greenspun Hall, a signature building that will mark the Southern entrance to Midtown and to UNLV.

Over the past eleven years we have continued our tradition of recruiting faculty and professional staff from some of the finest universities and organizations – not only in the U.S., but from around the world. And over that time the sheer number of faculty and staff has increased an astonishing 69%: from Harvard, Berkley, Virginia, Texas, Michigan, UCLA – the greatest universities in our country.

With the campus’ growing group of creative and committed faculty and staff, we have established more than 100 new degree programs – and nearly 60% of those are at the graduate level.

We have expanded the former Honors Program into a full-fledged Honors College, and recruited more outstanding scholars to UNLV than ever before, including 11 National Merit Scholars and one math major who had achieved a perfect score on the ACT.

We have established two of the most community-engaged, up-and-coming professional schools in the Mountain West region in our School of Dental Medicine, and the William S. Boyd School of Law… as well as professional programs in Architecture, Physical Therapy, Public Health and Nursing with a new PhD program to develop nursing teaching faculty.

These latest areas are shaping up as critical pieces of our community’s health science infrastructure, adding to the service we provide to our community by graduating nearly 700 teachers and education administrators each year.
All of these and many other programs too numerous to name are making a real difference in the quality of life for all Nevadans.

We have continued to develop, appropriately, as a premier center for hospitality education and research – and are very close to launching two new programs that will take our profile as an industry leader to a new level: a hospitality campus, dubbed “Innovation Village,” and UNLV Singapore, set to deliver our programs to an eager international student population beginning this fall.

I have said many times that we must be, increasingly, a university that reflects and serves its community. We are growing together splendidly into that role – through academic and research programs that address our climate, our social infrastructure and our economy… as well as, of course, by educating the next generation of talented business and community leaders, many of whom have majored in the liberal and fine arts, or in urban affairs, as well as business and hotel administration.

At every level of our life we have also become more diverse and more reflective of our community. Our data demonstrate a substantial increase in minority and female students and staff and proves how the culture of diversity and equity has permeated campus at all levels. No amount of rhetoric can change the data: our outcomes prove our commitment.

We have also set the stage for the next steps in development of this great university – by growing our external funding from $19 million to $95 million last year, including research funding increases from $14 million to $69.4 million – remarkably, an almost 500% increase. Our science and engineering programs and faculty are leading that trend.

We have also looked to the future by acquiring land around the valley – establishing our first regional campus at Shadow Lane in the downtown medical district, beginning development of the exciting Harry Reid Research Park in southwest Las Vegas; and taking the first steps towards securing more than 2,000 acres of federal land in North Las Vegas, a commitment to the entire higher education system in Nevada spearheaded by UNLV. I can only imagine the amazing possibilities for research and educational access at all levels and by multiple institutions that will be brought about in the future by our leadership and actions today.

I have always believed that top-tier athletics and top-tier academics go hand-in-hand. During these 11 years, many of our athletic programs have grown and flourished – with top ranked teams in sports as varied as swimming and golf, and many of our athletes now succeeding at the Olympic and professional level.

When I look to the future of the university I also see an exciting time ahead in athletics, and I have been so pleased to be a part of hiring outstanding coaches like Lon Kruger, Regina Miller, and Mike Sanford for our campus. We are all anxious to see the fruits of their labors and utterly optimistic that they will succeed beyond our expectations. And our athletic graduation rate has increased to 53% this year – the highest it has ever been at UNLV.
I’ve also told many of you in our campus community, and in the media, that our vision of the future for UNLV also involves a picture of a vibrant university district that serves as a community gathering place – a real destination and center of intellectual and artistic energy to envelop and support our campus.

This vision of Midtown UNLV, so lovingly shepherded and supported by community partners and visionaries, has captured imaginations – and is well on the way to becoming reality. I look forward to seeing the development of that vision continue – as well as to one day enjoying a glass of wine at a sidewalk café listening to our jazz combo, overlooking the tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly Maryland Boulevard. Trust me, we’ll get there.

