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PRESIDENT KELLY: "WE ARE ALL CAPTAINS"

TELLS FACULTY, STAFF "OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT"

August 20, 2024

Read time: about 14 min

President William G. Kelly delivered his first State of the University address to Christopher Newport's staff and faculty, gathered in the Diamonstein Concert Hall at the Ferguson Center for the Performing Arts.

Here are President Kelly's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

Good morning everyone and thank you for joining us.

It is a great day to be a Captain and We are all Captains.

Let me begin with the headline: The state of the university, the state of Christopher Newport is SOLID.

For every metric that matters - enrollment - giving - budget - employment - service - compassion and kindness - inclusivity - victories on the field - stunning performances on the stage - doors held open - smiles offered - for every metric that matters, the state of Christopher Newport University is solid and our future is bright.

No, please don't leave now. Not yet.

We need to talk about why our University is positioned for a bright, thriving, future - a future anchored in excellence.

Our future is bright thanks to the inspired leadership of our Board of Visitors and we welcome past and current Board members with us this morning. The current Board's presiding officer, Christy Morton, is with us today. She is

a Captain for Life. Thank you Christy for your leadership. And while she couldn't be with us this morning, I would also like to thank distinguished alumna and immediate past Rector Lindsey Carney Smith for her leadership.

Our future is bright thanks to the support of local, state and federal elected leaders, faith leaders, education leaders, corporate leaders, nonprofit leaders, community leaders, alumni leaders, and the many friends of the university in all walks of life. You saw their names on the screen as you entered the Concert Hall and we thank them for finding time in their busy schedules to be with us this morning and we are grateful and honored by their presence.

We are proud to be the hometown university for Newport News and we are especially proud that the entire nation now knows that Newport News is an All America City! Let us thank the leaders of our Board of Visitors, our region and our state for their support and their continued commitment to CNU and our Hampton Roads Community.

Most of all, our future is bright thanks to you. Each of us understands and embraces what it means to be a Captain. No matter where you sit this morning, no matter what you will do this afternoon, whether your job is indoors or outside, in front of a computer or across from a student - you are a Captain.

Let me say that again - you are a Captain - we are all Captains.

We are Captains because of the way we live our lives and embody our core values.

First and foremost...we value Honor. Captains demonstrate honor in all we do. Our incoming students sign the honor code and then learn what it means to live a life of honor and respect. Our new employees review the honor code at Orientation and we all know that the words matter and the actions they inspire matter so much more.

We value scholarship. Captains strive to be continuous learners, always exploring, researching and educating, figuring out a new and better way to solve a problem or capitalize on an opportunity. We are all Captains, always learning.

Service is another of our cherished values. As Captains, we serve others first, always placing the needs of the individual and the community before ourselves. Captains contribute their time, talent and treasure to the university they love and the community they serve. Finally, we value leadership. It is a distinctive characteristic of Christopher Newport University. We prepare leaders to live a life of significance. Our faculty and staff invest in our students and they embody what it means to be a servant leader each and every day.

Honor, scholarship, service, and leadership. With those values in mind - and they should always be in our hearts - I want to share a few thoughts about where we have been as Captains, the challenges we face together and where we are going as one.

Let's start with where we have been.

Just over a year ago, Angie and I were honored to be welcomed here and to have the opportunity to serve as your sixth president and first lady. In my remarks at my inauguration, I promised we would be "All In" and I asked the same of you. You came through in every respect.

We had an amazing year. We graduated more than 1,000 students and the reports we are getting indicate they are thriving as Captains for Life. One of those graduates is a Fulbright Scholar and many more achieved extraordinary accomplishments and earned countless honors.

We cut the ribbon on the new administration building on the north side of campus and we broke ground on the state-of-the-art Science and Engineering Research Center and it is literally coming to life right before our eyes.

We took meaningful steps to learn more about our history and improve how we respond to concerns about Title IX and opportunities on campus to create the most inclusive university in the Commonwealth.

We established bridge programs with community colleges so we could fulfill our mission to be a destination of choice for all students of Virginia seeking a great education.

We launched the Going Greener '24 initiative and we are already seeing results as we build a more sustainable, more environmentally conscious campus for the future.

