

CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICE

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2017 State of the University Address

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President
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Thank you, Bob, for the introduction and for all you do for Cornell as chair of the Board of Trustees. Your tribute to Pete Meinig, and the one that Sofia Vila read on behalf of her father, were deeply moving. Although I did not have the opportunity to know Pete as well as you did, I will be forever grateful for his wisdom and for the kindness he showed toward me as a new Cornell president. His intimate knowledge of the university, from an association that spanned more than a half century, was so helpful during my first months in office. He and Nancy and their family have had a transformational impact on Cornell and on so many of us here this morning.

I also want to thank Sofia for representing her father so well today. Enrique J. Vila-Biaggi has provided strong leadership to the Cornell University Council, and our thoughts are with him and all those in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands who are struggling to recover in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

I am delighted to be at my first TCAM meeting, and to be experiencing firsthand the energy and commitment of the Council members. Thank you all for the impressive work you have been doing throughout the year.

I have been at Cornell for just a half year, but I have already come to understand why this university has meant so much to Pete Meinig, Bob Harrison, Enrique J. Vila-Biaggi, members of Council and the Board of Trustees, and literally tens of thousands of alumni, parents and friends around the country and the world.

I have also very quickly learned that Cornell alumni are extraordinarily generous.

Last year the university raised a record \$743.5 million in cash gifts for all campuses, a 21 percent increase over cash gifts in FY2016. Several record-setting gifts--including the \$150-million gift from Fisk Johnson and SC Johnson to name what is now the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business--contributed to those results. But all gifts, large and small, make a difference. All told, we received contributions from 61,500 donors last year, and we set a new record for Annual Fund giving, which totaled \$41.7 million. I know many of you here played a role in that success. Thank you!

Universities are defined by their people, and great universities owe their greatness to the people, at all levels, who also contribute to the institution's intellectual and cultural vitality and societal engagement. So I'd like to start this morning by talking about some of the people who make Cornell great. We have several new members of Cornell's senior leadership team this year:

- **Dr. Augustine Choi** is our new Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean of Weill Cornell Medicine and Provost for Medical Affairs. Dean Choi is an outstanding physician-scientist and an exceptional leader, and we are so fortunate to have him leading Weill Cornell.
- **Emmanuel Giannelis**, the Walter R. Read Professor of Engineering, became vice provost for research and vice president for technology transfer, intellectual property and research policy in July. An important part of his portfolio is to expand Cornell's connections with industry and to encourage faculty to become stronger advocates for science in Washington.
- **Madelyn Wessel**, university counsel and secretary of the corporation, came to Cornell last spring from Virginia Commonwealth University, where she served as university counsel. Madelyn brings a wealth of university, legal and scholarly expertise to her position and has become a key member of my leadership team.

Let me next mention our marvelous students. It has been such a pleasure to interact

with Cornell students and to see firsthand how accomplished they are. Consider, for example, five extraordinary members of the Class of 2018 who received prestigious national scholarships last spring.

- **Allen Jiang**, a chemical engineering major, won a Goldwater Scholarship, a top national award for undergraduate students pursuing careers in mathematics, the natural sciences and engineering.
- **Alec Martinez** and **Celina Scott-Buechler** received Harry S. Truman Scholarships, which provide scholarships for graduate studies to juniors who intend to pursue careers in public service.
- And **Celina Scott-Buechler**, **Skye Hart** and **Dejah Powell** won Udall Scholarships, which are awarded to undergraduates committed to careers related to the environment or, if they are Native Americans, to health care or tribal policy.

But beyond these award winners, so many of our students are involved in impressive scholarship and research. My inauguration ceremonies in August began with a Festival of Scholarship where Cornell students working on some 30 different projects presented their work. Here are a just few examples:

- An M.D. student from Weill Cornell Medicine presented work on a non-invasive way to detect the most common malignant brain tumor in children.
- An undergraduate from the ILR School talked about his group, Bargaining for Better Schools, which is compiling a clearinghouse of information on collective-bargaining agreements for public school teachers across New York State.
- Cornell Tech was represented by a master's student in connective media, whose Magic Mirror project uses computer vision and machine learning to track changes in moles on the user's face or upper body.

The festival was punctuated by student performances of various sorts, including a graceful wheelchair ballroom dance routine by two members of the Cornell Class of 2020.

Cornell's newest students are equally exceptional. Among the members of the Class of 2021 are several published authors, a competitive logroller who has won a world title, a state champion in archery, and a student who became New Jersey's youngest falconer at the age of 14.

