Good afternoon, everyone. I’m pleased to see that you all made it through another blizzard and were able to dig out in time to join us today. I’ve begun to fear that when the snow melts, sometime in early July, we’re going to discover the frozen forms of colleagues that we just thought were away on sabbatical this spring semester.

And speaking of digging out: As anyone who has ever heard one of these State of the University addresses knows, I often reference members of our community who have done something really notable or otherwise made a contribution to UNH.

Well, let me start this address by recognizing the hardworking, hard digging folks from buildings and grounds who have REALLY borne the brunt of these storms—working through the night in often brutal conditions to push this abundance of snow with which we’ve been blessed off our roads, sidewalks and parking lots—while most of the rest of us spent our various curtailments sipping hot chocolate in front of the fire.

And one more upfront recognition: Every time we curtail, we ask a core group of staff members from housing, dining services, the UNH police and a handful of other offices, to scrape off their windshields and turn on their 4-wheel drives and come to campus anyway, to take care of our thousands of residential students.

They deserve a big round of applause, too.

So, in any event, welcome to you all. And welcome, too, to those watching online and via live video streaming at our campuses in Manchester and Concord.

For this year’s State of the University, we are going to break a little from tradition. At the conclusion of my remarks, we will hold a town hall meeting to take some questions and hear one another’s ideas.
My hope is that this will be a real, community-wide dialogue, something we don’t do often enough. So, I encourage you to begin to think about some questions you’d like to ask, either here in person or virtually via email or Twitter. The hash-tag and address are up on the screens behind me.

I’d like to start my remarks by reminding everyone of a few of the challenges we’ve had to confront to get to where we are today. These include:

- a deep recession,
- historic cuts in state funding,
- steady erosion in federal research support,
- a precipitous decline in the number of high school graduates,
- and fierce competition in the marketplace.

Those were daunting challenges.

Yet, as we enter 2015, UNH is thriving.

Consider, to begin with, enrollment.

If the number of highly qualified applicants reflects at all an institution’s reputation, success and momentum, then UNH is certainly doing a lot of things right.

In fact, last fall we welcomed UNH’s largest incoming class -- ever.
Overall, our first-year class grew more than ten percent. This included:

- a 7 percent increase in New Hampshire students,
- a 13 percent increase in students entering STEM majors,
- and a 23 percent increase in students from underrepresented groups.

That is astonishing. Especially when you consider that UNH sits in the middle of a region where the population of new high school graduates is dropping faster than anywhere in the country.

Yet applications and yield were way up.

While our Admissions staff deserves a lot of the credit, the fact is that they can’t sell something that doesn’t exist. It is the extraordinary quality of this institution, created day in and day out by the hard work and dedication of faculty and staff across campus, that makes UNH a place that young people want to attend.

Here’s another point to note: This year marked UNH’s greatest fundraising success – ever.

Private support totaled nearly $50 million in the last fiscal year. That’s an incredible 35 percent increase over the previous year, which had also set a record. And it includes gifts from more than 20,000 donors.

By the way, that $50 million number does NOT include Dana Hamel’s gift of $10 million this fall. On top of the many generous contributions that the Hamel family has already made to UNH, that is the largest single gift for student scholarships in our history.

I’ll bet some of those scholarship dollars, which Dana hopes will help us to hold on to our state’s best and brightest, wind up going to a few of the 100-plus students that Professor Vaughn Cooper and his graduate student, Taylor Warren,
are working with at Winnacunnet High School in Hampton, NH. Vaughn and Taylor designed an engaging, hands-on project to guide these students and their teachers through the process of growing and observing harmless, although slightly pungent, bacteria that reproduce and mutate at astonishing speeds.

Now, I imagine some of them thought that sounded a little gross at first. But let me share one student’s reaction when this class was over. Olivia Bessemer, who is 15, said, and I’m quoting here: “It’s so cool. It helped me learn so much. I actually got to go through the experiments instead of learning about someone else’s results.”

That’s music to my ears.

When we talk about how UNH is leading a statewide effort to double the number of science, technology, engineering, and math graduates by 2025—another point of pride—we’re really talking about students like Olivia.

And when we talk about our commitment to encourage more young women to pursue majors in the STEM disciplines, it is Olivia, and her sisters all over New Hampshire, that we have in mind. Olivia’s teacher at Winnacunnet, Mike Handwork, who is also a UNH alum, credits this project with revolutionizing the way he teaches. And Taylor Warren is expanding the program to three more high schools this year.

And speaking of programs, as America embarked this year on a long overdue national conversation about sexual assault and relationship violence, the University of New Hampshire’s own signature programs—Know Your Power and Bringing in the Bystander—that have been singled out for special praise by everyone who knows anything about this critical set of issues. Kudos to Sharyn Potter, Jane Stapleton, Amy Culp and their colleagues at Prevention Innovation and SHARPP for their tremendous work.
These are just a few examples, but this is UNH in 2015: a healthy, vibrant institution, making a huge contribution to our state and our nation.

The opportunities that we offer at this great university change lives, which I know is why we’re all here.

Let me tell you about one of those lives—a life that may ring a bell.

Some of you may remember Ali Fortin, a UNH student from Manchester whom I introduced at the State of the University in 2012. I shared Ali’s story then to show why it is so important that we keep UNH affordable. At the time, Ali was pursuing an undergraduate degree through our bio-medical sciences pre-med program.

And, as she was excelling in her studies, Ali was also taking on every work-study and odd job she could find—including one in my office—to help pay her college expenses.

That was really important because Ali’s parents both lost their jobs in the depths of the recession, when Ali was still a senior in high school. The Fortin family didn’t have the financial resources simply to write a check to pay Ali’s tuition.

