Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining me for my fall address to the campus community at California State University, Stanislaus.

There's always a certain electricity in the air at the start of the academic year — frenetic movement in all quarters to address everything from class schedules to books to lecture material to advising to parking. Yet, there is also comfort in traditions, security in perspectives, respect for attempts to break through those same traditions and perspectives, hope for a great semester and, of course, larger hopes riding on a college education.

It is really a pleasure to see so many people here today. We face challenges with our budget. We have work to do. But we are still a community that is proud of this university, its history and its obvious potential to impact both individuals and the region.

I'd like to begin with some introductions. First and foremost, let me first introduce my wife and best friend, Dr. Bernadette Halbrook. Bernadette has worked with me this summer to meet people all over the region. Please welcome her.

Let me also recognize our dedicated faculty and staff members who are here along with our students. And please give a special round of applause for new members of the faculty and staff who are joining us today.

Let me recognize a few others more formally:

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• Speaker of the Faculty, Dr. Mark Grobner and other Academic Senate members in attendance;
• Associated Students Incorporated (ASI) President Shanice Jackson and members of the ASI Board in attendance; and
• Emily Benefield, Chair of the University Student Union Board of Directors and members of that Board.

I also want to introduce some special guests from our larger campus community. They are here today because they respect and admire our university, and they want to support us, advocate for us and champion the partnerships that will benefit all of us in the region.

From the California State University Board of Trustees, please welcome Board Chair Bob Linscheid and Trustee Peter Mehas.

Also with us today are:

• John Lazar, mayor of the City of Turlock, an alumnus of our university. He is joined by Roy Wasden, Turlock city manager.
• Sharon Silva, CEO of the Turlock Chamber of Commerce — a CSU Stanislaus alumna, she has really helped me get to know people here.
• Ann Johnston, mayor of the city of Stockton — a San Francisco State alumna with family members who have attended college here.
• Virginia Madueño, mayor of the city of Riverbank, a CSU Stanislaus grad.
• Karen McLaughlin, Manteca city manager. Her son is a sophomore here.
• My colleague, Jill Stearns, president of Modesto Junior College and a Cal Poly grad.
• Dr. Sonny Da Marto, superintendent of the Turlock Unified School District.
• George Petrilakis, president of the CSU Stanislaus Foundation Board.
• John Jacinto, a 1996 graduate of this institution, president and CEO of VisTech Manufacturing Solutions and chair of the CSU Stanislaus Alumni Council.
• Maria Silveira, vice president of labor relations for Foster Farms and a CSU Stanislaus alumna.

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• Brett Tate, owner of the Dust Bowl Brewery downtown — and, you guessed it, a CSU Stanislaus alumnus.

I think the point is made well: the CSU and CSU Stanislaus make a huge difference in our state and region in business, civic and government sectors.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize my administration colleagues here today. Since my arrival in June, they have supported me and worked tirelessly to get the campus ready for this year and beyond:

• Dr. James Strong, provost and vice president for academic affairs;
• Dr. Suzanne Espinoza, vice president for enrollment and student affairs;
• Dr. Robert Dawson, interim vice president for advancement; and
• Mr. Dennis Shimek, interim vice president for faculty affairs and human resources.

I would also like to acknowledge Vice President for Business and Finance Russ Giambelluca, who could not be with us today.

Now, please join me in welcoming our deans. Deans, please stand as I introduce you, and remain standing.

• Dr. Linda Nowak, dean of the College of Business Administration;
• Dr. Reza Kamali, dean of the College of Natural Sciences;
• Dr. Jim Tuedio, interim dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences;
• Dr. Oddmund Myhre, interim dean of the College of Education;
• Ms. Annie Hor, interim dean of Library Services;
• Mr. Kevin Nemeth, dean of University Extended Education; and
• CSU Stanislaus alum and Dean of Students, Mr. Ron Noble.

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Finally, I would also like to recognize Daryl Moore, who served as the founding dean of the College of the Arts for six years and just rejoined the arts faculty as part of our recent college reorganization. Daryl did an outstanding job in building our visual and performing arts programs, and I wanted to thank him publicly.