In addition, we continue on a trend of increasing diversity, with 12.9% of the undergraduate Class of 2021 being the first generation in their family to attend college. More than 25% are under-represented minorities or multi-race including URM. They come from 49 states, plus Washington DC, Guam, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and 46 other countries.

And student interest in studying at Cornell continues to grow, with more than 47,000 applicants for places in the Class of 2021 -- a more than 4% increase from the previous year.

In the Graduate School, 1,388 new students were selected from among 22,818 applications for the 2017-18 academic year. More than half of these new graduate students are international, hailing from 65 countries beyond the US, and they are roughly equally divided between women and men.

Of course, students come to Cornell principally because of the opportunity to work with our world-class faculty. I could speak for hours about the remarkable research and scholarship being done by the faculty at all of our campuses, but in the interests of time, let me highlight just a few of the faculty we've hired since January.

- **Angela Poole** is a new assistant professor in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at CALS. Professor Poole is studying the complex relationships among food, human metabolic systems, gut microbiomes and individual variation necessary to understand, prevent and treat chronic diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease that cost the US economy \$1 trillion annually.
- We recruited **David Casasanto** from the University of Chicago to be an associate professor in the Department of Human Development within the College of Human Ecology. Professor Casasanto's research, which bridges

cognition, language and neurosciences, focuses on how language, culture, and bodily experiences influence people's feelings, thoughts and decision-making.

- And **Emily Fridlund**, who completed a postdoc in the English Department and is now a visiting scholar here, was short-listed for the 2017 Man Booker Prize for her novel "History of Wolves." I've read her book, and I heartily recommend it.

There are so many more faculty whose work you'd find completely fascinating. I've been having small dinners with groups of about a dozen faculty at a time, and each time, we've run long because the conversation is even more delicious than the food.

I've mentioned our students and our faculty, but I'd be remiss if I did not also recognize our outstanding staff. Cornell's staff are the unsung heroes of the university. Without them, our faculty could not teach, our students would not learn, and the work of running the campuses, in all their complexity, would not get done.

Every spring Cornell holds a reception to honor staff who, while working fulltime, also complete a degree. It was a great honor for me to congratulate our 2017 staff graduates--26 individuals in all—including two who completed Cornell PhDs.

Many people have asked me what my aspirations for Cornell are. In a nutshell, I believe that Cornell can be the model of a relevant, premier university for the 21st century. To do that, we must:

- First, conduct world-class research and scholarship that addresses key societal issues, which almost always require a breadth of disciplinary expertise and perspective. There are few universities whose breadth approaches ours.
- Second, we must provide engaged, evidence-based education that combines rigorous academics with experiential learning, enabling our students to become global leaders with an appetite and ability for lifelong learning.
- And third, we must be a community of diverse faculty, staff, and students that

continually develops and models the capacity for communicating and working effectively across different perspectives and experiences.

This aspiration—to be the model of a relevant, premier institution of higher education for the 21st century—aligns with the priorities I laid out in my inauguration address: to foster academic distinction, to create a culture of educational verve, and to fulfill our civic responsibilities. So let me give you some examples of how we are moving these priorities forward.

As I've mentioned, our academic distinction arises in large part from our ability to reach out across disciplinary boundaries and bring together a wide variety of perspectives.

You can see that in our “One Health” initiative—Cornell’s approach to public health, which is built on a systems approach that considers the interconnections of people, animals, and the environment. This work is not only generating important research insights, but also leading to the creation of a new innovative Cornell degree program, a Master of Public Health. You can learn more about this initiative this afternoon from experts from the College of Veterinary Medicine and Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future.

Another example is Cornell Neurotech, a joint initiative between the Colleges of Arts & Sciences and Engineering. Cornell Neurotech is developing powerful new tools and technologies that can reveal the inner workings of the brain, with a particular focus on how individual brain cells and complex neural circuits interact at the speed of thought. This is one of the most important scientific frontiers in the 21st century, providing the foundation for understanding such profound behavioral deficits as Alzheimer’s disease, schizophrenia, and depression.

In a different realm, faculty in ILR and Arts & Sciences are collaborating on a project to improve employment outcomes for people with criminal records. In this innovative work, they are addressing the issue of employment for the seventy million Americans who have some form of criminal record. While employment is an important factor in

preventing recidivism, a criminal record puts job seekers at steep disadvantage. The faculty involved will test the efficacy of interventions to educate individuals with criminal records about their related employment rights.