Thankfully, though, Ali persevered. She applied and enrolled at UNH. And when she arrived, she brought with her a year’s worth of college credits she earned while still in high school, thanks to a partnership with a local community college. That not only saved her family a lot of money, it also saved Ali’s dream of attending college.

Like some 80 percent of UNH students, Ali qualified for need-based financial aid. And like most of our students, she also had to take out a large student loan. In fact, when you consider the low level of public support for higher education in
New Hampshire, it’s little wonder that New Hampshire students graduate with the nation’s highest per capita student loan debt—not my favorite pride point.

Yet if our brightest high school students can get into UNH, they thrive.

I am very, very pleased to report that Ali Fortin thrived. She graduated from UNH in December, and today, she is on her way to becoming Dr. Ali Fortin as she heads off to medical school.

As remarkable and heart warming as Ali’s story is, it is not unique. We are surrounded in New Hampshire by thousands of students like Ali.

I know that in part because I see the statistics. But I also know because whenever I can, I steal away from campus and visit high schools around the state—to talk with students and teachers and guidance counselors. My aim is not to promote UNH, in fact. I go out of my way not to promote UNH. Instead I go just to get them to think about college.

I can tell you that there are Alis in every one of those schools.

Some of them will make their way to us here at UNH.

But far too many of them will not be as lucky or as persistent as our Ali.

They will decide, sadly, that college is not for them—or that it is beyond their reach.

They will be poorer for that decision, as will we.
I find it really troubling—and revealing—that while New Hampshire very nearly leads the nation in the percentage of students who graduate from high school, we are in the middle of the pack at best in sending high school graduates on to college.

The reason for that statistical disconnect is not a big mystery to me. The reason is that higher education in New Hampshire is so expensive. It is not only beyond the reach, it is beyond the imagination of far too many young people.

This is why I go on these high school visits—to try to shift what they can imagine. It’s sort of a mission for me, because many years ago, I was one of those students. I see myself reflected in the faces at Manchester West and Spaulding and Fall Mountain: first generation, no educational role model, no money.

So I figure if I can inspire even one young man or woman to think about college who otherwise wouldn’t have, I will done a little good,

I got to college—and had the arc of my own life changed—because the good people of New York State in the 1960s understood that higher education is a public good as well as a private good.

They understood that by investing in me—and in hundreds of thousands of other kids like me—through creating and sustaining the SUNY system, they were investing in their own futures as well.

How I wish that the good people of the Granite State had the same understanding.

Education benefits everyone. It’s a simple three word sentence. But its trust is apparently elusive so let me repeat. Education benefits everyone.

Who can seriously believe that in the 21st century New Hampshire will succeed—by any measure: economic, social, cultural, political—by having a undereducated citizenry? Why does that seem like a good idea?
By misconstruing education purely as a private benefit we are reinforcing an opportunity gap that will haunt our state for generations, diminishing our wealth and impoverishing our spirit.

It doesn’t have to be this way. We can turn it around.

In fact, we have inadvertently run a natural experiment in New Hampshire over the past four years that proves that. In the first two of those years, 2011 and 2012, the state cut our funding in half, which led to a spike in tuition and a drop in applications and enrollment. In the last two years, a partial restoration of funding led to a tuition freeze and a jump in applications and enrollment.

This is not rocket science. It’s simple cause and effect. Increasing costs closes doors. Lowering costs opens doors.

It’s time to throw open the doors of opportunity in New Hampshire—for the benefit of everyone.

Let’s start by urging the legislature to restore enough funding to extend the tuition freeze for another two years.

It’s not that hard.

In fact, all it will take is for our lawmakers to return funding to 2009 levels. How heavy a lift can that be?

Goodness knows, we at UNH and in the rest of the university system have done our part.

- We have increased financial aid substantially.
- We have expanded our partnerships with the state’s community colleges so that transferring credits to UNH is even easier.
And we have aggressively pared our costs, providing an extraordinarily high quality education at a cost that is 25% less than the other New England land grants. Let me repeat that, too. UNH is a model of efficiency.

Now it’s time for our partners in Concord to do their share.

Although the state budget proposed last week falls short of what we need to freeze tuition, I remain hopeful that we can still make our case as the legislature takes up its work in the weeks ahead.

We need to make the dream of attending UNH real for students like Ali from Manchester. And for the children of hard-working families from Colebrook to Hinsdale, from Salem to Weare, and from Hudson to Bartlett.

Everyone here today can play an important role in that effort by becoming an advocate through UNH Works. This is our grassroots, statewide campaign that invites citizens across New Hampshire to unite and show their support for UNH to our state’s elected leaders. You can sign up at unh.edu/works. Becoming an advocate is easy. It’s free. And it will make our voice stronger.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if, through our efforts, New Hampshire embraced an understanding of education as a public good—at least a little?

The irony, of course, is that doing so is actually in everyone’s self interest.

How many more students like Ali would be equipped to change the world—our worlds—for the better if they could access the opportunities found only at an outstanding, four-year public research university like UNH? How many would become our doctors? Our researchers? Our high-tech entrepreneurs? Our teachers? Our artists?
Seems like a win-win to me.

We have much to be grateful for and to celebrate at UNH in 2015 not least the wonderful students we send forth into the world. I am inspired by the dedication and commitment of this community. I am honored to be a part of it. Because of you, the state of our university is strong.

And that’s good, because we still have much work to do, “miles to go before we sleep,” I am tempted to say on this snowy afternoon.

It is our responsibility, our mission, to see that the doors of opportunity are fully opened for the people of this great state – And that they are kept safe for generations to come.

Thank you so much, everyone, for all that you do and will do to make The University of New Hampshire such an exceptional place.

Now, let’s open our town hall meeting.