Thank you, thank you.

Thank you for that warm welcome.

Chairwoman Comai and the Board of Trustees, I am humbled by the trust and confidence you have placed in me as the 14th president of Central Michigan University.

I accept this medallion – as a symbol of leadership of this historic university and the public trust it conveys – with tremendous pride, humility and a strong sense of purpose.

To our local, state and federal officials, CMU students, faculty, staff, alumni, honored guests, and all university friends and family, it is indeed an honor to stand before you today. For your presence signifies your commitment to higher education and to our great university.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the distinguished speakers and program participants. Thank you for those wonderful salutations, musical selections, and special thanks to Senator Stabenow, Lieutenant Governor Cherry and our SGA President, Brittany Mouzourakis.

It is a source of great excitement and pride, both for me and for our university community, to have representatives from so many higher learning institutions from around the country here today.

Your presence reminds us of the great strength that binds us together as a global academic community. Thank you for sharing this special occasion with us.

As a first generation college graduate, I have a deep appreciation and understanding for the power of higher education to change lives and for the contribution it makes to advance knowledge, human understanding and our quality of life. I owe this incredible opportunity to family, mentors and friends who have nurtured and encouraged my career in higher education.

To my mentors and friends, many who join us from across the country to share in this celebration and to support me, my heartfelt thank you for being here.

To my family from Alabama, Georgia, Illinois and Michigan who celebrate with us today, thank you for your love and support throughout the years. A special thank you to my daughter, Roshunda. Ro, Dr. Daddy is proud of you, and I love you.
And to my partner, my soul mate, my nurse, the love of my life, my wife, Elizabeth, the First Lady of Central Michigan University, thank you, sweetheart, for your love, your support and your encouragement.

We gather this afternoon to honor this great institution by reflecting on its storied past while celebrating the tremendous opportunities that lie ahead.

This is an opportune time to reaffirm our fundamental mission and purposefully chart our course into the future. A future that is not only ours to create, but one for which we have been entrusted to achieve.

Throughout our 118-year history, the 13 presidents who have preceded me furthered our legacy with each leaving their own mark and contribution.

Countless faculty and staff have passionately and tenaciously labored to ensure the success of our students and to grow this university from the 31 eighth-graders who were the founding class in 1892 to more than 28,000 students today.

The responsibility for the success of our students officially passes to me today.

I am humbled by this responsibility and draw inspiration from the words of the world-renown author and poet Maya Angelou, who graced our campus in 1999. Dr. Angelou defined humility as, and I quote, “. . . someone went before me, and I am here to try to make a path for someone who is yet to come.”

Ladies and gentlemen, we must recognize the transformative power of education and build a culture of academic excellence and quality across our university.

As we graduate and prepare our students for jobs and to be contributing members of their communities, it is our central commitment that they will leave CMU with knowledge and character, that they are prepared for life, prepared to go forth as lifelong learners.

Our history and tradition of commitment to student learning tells us stories – stories that inspire – stories of students’ lives that were transformed by CMU's world-class education.

Stories of a Central Michigan University that has served as a place of advanced learning for parts of three centuries, that has served as a life-transforming experience for alumni such as:

Dick Enberg, a 1957 graduate whose career in sports broadcasting with CBS and NBC, a nine-time Emmy winner, has covered everything from the Olympics to college and professional sports.

Others like Jeff Daniels, Terry O’Quinn, Amy Roloff, Carter Oosterhouse and Larry Joe Campbell learned their own distinct styles of entertainment in our hallowed halls.

Lea Wu, a 2009 graduate in teacher education, went on to be honored as the Michigan Student/Intern Teacher of the Year – the third CMU student in five years to receive the prestigious award.

Dr. John Bartholomew, a 1970 graduate, is head of vascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic and has received the clinic’s “Best Doctor” award for several years in a row.
Alums who lead in the business world – Keith E. Goodwin, 1974 graduate who serves as Senior Vice President, Worldwide Channels for Cisco Systems; Steve Violetta serves as senior vice president for the Detroit Red Wings; and Roger Kesseler, retired vice president/controller, The Dow Chemical Company.

The political world – U.S. Senator Robert Paul Griffin.

The military world – General Norton A. Schwartz, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff.

University presidents – Dr. John Jasinski, president of Northwest Missouri State University; Richard Hurley, president of Mary Washington University; and sitting with us today, the 22nd president of Eastern Michigan University, Dr. Susan Martin, who is a proud graduate of CMU, whose life was transformed by the quality education she received at Central.