We also have faculty working collaboratively across departments and colleges on the Critical Inquiry into Values, Imagination and Culture -- or CIVIC -- project. CIVIC takes advantage of Cornell's strengths at the interfaces between the humanities and arts, and digital technology and computer sciences and includes an initiative on Media Studies, Material Cultures and the Senses and a separate but related initiative on the Humanities, Arts and Public Life. The first two CIVIC hires will take place this year.

Other faculty, along with students and staff, are working on Earth Source Heat, which uses internal heat of the earth to provide heating for homes and buildings, and could significantly reduce fossil fuel use; and still others are working on crypto currencies and contracts, investigating the design of and policies around crypto-currency. In fact, we are fast becoming known as THE place to study this topic!

Some of these efforts are supported by federal research funding, some by philanthropy, and some by internal support through the Radical Collaboration Initiative, Provost Kotlikoff's signature program to attract and support faculty who are working across boundaries. But all are building on the breadth of expertise that is so fundamental to Cornell.

Another way in which we are distinctive, of course, is in having both rural (upstate) and urban (downstate) campuses. I've said many times that the Ithaca campus is and always will be at the core of the Cornell experience. It itself is an important part of what makes Cornell distinctive, and we will always nurture and treasure our Ithaca campus.

I want to remind you, though, that Cornell has been integrated into the fabric of New York City for more than 100 years. Our medical school began there in 1898, and last year Weill Cornell Medicine treated more than 2.9 million patients and brought more than \$240 million worth of research funding to New York.

Our physical footprint in the city also includes programs offered by the College of

Architecture, Art, and Planning; the School of Industrial and Labor Relations; the College of Engineering; Cornell's Law School; the Faculty of Computing and Information Science; and the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. And in all five boroughs, you'll find Cornell Cooperative Extension at work, supporting tens of thousands of New Yorkers with programs in nutrition education, youth development, energy conservation, and more.

Now, with the opening of Cornell Tech, we're "doubling down" on our New York City presence, actively seeking ways that our upstate and downstate programs can enhance one another. Just last month, we held the official dedication of Cornell Tech's Roosevelt Island campus. The fact that we had both the current and former mayor of New York City and the Governor of the State of New York there is an indication of how important this initiative is for the city, the state, and indeed the world.

As our New York City programs flourish, and particularly as Cornell Tech grows, we will enhance our educational quality, research, and societal impact through collaborations among our Ithaca and New York City campuses. We're now planning Phase 2 of the tech campus's development and, concurrently, I am asking a faculty committee to develop a NYC vision for the next decade that will complement and enhance what we are doing in Ithaca, making Cornell much more than the sum of its individually excellent parts.

Speaking of making a whole greater than the sum of its parts, I'd like also to briefly update you on the progress of the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. With impetus from the remarkable \$150 million gift from Fisk Johnson and SC Johnson that I mentioned earlier, the new College of Business is off to a very strong start. As most of you know, the college comprises the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, the School of Hotel Administration, and the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management. Each of them maintains their unique identity and focus, but by bringing them together we gain greater efficiencies, enhance collaborative programs, and increase our visibility on the national scene. With the creation of the new college, we now have the third-largest business faculty in the country and almost 6,000 students in the college's majors and minors.

This fall the college is launching “The Business of Food” initiative, co-directed by Profs. Miguel Gomez (Dyson) and Alex Suskind (SHA). The Business of Food theme cements Cornell’s reputation as the world’s thought leader in the global food industry, home to faculty whose expertise spans the whole food value chain, from farm input suppliers and growers upstream, to retailers and fine dining establishments downstream.

In addition to research that is academically distinguished, we are also focused on creating a culture of what I have called “educational verve.” We teach with verve through a variety of approaches.

Every one of our master’s students at Cornell Tech, for example, spends 1/3 of their time working in our studio curriculum, creating products and solving problems – engineering students with business students with law students with computing and information science students. The best way to solve our biggest societal and technical challenges is to gather a diversity of voices, backgrounds and disciplines. To date, Cornell Tech graduates have created 38 start-ups, collectively employing more than 200 people—and 94% of them are right in New York City, fueling the city’s tech economy.

Educational verve is also part of the Weill Cornell Medicine experience. The Class of 2018 at Weill Cornell, who will graduate next spring, is the first group of medical students to experience the college’s new curriculum for all four years. The curriculum blurs the rigid boundaries between basic science and clinical medicine, with faculty teaching the new curriculum using a combination of techniques, from traditional lectures, labs and project-based case sessions, to blended courses, video podcasts, e-learning modules, and other innovations.

