



Patrick F. Leahy

Installation Address | September 15, 2012

Chairman Miller, other members of the Board of Trustees, Mayor Leighton, Senator Yudichak, Past Presidents of Wilkes, delegates from other higher education institutions, delegates from each and every Wilkes class since 1947 – including our current state representative, Eddie Day Pashinski, from the class of 1967 – faculty, staff, students, friends. Good morning and welcome to the Diamond City of Wilkes-Barre, PA and to this special gathering of its very own Wilkes University. I am pleased and humbled to have all of you here, especially those of you who traveled some distance to be here today. It means a great deal to Wilkes University and to me. Thank you very much. Let me also thank in a special way my greeters – colleagues and friends all – for their kind words of support. Before I go any further, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my family who is here today. First, please welcome my beautiful wife of 17 years, Amy. Amy agreed to pick up and move to Northeast Pennsylvania eight years ago so I could pursue a dream to work in higher education. I probably shouldn't state this so publicly, but I owe you. Next, I am pleased to have here today the part of my life of which I am most proud, my children: my girls – Grace and Molly – and my boys – Jack and Brian. Molly, my 11 year old, took me aside this summer and told me: “Dad, I would like to be known as the “president's daughter.” What about Grace I asked? “She can be known as the president's daughter's sister.” I am thrilled to have both of them here. My sons would probably rather be at home in Bear Creek Village fishing, so this is a sacrifice for them for sure. I am so glad to have them here. One of my heroes, my dad, John Leahy, Sr., is here today from Baltimore, MD. My only sister, Brigid – the only girl of 6 of us – is here today with her husband, one of my best friends, Chuck Fischer. And, I'm so pleased to have many members of Amy's family here today from all over the country, in particular her grandparents, who have become my grandparents too, John & Florence Morello. Welcome, Pop and Gram. My family should know that all I really want to do is make the generation ahead of me and the generation behind me proud. I'd also like to remember the important people in my life who have already, as John Magee wrote so beautifully in 1941, “slipped the surly bonds of Earth, put out their hands, and touched the face of God:” my mom, Nancy Buseman Leahy; my brother, Tom Leahy; my uncle, Dick Conway; and my mother-in-law, Merry Morello. I miss all of them very much today. To Fr. Kevin Quinn and my friends at Scranton, many of whom are here today, let me just say this: thank you. When Amy and I moved to Scranton eight years ago, we did not know a single soul. You welcomed us, befriended us, supported us. I learned two things at Scranton which will always inform my thinking here at Wilkes. The first is “cura personalis” – care for the whole person in their uniqueness. The second is “magis” – the restless pursuit of excellence, motivated by gratitude. While I will not breach the Jesuit trademark on these terms, these two ideas will continue to shape my thinking about higher education. I often – in jest of course – refer to the University of Scranton as “that university just up Interstate 81 whose name escapes me. What's the name of it?” The truth is: I will never forget you. Thank you, my friends at Scranton. Now, having said all those sentimental things, be forewarned: Wilkes is coming after you!

I would like to pause and thank another person with Scranton ties – Scott Pilarz of the Society of Jesus. Thank you, Scott, for being here today and for providing your customary eloquence on this occasion. As many of you know, Scott was my boss at Scranton, serving as my mentor in higher education. One of the many things I learned from Scott is to always put students first. In fact, I’ve never met a college president who is more committed to the students than Fr. Pilarz.

How do you adequately thank someone who helped make a dream of becoming a university president come true? Shakespeare said: “I can no other answer make, but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks.” Somehow, though, even Shakespeare seems inadequate in this situation. Fortunately, there is a time honored tradition in higher education that allows the ultimate show of appreciation and recognition of achievement. It’s called the honorary degree. I’d like to ask Fr. Pilarz and our Interim Provost, Terri Wignot, to please come forward. I will now read the honorary degree citation for Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.

Honorary Degree Scott R. Pilarz, S.J..... Doctor of Humane Letters

Native of Camden, New Jersey; cum laude graduate of Georgetown University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English; graduate of Fordham University with a Masters degree in Philosophy; graduate of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology with master degrees in divinity and theology; graduate of the City University of New York with a PhD in English; member of the English faculty at Georgetown University from 1996 through 2003 where you also served as University Chaplain; recipient of the Edward B. Bunn, S. J. Award for Faculty Excellence; President of the University of Scranton from 2003 through 2011 where you led to successful completion the \$125 million dollar Pride, Passion and Promise Campaign; President of Marquette University since 2011; and winner of the John Carroll Award, Georgetown University Alumni Association’s highest honor. Because as a teacher you have served your students with passion and devotion that stirs their intellectual curiosity and inspires an appreciation for the humanities; because as a university president you have influenced thousands of graduates at the University of Scranton and Marquette University to lead lives of faith, hope and service; because you are a leader of great personality and spirit; and because in a life guided by a higher calling you lead by example and with grace. By the power now vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Wilkes University, I hereby confer upon you, Scott R. Pilarz of the Society of Jesus, the doctorate of humane letters, Honoris Causa, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto.

