BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

PROVOST’S REPORT: “MAKING A DIFFERENCE”

DR. NICHOLAS P. JONES

FRIDAY, MAY 6, 2016

UNIVERSITY PARK, PA
Good afternoon.

As we conclude the 2015-2016 academic year, I think this is an important time for all of us to reflect—on challenges the University has faced, but also on the accomplishments we’ve made despite those challenges.

One of the past year’s biggest areas of focus was the prolonged budget stalemate in Harrisburg. During the week preceding the last Board of Trustees meeting in February, we informed faculty and staff about the prospect of a $300 million budget shortfall if we received no state appropriation this year. Without it, the impacts across our campuses and beyond would be substantial, so the Penn State community needed to know what we were doing then—and planning to do—in response to the situation.

Meanwhile, during that same week, we were unveiling Penn State’s comprehensive strategic plan for the years 2016 through 2020, titled, “Our Commitment to Impact.” We faced the unusual dichotomy of publishing and promoting our meaningful plan of work for the next five years while wondering if we would receive state funds that would help to accomplish that work.
About a month later, an appropriations bill finally became law. Penn State received a 5 percent increase in its general support appropriation, from $214.1 million to $224.8 million. The budget also included $50.5 million for our Agricultural Research and Extension programs, which provide critical services to the agriculture industry and citizens in all 67 Pennsylvania counties.

This was great news for Penn State and the students, faculty, and staff we serve. Many of them had been involved in budget-related contingency planning, and throughout the process had acted respectfully and with integrity, and with an unwavering focus on excellence and our community’s needs. They revealed yet again how they are the heart of this institution, enabling Penn State to continue to reach new heights as one of the world’s premier research universities. In a period of uncertainty and concern, we experienced Penn State at its best.

With support from the Commonwealth secured, we refocused fully on our aforementioned commitment to impact, driven by stellar teaching, research, and service across Penn State. And this week, the University’s impact manifests itself further through our commencement ceremonies, which begin later today and continue through the weekend.
As an engineer, I’m a “numbers person,” so I’d like to share some significant ones with you now. More than 13,500 students across Penn State are graduating this weekend, with more than 11,500 undergraduates receiving their degrees, and more nearly 2,000 graduate students receiving theirs as well. Eric, our roles in that probably include about 5,000 handshakes each! The College of the Liberal Arts leads by conferring more than 1,600 degrees this spring, followed closely by the Smeal College of Business and the College of Engineering.

Those are big numbers—impressive ones—and they boost the University’s number of graduates since its inception to nearly 774,000 people. Nevertheless, these are just numbers, and it’s important to articulate clearly what they represent. I can do that with one word: Impact.

Penn State is poised to unleash on the world more than 13,500 graduates—people with a depth, breadth and diversity of talent and passion who will leave indelible marks on our world. Graduates of this University routinely excel in every field and discipline, making a difference around the United States and the world, and representing Penn State with great strength and pride.

A couple of weeks ago, during the annual Alumni Achievement Awards, I had the pleasure of honoring 13 Penn State graduates who have attained considerable success
early in their careers. Their work worldwide in fields ranging from financial services, government, and non-profits, to clean energy and children’s health, reveals how a Penn State education helps to enable meaningful work by those who have studied here. I expect even more great stories to emerge about the efforts our new graduates will undertake, and the undeniably positive impacts they will have.

**JONES – Slide 8: Celebrating with Pride**

As Penn State’s chief academic officer, I could not be more proud of our students, and how they make a difference every day. This weekend in particular, but continually, we should celebrate all they have accomplished so far and eventually will move on to do as outstanding global citizens.

Thank you.