

REMARKS - PRESIDENT PERRY

GROUNDBREAKING - JANUARY 25, 1971

Today I stand before you in a joyful spirit -- joyful that so many of you could be here with us, joyful that another significant phase in the life of this University is under way, joyful that the Miami sun is smiling on us just as the Chamber of Commerce says it always does!

This day means a great deal to Florida International University and to you. But now that I am actually standing here, I don't know if I can really find the words to express just how significant this event is to those of us who have lived and breathed, ate and slept, and continually worried about giving birth to this University, like a group of the most nervous expectant fathers you have ever seen.

Just sixteen and one-half months ago the Board of Regents sent me to Miami to start the planning process for a new state university that would open its doors in the fall of 1972. I brought with me three staff members, a beautiful and patient wife and two wonderful children. That was all we had except for one other thing: a great deal of enthusiasm to build a university dedicated to meeting the challenges of tomorrow -- not for yesterday or today.

We came to what was then just an abandoned airport.

We set up shop in the old control tower -- my first desk was a cardboard box and my chair an over-turned wastebasket.

Now -- after an enormous amount of effort by the people who have joined with the four original pioneers in this job of creation -- and with the assistance and encouragement from state and local governments, from civic and service organizations, from the leadership of the Greater Miami and South Florida Community and from just people in general, who none of us really knew -- we have now come to the magic moment when the ground will be officially broken for the construction of our first building.

We have always been convinced that planning and building a state university in this area -- and carrying out its regional, statewide and international commitments -- would be a landmark achievement in the history of Florida.

We have always been aware of the importance of the mission which the Legislature and Board of Regents has entrusted to us. And now to see all of you gathered here for this ceremony -- all levels of government including our number one public servant -- Governor Askew -- to realize that the most distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Honorable U Thant, has favored us by his presence -- that the leadership of every facet of life in South Florida is represented here -- this is not only rewarding and heartwarming; it is much, much more.

We know that this is just the beginning of the University. We also know that this University cannot be built, physically or otherwise, in a day or a year or in many years, because the kind of university which we are creating must continue to grow every hour of every day.

In the months and in the years that lie ahead, we are going to be calling on all of you for your continuing support and encouragement. Before September, 1972, when we open for more than 4,000 students, we shall need a considerable measure of your faith and trust. After that, the proof of our efforts will be more tangible because you will be able to judge us through the minds and hearts of our students as they -- young and old -- help mould the future of this institution, this community, and yes, even this world.

What we do before that opening day just 597 days from now -- the planning, the faculty recruiting, the physical construction -- all will be designed, so far as our abilities permit, to enable us to meet our three basic goals.

These goals are to create a university that will concern itself with the education of students; with service to the community; and with greater international understanding. These three very simple, but very important goals stand as the basic reasons for our existence as a university. And our commitment includes the absolute dedication to serve all the citizens of this vast urban area regardless of their age, sex, race or religion.

This nation cannot afford the luxury of universities which are aloof from the problems of society, and I wish to take the opportunity of this historic occasion to pledge that Florida International will be far from aloof. It will orient its programs to help find the solutions of some of the most pressing problems of our age, namely, those surrounding the urban, environmental and international issues facing mankind. Consequently, Florida International will be responsible to meeting the needs of a world increasingly urban in character and international in substance.

Pioneering in the building of a new university is an exciting opportunity. Each of you by your presence here and by your interest in this University, is, in a very real sense, a pioneer. That is why we at Florida International have presented to each one of you at this groundbreaking a card noting that the University has bestowed upon you that title of Honorary Pioneer.

We at the University believe that the educational pioneering taking place on the old Tamiami Trail is just as exciting as in those early days when man and civilization first came to this area. We hope that this excitement will prove to be contagious among everyone in this region and in this state, but particularly among you and your friends and associates.

Man cannot stand alone. Neither can a university. That is why your presence here today is so important for the future of Florida International. In return for this show of support, I can pledge on behalf of all of us at the University that we shall not let you down.

We may call for help; we will, at times, make mistakes -- but if you look closely, I am confident that you will see us continuing to press toward the achievement of our goals, I am confident, too, that with your understanding and support, Florida International University will develop into one of the most responsive and dynamic institutions of higher education in this nation.

To you, Secretary-General U Thant, and to you, Governor Askew, I can only say that having you with us here today is a great honor, and it is an honor for which we are most grateful. That you two gentlemen would take time from your tremendously busy schedules -- is a bold indication of your appreciation and concern for higher education -- and particularly, for the education of tomorrow which must be international and urban in its dimensions. That you have come to be with us as we officially launch this University will forever stand as a very treasured memory in the minds and hearts of all of us who have gathered here today.

And now, on runways where once planes took off, a University is being launched from which ideas will soar in the service of man.

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It is now my pleasure to introduce a man who has dedicated his life to public service. He is one of the nation's youngest mayors -- and an outstanding public servant -- The Honorable David T. Kennedy, Mayor of the City of Miami.