(Presentation of the degree)

Congratulations, Fr. Pilarz. A few years ago Fr. Pilarz was awarded an honorary degree from our neighboring institution, Kings College. Scott, you now have what you’ve always really wanted – a Wilkes degree! Everyone wants a Wilkes degree. Even the president of Kings College, Fr. Jack Ryan, has a Wilkes degree! Our mayor, himself a Kings graduate, sends his daughter to Wilkes.

Looking back with pride; looking forward with confidence – that is our theme for this weekend. Let’s look back with pride for a moment at this remarkable institution. One could argue that this University probably should not even exist today. Let me explain. Wilkes University was founded in 1933 as Bucknell University Junior College, a result of a statewide study that identified areas of need for higher education. Imagine starting an enterprise of any kind in the midst of the Great Depression! The school struggled to gain acceptance during the 1930s. Then, in the 1940s the U.S. went to war, and with it, most of the potential students. If not for the ingenuity of our first president, Eugene Farley, Wilkes would have died. He went to Washington, DC looking for a way to support the war effort. He convinced the Army Air Force to send some of its cadets to Bucknell University Junior College for training

before being sent off to fight in World War II. These “Flyboys”, as they were affectionately known, sustained the college during that period. In the process of saving our world from tyranny, the Flyboys saved this college. I’m proud to have one of those Flyboys with us here today, representing the Greatest Generation. Mr. John Horner, would you please stand and be recognized? Thank you for your service to our country. Following World War II, Bucknell University Junior College flourished for a time. Many colleges did, a result of the GI Bill, which sent thousands and thousands of returning veterans to college. In 1947, having just become a 4-year institution, Bucknell University Junior College became Wilkes College.

During the 1950s, Wilkes College continued to educate men and women of this valley and beyond, many of whom were the sons and daughters of immigrant coal miners. You see, this valley was flooded with immigrants from across the Atlantic Ocean – Germany, Italy, Ireland, Wales, Poland – first generation Americans willing to work day after day with “their faces to the coal” in what could only be described as the “Black Hell.” These immigrants endured unimaginable hardship working in the anthracite coal mines. Why? To provide a better life for their children. Wilkes College was part of that better life. Wilkes educated these children, providing a way out of the mines for thousands of families. My grandfather Leahy, who never had the privilege of pursuing a college degree, evidently used to say: “Once a generation receives a college degree, then the chain is broken forever.” In my family, both my father and my mother break those chains in their respective families. And, so it was with many Wilkes graduates.

During the 1960s, with the collapse of the anthracite coal mining industry, Wilkes-Barre needed to reinvent itself. Wilkes College helped lead these economic development efforts by introducing electrical engineering, which prompted RCA – now Fairchild Semiconductor – to relocate hundreds of jobs to the area. It was one more way that Wilkes supported its hometown. Then, in 1972 a flood of a different sort hit the Wyoming Valley – the Agnes Flood, which occurred 40 years ago this past June. For any of you who lived through the Agnes flood, the memories, even this many years later, are still vivid and I’m sure unforgettable. For those of you who weren’t here in 1972, imagine 9 feet of water in downtown Wilkes-Barre. Nine feet! If not for the perseverance of Wilkes’ second president, Francis Michellini, and the great civic leader and Wilkes Trustee, the late Judge Max Rosenn, Wilkes would not have survived, but it did.

In the late 1970s and 1980 under the leadership of Robert Capin this liberal arts college expanded to meet the educational needs of a growing number of students, both in the professional fields and in the graduate fields. In 1990, with the support of then-president Christopher Breiseth Wilkes College became Wilkes University. In 1996, the University opened its School of Pharmacy, prompting such companies as CVS Caremark to locate in the region. Since that time, Wilkes has continued to survive in the face of mounting pressure to keep higher education affordable and in the face of mounting competition from other first-class institutions, like Kings College, Misericordia University, Luzerne County Community College, and others from across this region and around the country.

In more recent years, under the leadership of Tim Gilmour Wilkes, while continuing to develop and advance, faced more challenges, including: 9/11, the Great Recession and, just last fall, the threat of another 100-year flood just 39 years after the last one. As has been mentioned, this institution over all those nearly 80 years has had only 5 presidents. I am now the sixth. Dr. Eugene Farley, our first president and guiding force for so many years, passed away in 1973. Every other president since Eugene Farley is here with us today. Would Dr. Francis Michellini, Dr. Robert Capin, Dr. Chris Breiseth, and Dr. Tim Gilmour please stand and be recognized? Thank you all for making Wilkes what it is today.

