

Inauguration Remarks: Daniel Wubah - Millersville University
April 18, 2019

Good morning. It is an honor to participate in this inaugural ceremony for my friend and colleague Daniel Wubah, your fifteenth president.

I know that anticipation and high hopes are in attendance here.

It is an interesting challenge to “come out of retirement” to make a public address. Though I have been retired since 2012, I do still deliver speeches - but now they are in my living room and my wife is getting very tired of being the only one in the audience. Her only objection is the standing ovation!

Judith, has always been very helpful in reviewing my speeches before delivery. Yesterday when I left our home in Florida to come north she said, “Don’t be too technical, don’t be too long, and for heaven’s sake don’t be yourself!”

Dr. Wubah, it meant a lot that you would ask me to be a speaker at your investiture. Yes, certainly because of our friendship, and the fact that you considered me a mentor, but frankly also because since retirement I was missing the action and excitement of work.

My life has changed since retirement. Last year we moved to Florida and built a house. All one floor, no stairs to climb. We designed the house with a walk-in bathtub. I do have a life alert button in case I fall and cannot get up, we have applied for a reverse mortgage that I am sure will be approved any time now, and we are now eating dinner about 4:30, which works out well when you go to bed at 8:30, but I still feel young - and, even in spite of my grandson.

In March of 2018, we were still living in Virginia and we were attending a JMU’s women’s basketball post-season tournament game. Tyler, who had been sitting next to me at every game, leaned over to me and asked me to sign his game ticket. His request, of course, engendered a sense of love and pride. I was touched that my grandson would want my autograph on his ticket as a lasting memento of the game. I signed it.

Walking out of the arena after the game I asked Tyler’s dad why he would want me to sign his ticket. His Dad chuckled and said, “Oh, that was a class project.

He had to spend two hours with a senior citizen and your signature was to verify that he had done it!”

Leadership is important in good times and bad. It is in the challenging times that the focus falls on the leader.

When there is uncertainty in our eyes we look to leaders for purpose and predictability.

When our minds are clouded by complexity and ambiguity we look to our leaders for clarity.

When our hearts are burdened by grief, stress or doubt we look to our leaders for comfort and hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am here today to tell you that should any of these conditions confront you, the leader you will seek has been found. He is sitting here and his name is Daniel Wubah.

Chair Shapira, Chancellor Greenstine, Chair Warfel, past presidents Caputo and McNairy-Nelson, SGA president Tintera, institutional delegates, officials of the Lancaster and Millersville communities, faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and friends of the University, I know that your attendance today means a great deal to Dr. Wubah. To the delegation from Ghana with us today, I know that you are rightfully proud of this son of your country.

Daniel, this day will be remembered as a signature day, a milestone, in your life. There will be others to be sure, but you will remember this one, as I remember the day we met twenty years ago.

Inaugurations, or investitures, are celebratory events. “inauguration” derives from the Latin word which refers to the ceremonies of the ancient Romans who sought to ascertain if it was the will of the gods for a public official to be deemed worthy to assume office.

Dr. Wubah may the Gods and the force be with you!

As Mr. Warfel stated, an investiture is a public opportunity to celebrate the university’s honored and storied past while evolving its future. But as a

paraphrased contemporary song lyric reminds us: “Keep all your memories, but don’t live the past. Instead, look forward to the best days you will have.”

In researching the topic, I wasn’t able to find anything definitive that tells us why we wait as long as we do to conduct inaugural ceremonies. Sometimes a full year passes from the time the new president assumes his/her working duties until the investiture. The delay in the Nation’s presidential inaugural is ascribed to the time required to travel to Washington, D.C. in the period before modern transportation.

But for college and university presidents I can only assume that the delay is attributable to our desire to make sure the selection committee “got it right” before we permanently commit to a long term relationship!

I suppose that an invited inaugural speaker is expected to offer assurances that you did, in fact, “get it right,” and to provide brief admonitions or advice going forward, and I will try to do that!

We can all recite long lists of desired leadership traits or characteristics. To me, responsible leadership implies character and service to others. We expect our leaders to be people of integrity, people who can be trusted, people who we regard as honest.

Leaders who don’t commit to service to the benefit of others are merely figureheads – they are not leaders.

The research and subsequent literature tells us that above all else we expect our leaders to be honest, forward-looking, inspiring and competent. I can assure you that Dr. Wubah was either born with or has acquired each of these characteristics. Unlike a young and inexperienced Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Wubah has a competence cultivated from study and experience: as an academic and administrative leader at all types of universities from those devoted to the liberal arts and those conducting cutting-edge research. He is fluent in the language of leadership.

Long before Abraham Lincoln became president, young Lincoln gathered together a band of men in 1832 to fight in the Black Hawk War. Having been the one who gathered the group together he was awarded the title of Captain.

But, Lincoln had a problem... he knew nothing about soldiering. He had no prior experience and he possessed no knowledge of tactics. He had trouble remembering the simplest military procedures.

One day Lincoln was marching a couple of dozen men across a field and needed to guide them through a gate into another field. But he could not manage it.

Recounting the incident later, Lincoln said, "I could not for the life of me remember the proper word of command for getting my company endwise."

Finally, as we came near the gate I shouted: "This company is dismissed for two minutes, when it will fall in again on the other side of the gate."