Our Advancement team exceeded our fundraising goal by over two million dollars, securing crucial scholarship support so that we can provide access and affordability to every qualified student who desires to be a Captain. We

welcomed in hundreds of new donors, including many recently graduated Captains for Life.

CNU Day was an enormous success as our network of Cities of Celebration literally spanned from Coast to Coast and around the globe!

And, as usual, our residence halls shined, our grounds are the envy of every university in Virginia and our dining facilities remain on par with some of the best restaurants in the area.

We launched our Captains of the Quarter recognition program so that we could lift up those Captains who lift us up as a university each and every day.

Our first Captain of the Quarter was Wes Mann - Wes - would you please join me on stage. Wes is the Director of Building Operations and when he was nominated to be our inaugural Captain of the Quarter, this is what his colleagues said about him: He embodies what it means to be a Captain. Sometimes his job is thankless and he deserves to be thanked. He works tirelessly and always manages to smile, and say hello. He keeps on trying even when others might wish to abandon ship.

Wes in recognition of you being our first Captain of the Quarter, I want you to have the first We Are Captains t-shirt.

I'll introduce the other Captains of the Quarter and the newest Captain of the Quarter as we continue but let's take a moment to thank Wes.

What a year it was. Thanks to people like Wes, thanks to all of you, our future is bright. Before we get to all the bright lights, I want to be transparent about the challenges ahead. There are storm clouds off in the distance, but I am confident, like any good Captain, we will navigate through them successfully.

Thanks to the support of the governor and the general assembly, thanks to our donors, thanks to our tuition-paying students and their families and thanks to the cost-savings efforts of our faculty and staff, we are SOLID when it comes to fiscal sustainability. I'm pleased to be able to say that, in most cases, I'm not going to ask you to do more with less. But we do have an opportunity to identify efficiencies to ensure we are the very best stewards of the resources we are provided and I ask that we always strive to remain anchored in excellence in all that we do.

Thanks to our Admission team and our Student Services team, our new and returning student population is Solid.

As our fellow Universities across the state and those from out of state seek to recruit the talented students in the Commonwealth, we must identify new opportunities to serve as the Peninsula's Hometown University, while ensuring we are attracting talent from across the state and around the nation. Virginia is the #1 State for Business and #1 for Education. We are in a unique position to enhance the talent pipeline for the region and together with our business and community leaders I know we will be successful.

The third opportunity comes from charting a course for the future. Many of you - more than 100 - volunteered your time and efforts this summer and you have contributed to our community-wide effort to create a Strategic Compass - a strategic plan to give us a north star to guide us toward an even brighter future.

This fall, we will finalize the plan and lay out the tracklines that will ensure we remain grounded in the liberal arts, serve as a regional hub with educational, cultural and economic connections, we will continue the work to be a more inclusive campus, and we will build upon the solid foundation that is this place, a foundation built upon our commitment to the liberal arts and to our four pillars - research, internships, study abroad and service.

As we navigate forward, there will almost certainly be changes in what we do and how we do it.

We will trim the sails and adjust the course for the most effective journey. Our challenge is to embrace what's new while continuing to provide an education that is student focused and anchored in excellence in every way.

I am energized by the opportunities that lay ahead and confident that we will remain successful because we are all Captains.

So here is a first look at our year ahead as we build toward a bright future.

We will move closer to our goal of being America's #1 regional public university.

We will focus on every one of those words - regional, public, university.

Let's start with "regional" because so many of our guests today help us achieve that goal.

Civic engagement - by students, faculty and staff is a hallmark of life at Christopher Newport. It is in our DNA.

Our Center for Community Engagement connects our University with our region and the result is thousands of hours and approximately a million dollars worth of volunteer service annually.

Our students work side by side with talented faculty at the Wason Center to provide citizens and lawmakers unbiased, nonpartisan insight into the policy issues shaping the future of the Commonwealth. Information and insights that are needed now more than ever.

Our Center for Career Planning connects our students with internships and jobs in the Hampton Roads region and we are grateful for the wonderful opportunities.

Those internships lead to our students staying in the Commonwealth and many right here on the Peninsula and Southside where they build careers, start families, they put down roots and serve as Captains in our communities.

We are encouraging everyone to attend the many events that take place on campus from Holiday Happening, the shows at the Ferguson Center, the Torggler Fine Arts Center exhibits, the myriad of Athletic events and of course the camps for the youth of the region and I could go on and on ...