Throughout its eventful history Wilkes University has faced serious challenges: depressions and recessions, natural disasters, economic ebbs and flows, increased competition, changing student demographics. There were plenty of times when the institution could have – maybe even should have – folded. But, at each turn the members of this community – faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the Wilkes-Barre community – responded. They decided that this institution is too important to this city and to this region. They decided that this place is too important to the thousands of students whose lives have been changed forever because of it. They decided that Wilkes University matters. Talk about looking back with pride.

Looking back with pride; looking forward with confidence – that is our theme for this weekend. We need to respect this history, even honor it. But, we have our own big questions that challenge American higher education in the years ahead: How do we keep a first-class college education affordable? How is our student profile changing? What opportunities and challenges will technology offer? How do we keep a first-class college education affordable? Gone are the days when colleges and universities can indiscriminately raise tuition. Just look at Measuring Up 2008, the national report card on higher education. This report tracked rising prices from 1982 – 2006. During that time, the Consumer Price Index increased 106%; median family income rose 147%; and medical costs went up 251%. During this same period, college tuition and fees increased 439%! Isn't it clear that colleges and universities must reduce their reliance on tuition increases? At the same time the economic challenges of the Great Recession have pushed financial aid pressures up, squeezing revenues for all college and universities nationwide, especially tuition-dependent ones like Wilkes University. We'll have to rethink how we fund our institutions.

How is our student profile changing? The number of traditional college age students in the Northeast, our prime recruiting market, is declining – by some estimates as much as 11% over the next decade – as the growth in the American population pushes south and west. This will set off a mad scramble for students from other high-quality institutions around the Northeast, which is easily the most competitive higher education market in the country. At the same time, the number of non-traditional individuals seeking higher education is increasing in this same market. These adult students require specific programs at specific times at specific places at specific prices. We'll have to rethink how we serve this market.

What opportunities and challenges will technology offer? Of course, those of us in higher education are still sorting out the effects of advances in technology. Technology has already changed the ways in which we deliver education. Some of our students who have traveled some distance to Wilkes-Barre, who live on campus in our residence halls, and who eat in our dining halls would rather take courses online than in class. What does this shift in student preference mean to the future of colleges and universities in general, and this university in particular? When Harvard University – by most accounts the leading university in the world – begins to offer courses online to anyone in the world at no charge, what does that mean for the rest of us? We'll have to rethink how we will continue to compete in the future. Eugene Farley said in his inaugural address in 1947: "If education has ever been isolated from reality or from the ordinary affairs of life, it is now challenged to re-examine its structure and, if necessary, to rebuild it." Those words are as true now as they were then. So, how does an institution like Wilkes University sustain itself, even thrive, in the face of our own contemporary challenges? For an answer to this question, I turn to the leading strategist of our time, Michael Porter. Porter writes: "The key to competitive success – for businesses and non-profits alike – lies in an organization's ability to create unique value. Aim to be unique, not best." Here's how Wilkes University is unique. One,

Wilkes has a unique dedication to student success. In fact, nowhere are faculty and staff members more committed to student success. That's a bold statement at a gathering where fiftysome colleges are represented. But, the idea of mentoring is not just a catchphrase here; it is a commitment imbedded in our very DNA as a community. Let me give you one example of this commitment. Even today by some estimates 50% of our student body – 1 out of 2 – every other student – is a first generation college student. Our outcomes with this student body profile are nothing short of amazing. Imagine the number of families, including many of you here today perhaps, whose lives have been forever changed because of Wilkes University. My grandfather Leahy, himself a self-educated man, used to say: "If you give someone an education, you give 'em a chance." Well, Wilkes has been giving first generation college students a chance for nearly 80 years. We are quite proud of this legacy, even though at times this work isn't fully appreciated by outsiders. And, we will continue this laser-like focus on student success in the future. At Wilkes University, we will continue to push every decision through the following filter: How does this decision – whatever it may be – impact the student experience here at Wilkes?

Two, Wilkes has a unique program mix. We have five colleges: 1) humanities and social sciences, 2) science and engineering, 3) nursing and pharmacy, 4) business, and 5) education, covering a broad array of student interests today. These five colleges offer a program mix that is consistent with much larger institutions. Yet, our relatively small size enables us to provide a very personalized education, the kind of personalized education that larger institutions can't begin to offer. We take pride in being a "small university." Within this "small university", Wilkes will continue to promote, even revere, the liberal arts and humanities. Wilkes is a place where engineers read Shakespeare. Why? Because we want our graduates not only to become strong technical engineers, but to become leaders in their field. Evidently, I'm late to this notion. At a Wilkes University commencement ceremony in 1990, Harry Ausprich, the then President of Bloomsburg University, told a generation of students all too preoccupied with careers: "If you want to learn about not missing the right opportunities, read Hamlet. If you want to learn about the dangers of over-weaning ambition, read MacBeth. If you want to know the pitfalls of playing around on the job, read Anthony & Cleopatra. If you want to learn the importance of fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to leadership, read King Lear. You'll see it all right there." Our Engineering department has heard me preach a variation of this. After a recent visit to their department, they presented me with a gift: the Complete Works of Shakespeare. (Maybe they want me to learn the importance of fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to leadership.) And, add to this broad academic program mix unparalleled opportunities for co-curricular development. Just last week I attended Club Day here on campus, where 88 different organizations were recruiting members. Wilkes is a place where a pharmacy student can play football, a nursing student can play the lead in a theatrical production, a business student can actually run a small business. Wilkes is a university that still looks, feels, and acts like a liberal arts college.