While he began the war with the title and position of captain, by the end of his military service he found his rightful place, having been demoted to the rank of private."

Well, as the story ends we know that Mr. Lincoln's competence was manifested in many other ways.

This is no easy job. After all the personal preparation the president still has to execute because at the end of the day, "whatever befalls the institution, the president is expected to resolve it brilliantly."

Scott Cowen, the former president of Tulane, shared a story about the nature of the job: As he was leaving the chancellorship at the University of Texas after three years in the position, William McRaven described the job of a college president as the "toughest job in the nation," Mind you that McRaven is a retired Navy four-star admiral who orchestrated the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden as well as the rescue of an American captain from the hands of Somalian pirates.

Fifty years ago higher education giant Clark Kerr, the former University of California president, wrote that "the University president in the United States is expected to be the friend of the students, a colleague of the faculty, a good fellow with the alumni, a sound administrator with the trustees... a devotee of opera and football equally, a decent human being, a good husband and father, and an active member of a church." Of course, when you then consider the additional complexities that have been added in today's "Age of Accelerations" as described by contemporary writer Thomas Friedman, you end up with one

challenging job description. But, don't worry Dr. Wubah, this leadership stuff is a piece of cake.

I am reminded of a story told to me by my friend Dale High. Dale has to cross the road from his house to collect the mail from his mailbox. One afternoon he left his home, approached the road, looked to the left and right, saw no vehicles and then started across the road to the mailbox. As he neared the center line, he noticed that a car was quickly approaching from his right. He hesitated and then started to retreat. The car pulled into its left lane and continued speeding toward him.

Not knowing what to do, Dale hesitated momentarily again and then started to move quickly across the road in the direction of the mailbox. The car swerved into its right lane and sped toward him. Totally mystified, and not knowing what to do, he moved to the center line, closed his eyes and froze in position.

The car came closer and closer and then the driver screeched to a stop inches away from Dale. Quite upset, Dale quickly moved to the driver's door and as he approached the window came down. To Dale's surprise there was a squirrel sitting behind the steering wheel who turned, looked at Dale and said, "It is not as easy as it looks, is it?"

No, President Wubah, It is not as easy as it looks, but it is a job that offers tremendous personal reward and gratification when the job is done well.

I have reviewed your Mission, Vision, and Values statements and looked at your strategic plan. All are worthy of Millersville's reputation and its promise. I suggest to you that accomplishing your ambitions in a timely fashion will be dependent upon two factors: alignment of individual objectives with those of the institution's and trust.

Trust makes the whole enterprise so much more efficient. When you don't doubt intentions or question motives and when you know that the next person is working to make the University better even if their approach isn't the path you would choose, progress is the product. Trust means that each person in the community can take action without fear of retribution, or embarrassment, if a mistake is made.

Communities characterized by the confidence that trust affords, get things done. Organizations more focused on blame and who did what, when mistakes are made may often become paralyzed by fear and doubt. Leaders emboldened by trust act, knowing that a misstep will cause others to ask, “so what do we try now?” rather than “why in the world did he/she do that?”

The recent Final Four basketball games are a wonderful example of the benefits of trust. Near the end of those very tight games, if a player missed a shot, dribbled the ball off his foot, or made a bad pass no one stopped and said “why did you do that?”, or “what were you thinking?”

Instead the total focus of each player became “what do we do now?” It is amazing what you can get done in a very short time when there is no second guessing because you know that each player is giving his all to help the team succeed.

Trust cannot be taken for granted. Like a proper diet and exercise it must be practiced every single day.

I have already mentioned my wife, Judith. She loves the author and artist Brian Andreas. Perhaps some of you know his “Story People” work.

One of my very favorite pieces of his states, “You have to remember to make it all over again every day, the angel said to me. Otherwise, it goes all to hell...” a climate of trust requires that kind of attention. If we mind it everyday, it becomes a culture - a culture that every other college or university will envy. - Be an engine of trust.

To my friend Daniel: cultivate, guard, respect and never take for granted the trust that is placed in you by others. It is a leader’s lifeblood.

Be inclusive, inviting the opinions of others before decisions are reached; be thoughtful and conscientious....but be decisive - I had a good friend and supporter at JMU who was in the fruit and produce business. He used to say, “when the bananas have brown spots, there is no time for a committee meeting!” In an organization characterized by trust, that is understood and no explanations are required.

Don't be a dweller on the threshold. Take the step. No one likes leaders who cannot make a decision. The good news is that this typically fails to be a problem in a "trusting organization."

People will look to you to take a position on matters of importance, and you should. As Dante warned, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality."

On the day of my own inauguration, my wife gave me one of those little acrylic paperweights for one's desk. The clear block contained a message. It says, "Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least" - Goethe. I didn't always succeed. There were many nights when I arrived home after a long day and said to myself, "What did I do to improve the quality of higher education today?" - - and there was too long a pause before I could come up with an answer! But if you will heed Goethe's advice, with the help of others, you will move this institution forward.

Always be humble, seek help and guidance. Foster a trusting community.

To everyone in the audience, we all want to be loved, appreciated and respected. Your new president will have to earn your respect over time, but go ahead and love him now. Why wait. Just look at him - he needs your love!

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be with you today. This proud and distinguished University has accomplished so much, it has enriched minds, offered discoveries, served others, advanced knowledge, and now, I am certain, the best is yet to come! Thank you.