Deans, please be seated.

There literally are dozens of others that I should be recognizing today. Again, thank you all for being here today. Together we send the message that we are united in our commitment to provide the best possible educational and university experience for our students and to impact our region's future in every practical and positive way.

And thank you for helping me getting a running start on my job. I have been on campus since early June. I promised when I took this job that I'd immerse myself in the university's history and policy documents. Bernadette will attest that I have done that — I have not even been watching the Giants, and that's a huge deal!

I promised also that I'd take advantage of the smaller scale of the Stanislaus campus and meet the people who work here. I've visited with our staff members all summer and will continue those visits. I've also begun meeting many of our faculty members, now that they are back for the semester.

I've met with ASI and USU leadership. And I've met other students, many walking up just to say "Hi." Just the other day, a student said, "You're the new president, right?" And she proceeded to tell me how our faculty members have worked so hard to advise her and get her through school, and how grateful she was to the university. She made me proud to be a part of this institution.

I promised that I'd get out into the community this summer, too. Bernadette and I have worn out our shoes and tires doing that. We've attended meetings and receptions up and down the Valley. I've met with congressional and state legislators, with mayors and city council members, with county supervisors, with chambers of commerce, with school district and county school
superintendents. I've driven to cities and towns all over the region — Turlock, Modesto, Ceres, Merced, Stockton, Lodi, Newman, Patterson, Sonora — to meet people and to listen to them, to see where our students live and work, and to send the message that we will come to them. We are not an island. We are part of an important region, and we truly want to partner in moving this region forward.

It's been great! Bernadette and I have been welcomed by everyone, and we've been bowled over by the passion and success of our alumni.

Warm welcome notwithstanding, there are serious challenges facing the university. As you can guess, that's the heart of today's agenda. First, we might as well look the bear right in the eye — let's talk about the budget. Second, I would like to shift gears a bit. I want to recognize publicly what I see as tremendous strengths and assets of this university. We have much to be proud of, and we cannot let our problems cause us to lose sight of that. Finally, I would like to talk about the next three or four years. What can and must we do to address our challenges?

The CSU has seen its budget cut by a third — $1 billion — over the past six years. Our funding is down to levels we haven't seen since the mid-1990s, though we're serving 75,000 more students — that's the equivalent of about eight campuses our size. Since 2007, we've raised tuition dramatically, more than doubling it, and yet the increases have made up for only half of the lost state funding. And middle-class families are having a tough time adjusting to the increases. Meanwhile, the CSU is being forced to limit enrollment, even for community college transfer students.

There's not a person in this room — and I mean administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community members — who hasn't felt the impact of these cuts. There's no fat left to be trimmed. We are into muscle. We are into bone.

You've surely heard about Proposition 30. It's the tax initiative proposed by Governor Jerry Brown to help balance the state's budget. It will temporarily increase sales tax and income taxes on higher income earners, bringing additional revenue to education and public safety.
The governor and legislature have tied our future to this initiative.

What does it mean for us? If Prop 30 fails in November — and that could easily happen — the state will enact a "trigger" cut of $250 million on the CSU. A cut like that, on top of what we've already suffered as a system and as a university, is going to put us into a fiscal situation unlike any since the Great Depression.

What if Prop 30 passes? We will not be out of the woods. Passage will bring us no new money — it will just keep us from experiencing the $250 million trigger cut. Indeed, if Prop 30 passes, it will also trigger a rollback of the last tuition fee hike. That's good news for our students, I know, but nothing comes without a cost. The rollback will leave the CSU with a $132 million budget hole to fill — much less than $250 million, but still a very significant cut.

At the campus level, we are facing cuts of several million dollars. For a campus our size that has already made severe cuts, the outlook is sobering. We are now looking at strategies to deal with our budget situation in a proactive and responsible way. The University Budget Advisory Committee (UBAC) and the vice presidents have worked tirelessly on this. I am grateful for their efforts. We have planned as if Prop 30 will not pass, because to do otherwise would be irresponsible — especially given that a significant cut will follow even if it passes.