Three, Wilkes has a unique location. We have a residential urban campus with a river running through it. To the west is a completely redeveloped riverfront. To the east is a redeveloping downtown. In between sits our campus, with a collection of old, historic mansions and new, state-of-the-art academic buildings, in particular our new science facility. These old mansions tell the proud history of early Wilkes-Barre. And, Wilkes University is proud to be part of that history. Wilkes University has been an economic engine in the City of Wilkes-Barre for nearly 80 years, by some estimates contributing today nearly \$200 million in economic impact each and every year. We will continue to support our host city of Wilkes-Barre because it is the right thing to do. And, Mr. Mayor, if you ever wonder if our commitment to our host city will wane, just remember: it is in everyone's interest to make coming to Wilkes-Barre, PA to go to school as attractive as possible. Our futures are inextricably linked. Consider us partners for the long haul. And, Wilkes-Barre is a short drive to some of the great cities of

this nation – New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Boston, and, of course, the greatest city on the eastern seaboard – Baltimore, MD. We are centrally located in the heart of this corridor. Imagine the recruiting, internship, co-curricular, and placement possibilities within this unique location! And four, Wilkes has a unique culture. Call it innovative, creative, entrepreneurial – whatever – this place has it, and we will continue to develop it in the years ahead. Michael Porter says: “Competing to be the best feeds on imitation. Competing to be unique thrives on innovation.” In fact, in my opinion the only real way to deal with the challenges of the future is to innovate, which is a word not often used to define higher education institutions. But, Wilkes University is innovative: secondary school outreach initiatives, low-residency programs, select online programs, remote locations as close as the Poconos and as far away as Mesa (AZ), partnerships with Discovery Education, The Energy Institute, a surgical robotics lab. And, I could go on and on. This innovation can position us as a model for American universities in the 21st century. Four characteristics – a unique dedication to student success, a unique program mix, a unique location, and a unique culture – four characteristics which – in and of themselves – make us a good institution. Four characteristics which – integrated together – could make us a great institution. Daniel Hudson Burnham, the pre-eminent American architect at the turn of the 20th century, said: “Make no little plans, for they have no power to stir the soul.”

Here’s my plan: to make Wilkes one of the top “small universities” not just in this region, but in this nation. Talk about looking forward with confidence. Looking back with pride; looking forward with confidence – that is our theme for this weekend. I have said many times before that I would have relocated almost anywhere in the country for an opportunity to lead an institution like Wilkes University. To be able to do this in my adopted hometown of NEPA – a place that Amy, the kids, and I have grown to love and appreciate – is a special privilege in my life, one for which I am very grateful. Why such a privilege? Well, I believe higher education is the world’s most compelling work. That’s right, the world’s most compelling work! That’s quite a statement I realize. After all, the medical field saves people’s lives. The legal field rights wrongs. The business field makes products and services that make countless lives easier, creating wealth along the way. To say that higher education is the world’s most compelling work says a lot. But, if you think about it, we at colleges and universities have the incredible opportunity to educate nearly all of the professionals who populate those fields and many other fields. Consequently, if we do our jobs properly, then we have a chance to positively influence all of those fields. I call that compelling!

So, in closing, how do we pursue this compelling work in the face of these daunting challenges? For inspiration, I look to the late Vaclav Havel. You will remember Havel as the playwright who became the President of the Czech Republic. Amy and I had the privilege of visiting the Czech Republic not long after we got married, which was not long after the Velvet Revolution that led to a free and independent Czech Republic. As you may recall, Havel was imprisoned for many years as a dissident of the state for speaking out against the Soviet occupation. In fact, we stayed in the actual room in which Vaclav Havel was imprisoned, since his detention center had been turned into a hotel. Let me suggest that it makes for a better detention center than it does a hotel. Havel was once asked how he dealt with the challenges before him. He said this: “I just carry hope in my heart. Hope is not a feeling of certainty that everything ends well. Hope is a feeling that our lives and our work have meaning.” May our time together serving the students of Wilkes University be full of hope. May our lives and our work together at Wilkes University have meaning. Looking back with pride; looking forward with confidence – that is our theme for this weekend and for evermore. Thank you very much.