Dr. Marilyn French Hubbard, retired Henry Ford Health System executive; Sarah R. Opperman, retired Dow Chemical executive; Robert F. Wardrop II, prominent Grand Rapids attorney; and Gail Torreano, Senior Vice President, AT&T.

More than 200,000 CMU graduates have distinguished themselves in business, health care, education, law, medicine, music and the arts, social work, and science – impacting innumerable lives.

Their preparation was achieved through high standards of quality and academic excellence. Everyone at the university – faculty, students, staff and administrators must actively participate to create a culture of academic excellence and high quality.

This is our core mission and each of us shares this responsibility.

Always being forwardly focused and recognizing the emerging societal and economic needs, CMU has successfully pursued many opportunities, and in doing so, enhanced the communities we serve.

In spite of the economic challenges, in spite of the nay-sayers and doubters we must adapt, change and move forward.

Yes, we have challenges, but challenges can and will make us stronger, and our message must be clear, backed by actions – not empty words.

I say for those who doubt us – we must address them head-on. For those doubters in Lansing and Washington who suggest that higher education is in “crisis,” we must address them head-on.

For the business leaders, who want us to “run our university like businesses” and say that we are not accountable, we must address them head-on.

And to address those who doubt us, we must embrace our future, we must commit to the alignment of our vision, mission and core values – and we must do so not at “university speed,” but with all deliberate speed.
Our Central Commitment must be to transform our traditions and focus our future.

Political theorist and scholar John Schaar said, “the future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.”

Today, I ask each of you to join with me as we create a future of endless possibilities for our students, our communities and our university.

As a progressive university we must be active participants in charting our course. As we look forward, there is much in our history to inspire us, to strengthen us and to encourage us as we plan our future.

CMU must seize every opportunity – we must ensure that our positive and robust momentum continues.

We must, and we will, demonstrate that CMU is in partnership with state and local governments, businesses, and civic and community leaders to graduate and retain more Michigan residents to improve our state’s economy and future development.

As a progressive university we will take a leadership and partnership role in the education, economic development, health care, social and cultural development in a global society.

Our fundamental goals must revolve around academic quality and excellence from our students. Our fundamental goals must revolve around research and creative activities that contribute to knowledge and cultural enhancements. Our fundamental goals must revolve around diversity and tolerance as we expand our learning and understanding.

As we do this we must be willing to assess and evaluate our progress, assess and evaluate our academic programs, assess and evaluate our administrative and support services – we must be willing to use these assessments and evaluations to make adjustments and where necessary change.

We cannot allow the challenges we face today to become excuses for slowing our progress.

We must think beyond the boundaries of our main campus here in Mount Pleasant. We must evaluate and leverage our 60 CMU locations that reside in 15 states, Canada and Mexico.

We must support and provide resources to the cornerstone of our success, our faculty. It’s the CMU faculty who nurture our achievements, set the standards for quality in our classrooms and laboratories. It’s the responsibility of our faculty to push us all to be better than we are, to design curriculum that provide our students with instruction that is cutting-edge and relevant, whether it be face-to-face, online or hybrid.

We must partner with our health care providers as we launch the College of Medicine. The College of Medicine will address the physician shortage in mid- and northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

The College of Medicine will train and graduate primary care physicians, enhance the economic climate in mid- and northern Michigan through medical research and related health care business opportunities, and elevate the overall academic excellence of all academic programs at CMU.
We will partner with business and industry leaders to provide future employees who are prepared for the knowledge- and technology-based workforce of the future.

We will partner with elected officials and civic and community leaders to continue to build the cultural and social enhancements that will contribute to our state’s well-being and job creation.

For our faculty, staff, students and alumni – we must not be out-worked. We must work hard, be creative – and yes, take some risks – risks based on data and evidence.

The opportunities and challenges we face will require us to think and act differently.

We must, and we will, find innovative solutions to the changing tide, to the uncertain economy and the myriad challenges facing us.

As we chart our future, Central Michigan University must re-commit ourselves to values of honesty, openness, fairness and integrity. Nothing else is more important.

We must value quality and excellence in our academic programs and in all that we do.

And finally, we must commit to moving forward as one university, no on-campus versus off-campus – one community of faculty – one university dedicated to cutting-edge pedagogy and strong student learning outcomes.

Central Michigan University is a great and caring institution and our potential for the future is boundless.

In closing, we are embarking on a time of transformation for our great university, change that will make us responsive to the needs of our students and our state, change that will make us stronger with strategic planning and direction.

In the words of President John F. Kennedy, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

Ladies and gentlemen, our future is now. Together, let us fulfill our Central Commitment.

God bless and keep Central Michigan University. Thank you.