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PRESIDENT WILLIAM G. KELLY'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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Good morning!

It is a great day to be a Captain. Today, we celebrate you, all of you, who are the heart of this remarkable place. We take measure of the challenges that lie before us. And we consider the enormity of our blessings, foremost is the awesome opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of our community, our commonwealth, our nation and our world.

Thank you, Father Beeman, for the reminder that faith is real and that grace is everywhere. Governor Youngkin, thank you for your inspiring and insightful remarks and thank you for your confidence in my leadership.

Congressman Scott, our friends from the Virginia General Assembly, and Newport News and Hampton Roads leaders - we are honored by your presence and we are grateful for your good work on our behalf.

Thank you to my colleagues in higher education including the leaders of Virginia's outstanding colleges and universities. Every day, I learn from you and I will continue to seek your guidance.

Thank you, Rector Carney Smith - I am humbled by your gracious words, actually I was brought me to tears, and for your kind welcome and tremendous support. Thank you to each member of the Board of Visitors for your confidence in my leadership.

Thank you to our students, faculty, staff, coaches and all the many friends of this great university. I look forward to

setting sail with you.

Thank you to all who are participating in this ceremony and to all who organized this event and made the Great Lawn, somehow, even more beautiful. I want to take a moment to thank our staff. We had the Virginia Symphony Orchestra here last night and our team was here until after midnight cleaning up from that and they were here before dawn today setting this place up. Would you please join me in a round of applause for them?

Thank you to the Christopher Newport ROTC Revolutionary Guard Battalion for your stirring presence and for your service to our country. And also, a thank you to our wonderful orchestra who has graced us with their presence today.

Several of my friends and shipmates made during my 36 years of service to our country are here today. Somewhere under this regalia beats the heart of a Captain and a Cutterman and I am grateful for your continued support and friendship.

I would especially like to thank President Tribble and Rosemary, and President Santoro. I've been on the job for a little over a month. While I came here with some experience at the helm, I have in these last six weeks gained a new understanding of the depth of your service to Christopher Newport, and a deeper appreciation for the challenges you surmounted and for the enormity of the task before me.

Thank you to Interim President Thompson and J. Lynn. Adelia, we are grateful to you for your selfless efforts to lead this institution during the transition period in which the University continued to thrive.

I see in all of you how your spirit and your heart can be lifted and made happy here.

One last group I must thank is my family. My mom and dad are joining us today for this memorable event and I am so grateful for all they have done to prepare me for this opportunity. Thanks to my soon to be 91 year old Aunt Betty - everyone needs an Aunt Betty, believe me.

Thanks to my brother Eugene for joining us and I look forward to having all of my brothers on campus soon. Bob, Jackie, Kathy, and Mike thank you for your amazing daughter and sister and thank you for your continued support and we know Annie is looking down on us today.

Patrick and Ellen. Thank you for your service to this nation, you are an inspirational couple and you have graced us with the most precious of gifts with our grandson Liam, you are amazing. Our younger son Tyler was unable to join us today, but he visited two weeks ago and he is looking forward to his return with his wife Alyssa and our grand puppy Lola and I'm certain Lola will love the Great Lawn.

I know that there are a lot of thank you's, but I think I better take a moment and thank the love of my life. Angie - honey, thank you for your love and support and this university is just starting to learn how amazing you are. I am blessed to have you as a partner as we set out on this voyage together.

So, the first time I came to Christopher Newport, I hadn't yet met Angie. And, believe me, I had no idea that one day I could return as president.

In 1984, and for the three years after that, I visited this very campus. It looked very different. I was part of the Coast Guard Academy baseball team. We had a game each and every year against what was then Christopher Newport College. And each and every year we lost. No surprise there, Captains win a lot.

Fast forward to last year when I began thinking about what life would look like after I retired from the Coast Guard. Angie and I were in Yorktown attending the retirement ceremony of a shipmate. We heard about the potential search for a sixth president here. We connected with a former colleague of mine who works here and he gave us a great tour. It was quiet, the students were gone, but you could get an instant sense that this place was special. As we got back in the car to head out, I turned to Angie and asked...what do you think? She looked at me eyes and said to me, "We've got to go for this. This is where we belong."

As usual, she was right. Here is why I believe we belong here and why we are so ready to serve.

It begins with my inner compass. Each of us has one - it's our internal guide to do what's right, to do what matters and, to do what's moral. My inner compass was formed by my parents, built on my faith and fortified by my 36 years of service to this great nation.

Here's where my inner compass points: It points first to our values. My values align with the values of Christopher

Newport University. In the Coast Guard, our Core Values are Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Integrity is the standard and Leadership defines who we are.

At Christopher Newport, our core values are Honor, Scholarship, Service, and Leadership and they are reflected in the honor code that our incoming students and I will sign at the end of this week.

We promise to uphold: On my honor, I will maintain the highest standards of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility. This means I will not lie, cheat or steal, and as a member of this academic community, I am committed to creating an environment of respect and mutual trust.

These are my values. My inner compass is aligned with CNU.

Here is the second reason we are ready to serve. Angie and I have so much more to give, and to give back. Our faith, our love of this country, and the way we were raised, and the way we tried to raise our sons, demands that we serve because we have been so blessed.