Which brings me full circle to my own future with UNLV. One of the greatest pleasures I’ve enjoyed as UNLV president – and believe me, there have been many pleasures to balance some considerable pain – is helping this community to discover, embrace, and support its university.

As a young university we must look not only to alumni for private support, but also to many of Las Vegas’ leaders to shepherd and support their “adopted” university – and recognize its meaning and value for Southern Nevada. As I discussed during last fall’s State of the University address, we could not possibly have come as far as we have in such a short time without so many angels in our community playing pivotal roles in the development of UNLV – and many of you are in this room today.

A great milestone in the university’s history that we celebrated just recently was the public launch of our first-ever comprehensive fundraising campaign, very appropriately titled Invent the Future. This effort has, in many ways, captured the imagination of our community. In our first quarterly update since the public launch, we just last week announced that our campaign has soared past the $300 million mark, bringing in more than $37 million since September.

The campaign is on an amazing pace which I have no doubt will continue to accelerate as we blow through our $500 million goal. There are many exciting developments shaping up within the campaign – developments with the potential to dramatically change and enrich our university for the future. I wish that I could tell you about some of those today… but I can assure you, they’re coming and are in the pipeline as we speak.

The campaign, and all it entails, is a major undertaking in the life of UNLV. It is designed to take us all to new levels of academic excellence, while strengthening our ability to serve our community as an engine for economic diversity and social development. It is the next step in our journey together – and an effort that I look forward to continuing.

I am pleased to share with you that my efforts in this campaign will become even more concentrated in my new role with UNLV. Working closely with the next president and with the Foundation, I will spearhead the newest phase of intensive fundraising through the culmination of the campaign, working to ensure that our goals are met, and to develop some of the resources needed for UNLV to grow in the future.
Through my tenure as President, and working with the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees and many of our advocates in the Las Vegas community, I have also participated in the development of some of the most creative and exciting academic projects in the country, including bringing the state’s first Nobel Laureate to campus.

The Black Mountain Institute, and its centerpiece, the Forum on Contemporary Cultures, is being planned as an international “think tank” supporting compelling, intellectual dialogue about the most pressing global issues in an environment of multidisciplinary and varied political perspectives. Much of that dialogue will occur in public venues in which the community will participate.

This vision of an innovative, one-of-a-kind center is yet another step in UNLV’s growing prominence on the national and international stage, and I am very excited to take a leadership role in its development. As you can imagine, deep from my own academic roots, I find this a tremendously appealing and fascinating opportunity that can reignite the profound intellectual interest that drew me to the academy more than forty years ago.

Many of you will remember that I once stood before you at a State of the University Address, and, quoting the philosopher-musicians of pop band Timbuk 3, opined that at UNLV, “the future’s so bright, I’ve gotta wear shades.” That is just as true today as it was then – and though I may be retiring from the Presidency, I want all of you to know that I am not retiring from UNLV.

Having had the opportunity to serve as your president these 11 years has been a humbling experience and a real honor. You are, without a doubt, the best group of creative, committed, and talented people I could ever imagine. And we all know that it takes a truly strong group of individuals to move UNLV so far so fast.

To all of the deans, department chairs, faculty, classified and professional staff, students and senior administrative leadership – please know that your creative spark, your leadership and your commitment to this university have created wonderful programs to see our students well into the future. This university is in great hands.

To our students, we are dedicated to your intellectual and social development, one student at a time. You are the heart and soul of the University.

We have been through so much together – but there’s still much to accomplish. This spring semester is shaping up to be one of the best and most productive ever, and I look forward to accomplishing many great things with all of you – in my current role, as well as in my next one.

I am blessed to be a part of such a tremendous team, and such a marvelous university, an academic juggernaut that cannot be constrained. I am fortunate to have lived a lifetime of career highlights in a mere 11 years.

For all these memorable years and more exceptional opportunities and challenges than any university president could hope to experience, I thank you all.
And as all of you who know me well will appreciate: “I will not go gentle into that good night.”
Thank you.