

Good morning and welcome to the University of Manitoba.

Chancellor Anne Mahon, Board Chair Laurel Hyde and members of the Board of Governors, thank you for choosing me to serve as the 12th President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manitoba. It is truly among the greatest honours of my life.

I am following 11 previous presidents of this university whose contributions have helped to make UM the leading research institution that it is today. I also acknowledge the contributions of previous Chancellors and Board Chairs who have worked in partnership with those presidents to advance this great institution. Will the former presidents, Chancellors and Board Chairs in our midst today please stand? Please join me in thanking these exceptional leaders with a round of applause.

I stand humbly before you today, in awe of the community of people who have dedicated themselves to the success of the University of Manitoba.

I stand before you, having benefited from opportunities throughout my life that were only available to me because of the sacrifices of my parents.

You see, when I was three years old, my parents had a big idea. They decided to leave the home they loved in Tangier, Morocco to immigrate to Manitoba.

Imagine. They left a city on the Mediterranean surrounded by friends and family. They boarded a ship with their three young boys, (our fourth brother was born in Canada), and journeyed 10 days to arrive in Halifax. From there, another four days by train to Winnipeg.

They arrived in a city where they didn't speak the language or understand the culture and knew only one person - my mother's brother. Why did they do this? What lofty dream could have inspired them to take on such an uncertain adventure?

The rising tide of anti-Semitism in Morocco was making life more difficult, and they were concerned about what this would mean for their children. They wanted to provide greater opportunities for us – opportunities they never had and knew we would never have if they stayed.

Don't get me wrong, they were not unhappy in Morocco. To hear them reminisce of their life you would have imagined they lived in paradise. The fruits were so sweet, the vegetables so flavourful, the spices so fresh and the waters so clear. But I digress.

For my parents, their dream was for us children to have the education that was unavailable to them. This didn't come easily – English wasn't our first language, so my brothers and I initially struggled in school. But our parents always believed in us.

We had a loving home, in the heart of the North end on Lansdowne and Salter. My father, a former teacher, worked for the Jewish community, and my mother worked at an elementary school and daycare as a teacher's aide. Education has been at the heart of our family for many years.

After I graduated high school and started university, I saw a world of opportunity before me. A world I had never imagined. As I began to succeed in my studies, my professors in economics noticed me and began to encourage me to enter the honours program and then graduate school. I cannot tell you how much this encouragement meant to me.

The immigrant from Morocco, who didn't particularly do very well in high school (in fact did downright poorly), was suddenly receiving the admiration of his professors.

At this time, I also met my future wife and life partner Kim Bailey. In fact, truth be told, we met in a Sociology of the Family class and quickly became friends, spending evenings studying together, when we weren't talking and being shushed in the library.

Together we pursued our academic goals as undergrads, and then as graduate students at Western University and Carleton. Kim in Social Work and me in Economics.

I have been so fortunate to have had this career. A career that gave me the flexibility to work with amazing colleagues, travel the world and conduct research in areas of my choosing. A career that provided the opportunity to teach amazing students from across the globe. And a career that allowed me to balance work and home, and watch my sons Aden and Keenan, grow into the wonderful humans that they are.

And what a gift to be able to do this in my home province, at both the University of Winnipeg, where I started my career, and now at the University of Manitoba, where I previously served as Dean of the IH Asper School of Business.

My parents' move to Canada has paid off in exactly the way they hoped. Through hard work and perseverance, all four of their boys have completed graduate degrees. My younger brother is a psychologist, my two older brothers are Rabbis. We are all deeply grateful for their big idea.

My parents are not with us today. My father passed away five years ago, and my mother has dementia and is in a nursing home. Though I must tell you that just the other day she asked me what I do for a living and when I told her I was the President of the University of Manitoba, she said in her Moroccan accent "Ya, well you are a very educated boy." And that says it all.