On the Ithaca campus, the Engaged Cornell initiative, launched in 2014 with a transformational gift from the Einhorn Family Trust, is enabling students, faculty and staff to work with community partners in Ithaca, New York State and globally in active learning focused on solutions to significant challenges. This morning’s panel, moderated by Provost Mike Kotlikoff, will introduce us to some of those involved.

Professor Julia Thom-Levy, who was among the pedagogical pioneers who helped “flip” Cornell’s large physics courses as part of the College of Arts & Sciences’ Active Learning Initiative, now serves as vice provost for academic innovation. In her new role, Professor Thom-Levy is working to create excitement and experimentation around teaching, rooted in evidence-based practices, and to support faculty as they design new courses or think about how they teach existing courses. Our new Center for Teaching Innovation, which she helped bring about, combines academic computing that supports teaching and learning with a range of other services to help faculty, postdocs and graduate teaching assistants teach with verve.

Student life outside the classroom is closely related to educational engagement and verve. We aim to have more students living on campus to provide richer extracurricular environment. Toward this end, we are building dormitories with 2,000 new beds, and slightly increasing the undergraduate class size, by 1,100 over a period of years. Doing this will also enable us to keep up with the incredible demand in some of our programs, such as those in the Dyson School within the SC Johnson College of Business.

Finally I want to mention what I called in my inauguration our civic responsibilities—an interlinked triad of principles that universities, and Cornell in particular, need to uphold.

The first is to advocate for and to contribute to the understanding of reliable knowledge, and the importance of evidence-based reasoning. Over the last decade or so, a number of developments—including the rise of social media and the complexity of many social issues—have brought this issue to the fore. Last April the Faculty Senate passed a resolution to develop programs, both on and off campus, to model reliable knowledge, and they are now working to develop such programs.

The second civic responsibility that universities have is to support free speech. As I said in my inaugural address, as an institution whose very mission is tied to the free interchange of ideas, we have a special responsibility to be open to all thought and to guarantee freedom of expression. And we have a concomitant responsibility to speak up

forcefully, as an institution, against speech that is at odds with our core principles.

A strong commitment to free speech does not mean that there are no limits to speech. For example, harassment and threats are not protected, and institutions can put in place reasonable, content-neutral limits on the time, place and manner in which protected speech can occur. The lines are messy, and debate about them is an appropriate activity for universities. As we engage in those debates, we must bear in mind what history has shown about the perils of suppressing speech: that so often it is the powerful who attempt to shut down the speech of the less powerful.

That leads me to the third area of civic responsibility--our commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity, as expressed in our founding ideal of "any person." As you have likely heard, here at Cornell we recently had a series of incidents that were anything but compatible with that principle. And, alas, there have been many similar incidents recently on college campuses across the country. But Cornell must take a strong stance and be a leader in repudiating hatred and intolerance. We are and must remain committed to continually working for a campus environment in which all students, faculty, and staff feel included and valued. We need to be a community based on mutual respect, and, I would argue, a lot more kindness.

Over the past six months, (among other initiatives focused on diversity and inclusion) we have increased staffing in several student support areas and reframed the role of the dean of students to support students in their cultural and identity development. Our new dean of students, Dr. Vijay Pendakur, is leading many of these efforts.

An alumnus has made a significant philanthropic commitment to support first-generation and low-income student initiatives over the next five years, enabling us to hire a fulltime professional to implement programs and support for this growing student population. In addition, the Center for Teaching Innovation that I mentioned earlier is devoting new staff resources to helping faculty address diversity in the classroom and facilitate faculty-student conversations.

These are just a few of the recent initiatives that we have launched; in addition, I am

convening a Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate that will look holistically at how we can effect ongoing institutional change to help us achieve our aspirations in this area.

An academic, the old adage goes, is someone who sees something working in practice and wonders if it will work in theory. But Cornell was not forged from that mold. From the very beginning, we have joined practical and theoretical knowledge in ways that have been incredibly creative and productive. A private university with a public mission, we are Ivy League but never Ivory Tower. We couple our distinguished and distinctive research and teaching with a commitment to engage productively with the world. True to our founding vision, we strive to be a university that strives for diversity, inclusion, and equity—to be a place where people know how to behave respectfully to one another and to engage in thoughtful dialogue that appreciates differences in perspective.

Now, with our expanding presence in New York City and the new synergies that are emerging from that, we stand at the cusp of a new era for the university--in which we can and will be the model of a relevant, premier university for the 21st century. We do not yet know the full dimensions of what lies ahead, but I am convinced that we are at a moment that is transformational for Cornell and for the role we can play in the world. I am so pleased to have all of you as partners on the journey ahead. Thank you.