

**President-designate James B. Milliken – Opening Remarks  
Board of Regents Special Meeting  
UCSF Millberry Union Conference Center  
500 Parnassus Avenue, San Francisco  
Friday, May 2, 2025  
3:00 P.M.**

Thank you so much. Thank you very much, Chair Reilly, and thank you, Regent Chu, the presidential search committee, the entire the Board of Regents.

The University of California holds a special place among American—indeed global—universities. Its success is unparalleled in the history of higher education; the opportunity it has provided to so many Californians, the extraordinary record of research, innovation, and health care, and the impact it's had on the development of this state and this nation.

It's been 20 years since I first read The Gold and The Blue, the two-volume memoir of the 12<sup>th</sup> president of the University of California, Clark Kerr. That kindled my interest in UC history. I was struck then, as I am today, by the remarkable story of this university, the accomplished faculty who have brought such high regard, the many essential staff who dedicate themselves to this university, the extraordinary students whose lives have been changed, the committed Regents and campus leaders who have helped guide it. And while this history is hugely impressive, UC's importance to California, the nation, and the world is greater today than at any other time in history.

I am deeply honored to serve as the 22nd President of the University of California. To join a long line of distinguished UC Presidents, the most recent of whom is my friend, Dr. Michael Drake, who not only led the UC system successfully through a global pandemic but also made great strides to expand enrollment of Californians, prioritize affordability and student support, and ensure that the University's health enterprise is expanding its excellent care throughout the state.

As delivered

I met the UC chancellors today. I am excited for the opportunity to work with them. One thing that I have learned over the years working with 75 campus leaders at four university systems is that leadership matters. The UC chancellors are among the best higher education leaders in America, drawn to this extraordinary university for the same reasons that I am.

A basic idea at the core of why I believe the work we are all engaged in is so essential: Talent is universal, but opportunity is not. Talent is not determined by zip code, national origin, race, gender, or wealth. But too often over history, opportunity has been. Education, and particularly public higher education, is the most effective bridge we have found to connect talent and opportunity.

Our nation's colleges and universities are the greatest engines of social and economic mobility the world has ever seen. Seventy percent of the degrees in this country are awarded by public colleges and universities. Those degrees change the lives of our graduates for the better, absolutely. But they also change the trajectories of families and communities.

Despite this, we know that confidence in higher education is at the lowest levels in the decades since it's been measured.

Yet I remain firmly convinced that higher education is more important than at any point in our history. At a time when knowledge is increasing at a faster rate than ever, new technologies are providing previously unimagined capabilities, and our graduates are enjoying opportunities in fields that didn't even exist a few years ago, it's abundantly clear that we must continue to invest in the most successful higher education model in the world.

I have had the good fortune to lead four very different university systems in four very different states. At each, we worked to increase access, ensure affordability, promote student success, grow the vital research enterprise, expand healthcare – all for the public good.

We know that higher education faces challenges and changes. What will not change is the University of California's historic mission: teaching, research, health care, and public service.

As delivered

And to advance that vital mission, I look forward to working with the Board of Regents – with our chancellors, our faculty, our staff, our alumni, our students, and our supporters across California. Together, we will find solutions. And together, we will build on the University of California’s unsurpassed legacy of graduating exceptional students, producing life-saving research, delivering world-class patient care, and driving the innovation economy in California and this nation.

There is no other university like the University of California, and as stewards at this critical moment in history, must meet our challenges with the same confidence and optimism of those upon whose shoulders we stand.

There is no place I would rather be, no community I would rather join, and no mission I would rather embrace. I am grateful for your trust and your confidence, and for the warm UC and California welcome. Thank you, and Fiat Lux.