We will be a public university in the best sense of the word - open to all who seek a great education - from every neighborhood on the Peninsula and the Southside, every city and county in Virginia, and every state in the union.

We are expanding our Community Captains program for the students of Newport News and we are stepping up our recruiting of out of state students, military veterans, community college students, and adult learners.

We will serve our region. We will embrace the public - holding our doors wide open. And we will continue to be an exceptional university that provides an extraordinary education.

Let's meet two of our accomplished professors and I would ask them to join me here on stage.

Tarek Abdel-Fattah and Johnny Finn were recognized by SCHEV as two of Virginia's outstanding faculty of 2024 - it is the highest honor for faculty in the Commonwealth. That speaks to their contributions in the classroom and through their research and service. It also speaks to CNU's growing statewide reputation as an academic powerhouse. Tarek and Johnny...I'm pleased to present you with a We Are Captains t-shirt and ask that you all join me in congratulating them.

Now let's go inside the classroom for a moment.

I asked each Dean for a brief snapshot of the year ahead for their school or college and here's what they said.

Dean Jana Adamitis reports the College of Arts and Humanities has added a certificate in professional ethics, they are refining our music offerings and the faculty is working to deepen the connections between our academic programs and the Ferguson and Torggler centers.

Dean Nicole Guajardo says the College of Natural and Behavioral Sciences is building new and important relationships within our community, including finalizing our memorandum of understanding with Riverside College of Health Sciences so we may offer a 3+2 Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. The College is also establishing a Professional Advisory Board to enhance students' professional development.

Dean Tatiana Rizova says the College of Social Sciences is focusing on community engaged learning with three courses as part of the Tidewater Fellows program for the Center for Community Engagement. The College has launched a new minor in forensic science in collaboration with Natural and Behavioral Sciences and is working on a baccalaureate certificate in sustainability.

Dean Alan Witt reports the Luter School of Business is developing new courses for both the business major and minor to increase the number of electives available to students. These courses are in response to interest expressed by students and include courses in Sports Management, Not-for-Profit Management, and Healthcare Administration.

And finally, Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Vice Provost Lynn Lambert says CNU is collaborating with the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce to offer the LEAD Higher micro-credential program in advanced leadership.

Christopher Newport also received new grants surpassing three million dollars for the second year in a row, and we are starting Virginia's first undergraduate research certificate in the Fall of 2025.

Looking outside the classroom, we are just days away from the first Captains athletic events. It will be hard to top last year when we welcomed in thousands of players, parents and fans from across the nation for a record breaking year as 13 CNU teams qualified for NCAA Tournament Play and we hosted 25 NCAA tournament teams for competition.

For the first time in school history our Women's Sailing Team qualified for the National Championship and our Cheer Team won the National Championship! I know our coaches and student-athletes are committed to remaining anchored in excellence in all they do and we are excited to see our Captains take the field again this year.

The Ferguson Center will celebrate its 20th anniversary in the year ahead and Bruce Bronstein and his team have an amazing array of events planned - not just star performers in concert ... Like Diana Ross, but also the Arts for All performances and the New Musicals Lab that extend the reach of the Ferg so that all of our students and all of our neighbors can discover the joy and wonder of the performing arts.

The Mary M. Torggler Center will remain free to visit and Holly Koons and her team are always seeking the next inspiring exhibit. Our goal for this upcoming year is to raise the profile of the Torggler Center so everyone in the region and across the Commonwealth knows about the jewel behind those glass domes.

In everything we do this year, we will be honoring the legacy of our Captains for Life. Could I ask every Christopher Newport Captain for Life to stand so we can acknowledge and celebrate your service.

Those Captains for Life have seen this institution grow from a two-year college, to a four year college and now this exceptional regional public university.

We stand on the shoulders of legendary leaders. I personally want to thank President Tribble and Interim President Thompson, who are here with us today, and President Santoro for all of their support.

Please join me in thanking them for all that they have given and continue to give to this amazing University.

It is the people who make this place so special. I want to take a moment to speak from the heart and I'd like to ask my wife Angie to join me.

We had a great year as Captains and we had an inspiring year as this Admiral and this dedicated military spouse learned what it means to truly be a Captain. We tried to meet as many of you as we could. Angie and I attended countless events on campus and in the community, we listened to you at office hours and in casual meetings on the Great Lawn or in line at our dining halls.