The effects are not hard to imagine; we've already been experiencing them. Fewer classes, positions left unfilled, advising reduced, progress to graduation slowed, important projects left undone, badly needed facilities not built, the overall university experience that we so desire for our students not provided — and, perhaps more important, dreams delayed or even lost. And the shared stress, that knot in the stomachs of everyone in higher education, so palpable that it will be remembered for generations.

Now, we are all feeling pretty beat up with this budget talk. This is a very difficult time. But, as I said earlier, we cannot let our difficulties blind us to our strengths and accomplishments. We have so much to be proud of, so much to celebrate.

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As the new guy in town, let me tell you what I see.

It starts with the kind of graduates we produce at CSU Stanislaus. Employers love our students. They are practical. They hit the ground running. They learn fast. They want to do a good job. And as one employer said to me recently, "They're not even cynical!"

We have an outstanding array of degree offerings — both undergraduate and graduate — and a number of paths students can choose to take. Our arts programs are outstanding. Our professional degrees — health, business, teaching and the like — are admired. But, with some notable exceptions, it's less about the specific path chosen than about the general approach. I say this as a sociology major whose relatives demanded to know what good that major was.

I often ask employers in this region how many CSU Stanislaus alumni they have on staff. Usually it is many. I ask them what were the majors of those alums, and they run the gamut. What we really do well at this university is foundational. We ground our curriculum in the liberal arts — I am talking here not about specific majors but about knowing how to communicate, think critically, write well, adapt to challenges, facilitate change and appreciate perspectives. Employers get it. It's less about specifics learned than about capacity developed.

We match quality programming with quality people. Our faculty members are regarded and routinely sought out as experts in their fields. They are committed to their students' success.

Our staff members, no matter what their assignment is, understand that it is all about the success of our students.

And we are a vital part of this community and this region — and a partner. Our outstanding service learning programs provide educational and networking opportunities to students through programs that directly benefit the community — programs in which students aid low-income families in preparing their tax returns, or visit area schools to get young children excited about

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science, or help our cities and counties calculate their greenhouse gas emissions or plan bus routes or catalog available retail space downtown.

When voters are asked to pony up more of their money, they're looking for value added. Well, our service learning programs generated 46,000 volunteer hours last year alone, which equates to nearly $1 million of economic impact in the community.

Finally, I am taken with the sheer beauty of this campus and the quality of our facilities. I have friends at other state and private universities who would love to work at a campus like this. I hope you all feel the same sense of pride I do when I walk onto this campus every day. Ask our students — even those who commute a significant distance. Going to school here feels like really going to college.

We work in a beautiful place, with great facilities, with people who genuinely care about our students, with outstanding faculty and high-quality degree programs. Our students' university experience is exceptional. So what's the problem? Not enough people know it. It is imperative to our future that they do. Which brings me to my last point today — positioning CSU Stanislaus to succeed.

We have no choice but to focus quickly on priorities and budget strategies. We can see light at the end of the tunnel, but it is too far away to allow us simply to ride out our difficulties. We need to address the budget rather than simply survive it. We must address issues like course schedules, advising and progress to degree as priorities now, not put them on the back burner until things return to normal. Normal as we think of it is gone, folks.

We are doing fine with WASC accreditation, but we should seek to exceed fine, to let the accreditation process show the world how good we are. We need to return to clarifying our mission, our values, our vision — and to pursuing strategic planning goals. To sit still is to lose momentum, to lose our competitive edge, to let students, our alumni, our community and ourselves down.

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Members of our faculty, I need your help. First and foremost, we must have classes in place for our students, especially for courses that we require within general education and major curricula. Lopping off low-enrolled sections and stuffing more students into every class may be necessary in the short run, but it is not going to get us there by itself — we've already done it, for the most part. We need to examine our curriculum, related issues of quality and cost, ratio of required to elective courses, and number of units required. And we cannot spend a long time doing it. I don't pretend to have the answer here, but when all is said and done, I do want us to be able to face our students and say honestly that we pushed ourselves and did not duck the hard calls. We did not get so frustrated that we walked away from the challenge.