The third reason I believe we belong here is: We are **ALL IN**. We will be all in for our students and our community. This isn't a brief port visit or a waypoint on the way to another. The Service has moved my family 15 times. We don't want to do it again any time soon. We've unpacked mostly, hung most of the pictures, and with your support and God's good grace, we plan on staying here for a long while! We're all in!

What we've discovered and what most of you already know is this: Christopher Newport University is already "All In" in so many ways that serve our students, our community, and the Commonwealth.

Christopher Newport is all in for Academics.

- 93% of our students begin careers of their choice or pursue advanced education after graduation.
- Our students engage in meaningful internships across the Commonwealth in both the public and private sector.
- We are exploring new academic programs and partnerships, and our commitment to the Liberal Arts and Sciences will provide our students with an education that will permit them to pivot from one career to another as our world changes.
- Our faculty continue to do impressive work. Jon White joined famed historian Jon Meacham in winning the 2023 Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize. Jon was recognized for his book *A House Built by Slaves*.
- Two other members of our faculty received the 2023 SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award:
 - Dr. Margarita Marinova of the English Department and
 - Dr. Kelly Cartwright of the Psychology and Neuroscience Departments.

Christopher Newport is all in for the Arts.

The Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center and the Ferguson Center for the Performing Arts attract audiences from across Virginia for shows, concerts and exhibits.

Just last night, we hosted the Virginia Symphony Orchestra followed by fireworks. It was amazing! Thousands of local residents crowded this lawn for a wonderful and free performance for our community.

Christopher Newport is all in for athletics.

Our student-athletes give this university and our community countless memories and exhilarating moments. The men's basketball team just won the national championship, the women played for the title. Men's lacrosse went to the final four and, last year, 17 of our teams competed in NCAA championship events.

Our softball team and our women's soccer team have recently won national championships. We are a university of champions and one of the best comprehensive athletic programs in all the nation.

And, we are all in for our community:

On Thursday, more than 600 Captains will collaborate with 52 community partners for this year's Day One of Service.

Our LifeLong Learning program is a powerful force for education and community, serving well over 600 retirement-

aged individuals across Hampton Roads.

The Community Captains Program is our student success partnership with Newport News Public Schools and we're looking to expand it to serve more Peninsula students.

That we're all in matters because, together, we will have to navigate the choppy seas and shifting tides. The "demographic cliff" and the shrinking pool of college-age students coupled with the rise in inflation is a challenge for all of us committed to educating and developing the future citizens of our great nation.

I will ensure we remain thoughtful stewards of the funds provided by our students through tuition, our supporters through donations and our leaders in Richmond through state appropriations. We are improving efficiencies across the university and we're looking to enhance revenue and serve the Commonwealth in new ways.

We also know that our students are changing. That change is due to recent events that have impacted our nation and that change is also due to the ever-changing world we live in.

We will continue to evolve to serve and support our students. We are a student first university, committed to frequent quality interactions with our student body. And Angie and I are committed to being approachable and authentic in every interaction.

Collectively, our dedicated faculty, amazing staff and talented coaches will continue to make this a safe, inclusive, and respectful campus where free speech is prized and diversity is celebrated. Words without actions on those absolutes are unacceptable.

As our students change, so too is the higher education environment in Virginia. To meet this challenge, we are committed to telling Christopher Newport's story to new audiences, to recruiting students from all backgrounds, all regions of Virginia and beyond. We know, if prospective students visit this beautiful campus and engage with the people who make this a special place, they will then decide to come here, learn here, and eventually live and work here. They will build a meaningful life for their families and, Mr. Mayor and City Council members, they will make Newport News the All-American City we aspire it to be. As we rise up to meet the challenges, we need all hands on deck. My faith has taught me that inclusive leadership is the fundamental key to success of any team, any crew, and in our case, any University.

Not only must we be good stewards of the resources we receive, but we must be exceptional stewards of the hearts and minds entrusted to us.

Angie and I will strive to work each and every day to ensure that every member of our Christopher Newport community feels included and has a true sense of belonging on our campus.

From our dedicated faculty to our talented coaches and our hard-working staff and of course ... our brilliant students; we will strive to ensure that each and every one of us feels like we belong here and that across these beautiful 260 acres we can be our true and best selves.

This will always be a place where students come first and where nurturing this institution we love so much is our shared responsibility.

To assure its continuing health, we have taken the initial steps to create a Strategic Compass to guide us going forward.

We will engage with our entire community to garner our best thoughts, we will set the right course for our journey, and we will energize our Captains for the voyage we are all on together.

Our Strategic Compass will provide a pathway to competitive advantage. It will propel us to create and seize new strategic initiatives and it will ensure alignment to the resources entrusted to this University.

It will require commitment, time and talent from all of us.

As we set our track lines utilizing our compass, here's what we already know about the destination. Our goal is to be recognized as among the very best regional public universities in America. We will recruit, educate, and graduate students committed to leadership, honor, service, and scholarship.

We will be committed to excellence in all that we do.

And above all, our students will define what it means to lead a life of significance.

I am humbled and honored to stand before you and to serve as your president. I am awed by the responsibility and energized by the opportunity.

I ask you to join Angie and me in the voyage ahead. Together, side by side, we will adjust the lines and set the sails and we will change the world.

We are all in for the Future. And as always ...Go Captains!