I am now nearly two years into my role as president, and I continue to be awed by the greatness of this institution and by the magnitude of our impact. Our research enterprise, now valued at more than \$230M, is driving discovery and transforming lives through innovation. We are Manitoba's research university, and we serve and support this entire province in profound ways.

That is why, one of my highest priorities as your president is to create the conditions for our community to *dream big*.

Taking risks has shaped my own life, and I see how it has shaped us as well. Our greatest impacts as a university come when someone is willing to dream beyond the status quo.

I was especially struck by the impact of visionary thinking when I travelled to India last month. I saw up close how UM's Institute for Global Public Health is doing something transformative in the world.

Through innovative partnerships, they are making monumental advances in child and maternal health – and receiving awe-inspiring investments from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and our generous donor community.

Within a very competitive framework – the University of Manitoba is being chosen by the Gates foundation over Harvard, Cambridge, Stanford and our peers all over the world. We are *global* leaders in supporting health as a human right, first around HIV, now around maternal health and moving into Tuberculosis. This is big thinking at its best.

I am also inspired, by the work of our Centre for Earth Observation Science and the incredible life of Dr. David Barber. We lost this visionary on April 15, but his legacy lives on through our globally accomplished Arctic researchers, our academic programs, facilities and labs.

We are proud to lead internationally renowned academic and research programs in Arctic science, climate change and its impacts on life in the North. Programs that are transforming how we understand our planet and how we must respond to save it. In this field, we are chosen ahead of our peers again and again because we dare to think big.

I look at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, located on the Fort Garry campus, and see how their BIG dream to build a permanent home, worthy of its place in Canada's past, present and future, is attracting investment from all over the world, including a significant commitment from the Government of Canada.

Led by the Office of the Vice-President (Indigenous), the University of Manitoba is working with the NCTR and Indigenous communities across Canada, to advance the Calls to Action and to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into everything we do. We have the big idea that we can become Indigenous students' and scholars' first choice for where they want to teach and learn.

We want our programs, expertise and campus community to reflect the diversity of this province, and we embrace our responsibility to ensure Manitoba has the highly qualified talent to prosper and grow. We offer unique and meaningful learning and research opportunities, giving students the hands on experience they need to thrive in the knowledge economy. We know that whatever form it takes, experiential learning supports student success in their studies and their careers.

Our newly created Office of Experiential Learning will serve as a centre of excellence for collaboration and innovation in experiential education. The University of Manitoba supports the BIG IDEA that every student at our institution can engage in experiential learning before they graduate, helping prepare them to lead this province to new heights.

Across our campuses, there's so much more to celebrate. I have shared a mere few highlights of what makes our community world class.

Coming this fall, I will be celebrating our community of visionaries with a new virtual speaker series: *WHAT'S the BIG IDEA?* I can't wait to bring you conversations with big thinkers from across our community.

I'm deeply proud and honoured to share your stories and to lead Manitoba's research university. This is home. And it brings me great joy to partner with all of you – the remarkable people who work here – to help this province thrive.

I stand before you today, committed to give my best to the University of Manitoba – To me, that means being an accessible leader, listening deeply to our community, and of course, pursuing big ideas with you – inspired and motivated by the dreams that brought my family here.

You have honoured me greatly by choosing me to serve as your President and I will work with you to promote freedom of thinking, institutional autonomy, and to create an outstanding work and learning environment in every faculty – in every classroom.

As we move through the global pandemic, we must confront the challenges of our time. We have a unique opportunity to ask new questions, create new partnerships, and uncover innovative solutions. Our impact is already immeasurable, but there is still so much more we can do

together.

As we look to the future, I see us celebrating new heights in research and learning. I see progress towards reconciliation at all levels - in governance, leadership, and practice. I see us expanding industry partnerships, fostering entrepreneurship, and meeting the needs of our evolving province and world.

I see a bright future before us – not because it will always be easy, but because we are up for the challenge.

The world needs the University of Manitoba and it needs each of us in this remarkable community to DREAM BIG.

I believe in this province, I believe in us, and I believe in our BIG IDEA.

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