Staff members, I need your help. You toil less noticed, but you are no less critical to our success. You take the brunt of everyday stress. You run interference for the rest of us. I want you to know that we appreciate you. I can ask only that you stay the course. And, in line with a recent UBAC recommendation, I ask you to come together to find ways to deliver critical services more efficiently and effectively. Every efficiency is more students served. Again, I want us to be able to face our students and say we tried our honest best for them.

Students, I need your help. Please be patient and flexible. ASI, please work with us to create better pathways to advising, the key to progress to graduation. And one last important request, students: Between now and Election Day, knock on the doors of five neighbors, just five. Speak from the heart — don't cry, don't yell, don't seek pity. Explain honestly how important your education at CSU Stanislaus is to your future and that of the community. Five neighbors, that's all I ask of you. Put a face, a real person, to the issue of cuts to higher education.

Finally, I need everyone’s help to solve our challenges as a community, not simply as several groups sharing the same space. I know that this sounds like Pollyanna. If it is, so be it. It’s where we need to be. We are going to be all right. Ease up on the worry. Squelch the rumors. Build community by solving problems together.

These are not minor requests, I know. But I ask more still.

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Many people on and off campus view CSU Stanislaus as a hidden gem within the CSU system, a small, high-quality institution tucked away in Stanislaus County and the San Joaquin Valley — themselves hidden gems of sorts.

We are a gem. But we cannot afford stay hidden. Here's why.

As difficult as our current situation is, most economic experts and our own regional business leaders agree that we've probably hit bottom and are heading very slowly toward recovery. Given the lag in translating business revenue to state revenue and then to allocations for higher education, we are looking at three to four more years of difficulty. But even then the allocations will be small and much contested within the 23-campus CSU. And when the gates open for expanded enrollment — and enrollment will continue to determine budget — the fight will be on. Every campus will be saying "Look at me! Invest in me! Enroll here!"

Those of you who know me even a little know that I do not take kindly to finishing back in the pack. I want us to be at the front. People need to see our strengths. We need state leaders, CSU trustees and the chancellor's office to know who we are and what CSU Stanislaus is all about. We cannot be an afterthought anymore.

First, we need to counter our historic reluctance to bragging. It's okay to brag. We are good, and we should be saying so to those off campus. We need to tell our success story!

Second, we need to bring our alumni back into our world — nearly 50,000 of them, most right here, making a difference in this region every day. We must transform gratitude for a great education into active alumni pride and advocacy, whether the alum graduated 50 years or one year ago. Our alumni are our success story. They can be our strongest advocates. But to champion our cause, they need to know what we are doing. They need to know that their degrees grow in value daily in perpetuity. They need to be able to meet alumni from other universities and say, "You think you're hot? Let me tell you about my alma mater." Pride is contagious.
As a quick aside, I want to thank the members of our advancement and alumni relations teams for what they've been doing to help me with this goal. They have worked very hard all summer, no questions asked. They've stepped up — just professional pride and pride in our university — and they've made me proud.

Third, we must be a true partner in our region's development — more than the dollars that our operation circulates into the local economy; even more than the significant contributions that our internships and service learning make; more than the talents that our alumni bring to their jobs; more than the cultural contributions our arts programs bring to the region and the accolades our athletics teams garner for the area.

We need to partner — not carry the ball by ourselves, not cheer from the sidelines — with regional business, civic and government entities in a small number of practical ventures that truly move our region forward, and in ways not able to be accomplished without those very same partnerships.

If we do this, the region's leaders and citizens become our active, aggressive advocates. They celebrate our successes publicly. And they pick up the phone and personally let those who decide our fate know why we matter. No more hidden gem.

In closing, we all recognize the challenges we have and wish times were better. But we are not going to hang our heads. We are not going to tread water waiting for rescue. Nor will we wait for good luck. We can make our own luck if we come together as a community, prioritize internally and make decisions that make this campus more than the sum of its parts, and advocate externally together for both this university and the region.

Thank you for coming today. Thank you for working hard. Thank you for your support of CSU Stanislaus. May all of you have an excellent and productive year.

Thank you.