Announcements on the Capital Campaign, New Initiatives, and A Major Gift

Remarks at Explore UT Opening Ceremony
The University of Texas at Austin.
March 2, 2002

Today we stand before the Tower, our state’s most recognizable symbol of educational achievement and hope. It is a legacy of early Texans who envisioned the University, even while this land was still wild. They somehow understood what it could accomplish for the generations to follow. Theirs was a survival society, not a knowledge society. Yet they foresaw a larger, more capable Texas, and they wanted it to be a performer on the global stage. May we be granted such vision.

This university has its roots in the imagination of Mirabeau B. Lamar, President of the Republic, who first spoke of his hope in 1838. But the University's history began with the adoption of the Texas Constitution in 1876, which charged the Legislature to establish and maintain “a university of the first class.” For 125 years, the future of Texas and the idea of this university have been interwoven. Ours is a state that aspires to lead, so its constitutional university was intended to compete with the nation’s best. And it has succeeded.

A great public university does not separate itself from the most important challenges faced by its society. Rather, it engages them directly in service to the public interest. That engagement has been a part of our contract with the citizens of Texas since the University opened; it must be a larger part as we go forward. The challenges to our land and our people are far bigger in scale and far more intricate than those of 1838, or even those of a quarter-century ago. Where better than universities to harness the knowledge, the imagination, the education, the organization required to address them?

I believe that the great public university of the 21st century will be defined by combining distinction in teaching and research with effective engagement of large issues to the benefit of its society.

The University of Texas at Austin has begun to establish this model, not only with increasing success in research and teaching, but also with particular initiatives relating to public education, Latin America, and transformation of the Texas economy.

Today, with three announcements, we take additional steps to extend the University’s service to the people of Texas.

Americans now live and work in a knowledge-based society. Access to information lies at the heart of our ability to succeed. We also now live in a world where technology has eliminated many barriers of time and space. These developments create opportunity. In an ambitious new initiative, we will open this university's vast reservoir of knowledge and cultural assets, enabling citizens everywhere to derive personal value from them.
Thus, my first announcement is that the University is setting the goal of providing a
digital Knowledge Gateway to all Texans. We will provide access for every citizen, via a
personalized Internet window, into the resources of our libraries, collections, museums,
and much more. The University is a dynamo, now with the power to bring light into
every home and business in Texas, and we mean to realize that potential.

Our target is to establish an online service that exceeds anything else of its kind,
permitting Texans everywhere to access, use, and benefit from the core materials at the
heart of our University. This will require three developments--(1) building the new portal,
(2) digitizing our holdings, and, (3) strengthening our information technology
infrastructure to handle increased traffic.

The great treasures of this institution belong to all citizens of the state. We want all to use
them. Also, we intend to be a leader in the new realm where research, learning, and
scholarly discourse are not limited by the walls of classrooms and laboratories.

Second, I am announcing the formation of a new commission on the future of the
University.

Twice before, we have convened groups of wise citizens to examine the University’s
relationship to Texas and to chart a course for continued development. Both had great
positive effect. The Committee of Seventy-Five, brought together on the occasion of the
University’s 75th anniversary, set out the path that, during the 1960s and 1970s, enabled
UT Austin to join the circle of national universities. Twenty-five years later, the
Centennial Commission charted the course that, during the 1980s and 1990s, gained for
the University a position among the leadership of higher education.

We are in a dynamic period of history. Many aspects of our economy and our society
have changed in the two decades since the Centennial Commission completed its work.
The intellectual agenda and the base of technology have changed, too. In those twenty
years, we have seen the rise of the personal computer, the forceful growth of
biotechnology, and the advent of the Internet. The face of Texas has been altered in so
many ways, and it has assumed a greater national role. It is time for close study of
circumstances, obligations, and opportunities. It is time for a new roadmap for the future.

This is the 125th anniversary of the constitutional mandate giving rise to The University
of Texas at Austin; therefore I will convene a Commission of 125 to begin work in the
fall. It will be charged with defining the model, goals, and strategy for our public research
university in this era. It will have representation from all of Texas--all population groups,
all geographic regions, all sectors of activity.

If the commission’s role is to ensure that we are directly engaged in matters that affect all
of our citizens, among the most fundamental is surely the land of Texas itself, comprising
its geology, energy resources, water, and environment. Already we have assembled at UT
an extraordinary network of scientists and engineers doing groundbreaking work in all of
these important domains. But there will never be an end to the need for new knowledge
My third announcement is that two Texans with vision and belief in Texas have stepped forward to see that resources will always be committed to that end.

Mr. John A. Jackson and his late wife, Katherine, people who have blessed this institution with great generosity in the past, are committing the residue of their estate in support of the Jackson School of Geosciences at UT Austin. Because of the nature of their gift, its ultimate value cannot be precisely determined, but the current value is in the range of $150 million. These resources will eventually become a part of the Jackson Endowment, advised by the Geology Foundation. As an endowment, this gift will create perpetual revenue to support teaching and research in geology, geophysics, energy, mineral and water resources--as well as the broad areas of earth sciences, including the environment.

I cannot be more eloquent than Jack Jackson himself, who has said:

"The resources of the Earth have been important to me and to what Katie and I have been able to achieve. The continued study and understanding of geology and the resources and environment of the Earth will be important to The University and the citizens of Texas in the future."

Thanks to the Jacksons, I believe that no organization committed to these topics in any university worldwide will be more powerfully endowed.

Even though this commitment is magnanimous indeed, and even though it is provided with the grace of a gift, Mr. Jackson insists that he and his wife are not donors. They are investors in the future of Texas. He could not be more correct. The Jacksons are addressing an everlasting interest of the people of Texas with an everlasting flow of financial support.

Mr. Jackson, on behalf of the people of Texas, those of us gathered here express our great gratitude.

With the Jackson gift, we have surpassed our goal of $1 billion dollars for UT's capital campaign. This marks an important milestone. It also serves as a testament to the faith that Texans have in the ability of the University to transform lives for the benefit of society.

Let me conclude by sharing with you a video that we have prepared for this occasion. We are proud that it makes its public debut with you this morning. It will be used in the following weeks and months across the state and the nation, whenever we have a chance to talk about how UT-Austin is improving the lives of real people.

Now I invite all of you to participate in Explore UT, the biggest open house in Texas. Make yourselves at home.