You invited us to the events that mattered to you and we learned so much along the way. I started the Wednesday morning walks and that tradition will continue beginning tomorrow and every Wednesday thereafter starting at 6:30 a.m. at the Fountain.

Together, we are committed to getting to know you better in the year ahead - we want to know who you are, what brings you satisfaction on the job, what challenges you face and what we can do as your President and First Lady to help make this an even more inclusive, welcoming, kind, and successful community.

Our ears are open to your ideas and our hearts are open to each and every one of you.

Let me conclude where I began - with our values and I'm going to need some help.

Please welcome another one of our previous Captains of the Quarter Ivette Sabater, who embodies the value of honor.

In everything she does, Ivette honors all the people in her path. She is one of the first to greet new employees to hand them the keys (literally) to their new office. And she can be found chipping in wherever and whenever needed. She is always there to lend a hand, and doing it all with a warm and welcoming smile on her face.

Ivette, I am honored to be your colleague and to present you this We are Captains t-shirt.

Let's bring Wes, Tarek and Johnny back on stage as we celebrate our value of scholarship.

To do that, I would like to invite Dr. John Thompson to the stage.

John is an exceptional professor of philosophy and religion. And Dr. Thompson quietly teaches his students life lessons. Through his genuine approach, he models what it means to listen, to value our differences and divergent perspectives and to be student focused.

He often tells his students "It's necessary for us to be kinder than we need to be."

As we enter into the fall, we must approach it with kindness, respect, and a willingness to listen to others who hold very different opinions. John, may I present this We are Captains shirt to you.

Now... service. And it's about to get crowded up here.

Please welcome Coach Paul Crowley and members of the Captains football team, fresh from practice. Yes, they will serve a defeat to plenty of their opponents this season but let's cheer them for their service to the community.

In April, Coach Crowley and nearly 80 Captains descended on an area known as Pinkett's Beach in downtown Newport News. They cleaned up - boy, did they ever, gathering trash, debris, and seagrass. In all, 120 bags were filled and removed.

And in a few days, this team and many other CNU athletes and coaches will join me and Angie on the sidewalks at Newport News public schools, welcoming children back for their first day of class. Captains serve. Thanks Coach!

Finally - Captains lead.

Please welcome Chief Dan and our uniformed police officers, security officers, and communications officers along with our Police Department's administrative and support personnel. These women and men are exceptionally skilled and caring - they are leaders in their field and we are all safer because of their efforts.

One of the people on stage is our newest Captain of the Quarter.

Let me ask Chief People Officer Ashleigh Andrews to join me with the envelope containing the name of the winner.

Drum roll, please!

It is Jack de los Santos - our public service technician.

To quote some of Jack's colleagues...Jack's commitment to the CNU Police Department is truly exceptional. He willingly offers guidance and assistance beyond his core job responsibilities, demonstrating genuine care. His professional and interpersonal attributes testify to his dedication.

His exceptional work ethic and humble approach make him an invaluable asset to our community. Through his actions, Jack not only exemplifies our core values but also inspires others to achieve their fullest potential.

Jack, I am honored to present you this coin and this shirt as a token of our appreciation for all that you do.

After the event, we will make sure you get all the other good things that come with being a Captain of Quarter.

By now you're wondering — how do I get one of those "We are Captains!" t-shirts. Regarding that - the future is also bright!

As you leave the Concert Hall, please stop off in the lobby where we have boxes of We Are Captains t-shirts in many sizes waiting for you. Take one...wear it today and wear it on our spirit Fridays. And to our guests - Please also stop and grab a t-shirt, as you too, are part of the Christopher Newport family!

And we will make sure everyone up here receives one as well.

We are all Captains. Captains set the pace, we live our core values and we are Anchored in Excellence in all we do.

Our Campus is a community of Captains, from our students, to our talented faculty, to our dedicated staff, to our passionate coaches, and every Captain for Life who loves this university with all their heart.

We're excited for the year ahead, we have an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our students, our university and our Community. I am one hundred percent certain that our future is bright because We are all Captains and we are truly Stronger Together.

Thank you for joining us today and let's finish as we always do, and let's say it together, loud and proud on 3 Go

Captains ...1...2...3...Go Captains! Thank You everybody!
