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**ADDRESS ON THE STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY
PRESIDENT'S TOWNHALL**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning everyone and welcome to York University's Town Hall.

It is great to see so many members of the community here today to partake in the dialogue of the future of our institution.

Before I share our vision, I thought I would first talk about York's history...we can't look to the future, without first understanding our past.

York is not like the traditional Universities. We haven't had centuries in which to grow, develop, and determine what works and doesn't work....

Compared to other Universities, at 52 years old, we are relatively young.

The Rise of the University

The 1950s, the time of our founding, was an exciting period in the history of higher education in Canada.

More students were going to university, in fact, enrolment was expected to double the following decade, which was unprecedented for the time.

Students were enrolling because they were witnessing the link between post-secondary education, and scientific and economic advances.

Some would even argue that the launching of Sputnik, the Soviet space satellite, prompted this realization; symbolizing the cold war competition in advancing science and technology.

This was a catalyst for change, and from that stemmed a great wave of planning for university expansion and growth.

Since most universities were reticent to expansion, the only alternative was to create more Universities – and hence the birth of York.

In fact, we are frequently referred to as the first of this new crop.

The Birth of York

York was incorporated in Ontario in 1959, with the biggest task being the actual development of the University, particularly its future character.

After much deliberation by York's Board of Governors, it was decided that the University would comprise: a residential college, known as Glendon College, an evening college for part-time adult students from different backgrounds, generations and socio-

economic circumstances, known as Atkinson College, and a large, urban, multi-faculty campus that would eventually accommodate 7,000 to 10,000 students...known today as our Keele campus.

The Keele site was considered ideal as it was believed that the movement of population in Toronto would be towards the northwest, and it would be accessible to future main traffic arteries.

Originally it was estimated that enrolment would reach 7,000 students by 1980.

The projection was later increased to 15,000.

But by 1980, actual enrolment was 25,000 students.

The curriculum focused on general and liberal education in arts and science, and by the late 60s there was talk of adding three additional faculties...education, engineering and medicine.

While education ended up being the focus, the aspiration to expand in professional education like engineering and medicine was reflected in all of our strategic plans.

York Today

This brings me to today.

Over the years, we have transformed into a leading interdisciplinary research and teaching university, all while continuing to hold dear York's original values of commitment to accessibility, social responsibility and excellence.

We have a student population of 55,000, almost 250,000 alumni worldwide, and a budget of nearly \$900 million – making us the second largest University in Ontario, and the third largest in Canada.

This rapid growth was driven by an unprecedented increase in demand for PSE, and people realizing the value of a higher education in today's knowledge economy.

We have much to be proud of.

We have the leading departments in humanities and social sciences, the leading business and law schools, and our fine arts program is second to none.

We have excellent faculties of science and environmental studies, and the largest faculty of health. We also have the only French and bilingual post-secondary programs in southern Ontario.

And we have had an unprecedented number of successes in the last year...the construction of our new Life Sciences Building, the expanded and renovated Osgoode Hall Law School, the Glendon Centre of Excellence, and the Sherman Health Science Centre.

Among our many research awards, we were awarded \$5 million from the major collaborative research initiative – the largest competition SSHRC runs, we were recognized as a campus sustainability leader by the college sustainability report card, and our men's soccer team won the national championships.

To ensure that York's future evolution is guided by a clearly articulated plan, we have invested a great deal of effort in strategic planning for the future.

The White Paper and the UAP, developed through an extensive consultative process, reflect the university's aspirations and outline our future road map.

From a broad perspective, our planning documents reflect a commitment to three strategic objectives: academic excellence, student success and community engagement.

Within these objectives are several clearly defined priorities, such as: research intensification, increasing the scope of our programs to be aligned with the needs of society and to be more comprehensive, increasing the number of full-time faculty, enhancing the first-year experience, and introducing more experiential learning and international engagement opportunities for students.

The Critical Point

At 52 years young, we are at the doorstep of becoming a world-class teaching and research institution.

We have a strong foundation and a road map.

But, our success will depend on our ability to change and deal with the many challenges facing post-secondary education in general, and York in particular.

Much like all universities today, there are challenges within the post-secondary education sector.

The first has to do with fiscal sustainability – ensuring that we have the revenue to achieve our overall goals, and that our expenses do not exceed our revenue.

There is a serious problem related to funding and the way we are funded (currently the only way to access new money is to grow).

With that in mind, how can you be more efficient?

We need to sit down with whatever government is elected next month and discuss this.

The key issue is indexing the government grant.

The second relates to the quality of our education.

How do we improve quality in terms of class size and facilities, and use of technology?

How do we offer the quality and breadth of programs that are needed by society to attract top students?

I am proud of our achievements to date, but we can do even better.

The third is the threat to institutional autonomy.

As you know, I am very supportive of planning, but the government is looking for more alignment between themselves and universities.

In this respect, I am pleased that we are aligned with the government, but there are limits.

For example, there have been suggestions that the government may create satellite campuses.

We definitely need to sit down with government and have a discussion before any decisions can be made.

There are also York specific challenges, our reputation, safety and internal relations.

We have been working extremely hard at changing perceptions, and I am confident that we are moving in the right direction.

The York Advantage

Unlike other universities, we are in a really great position.

We are better off than most because of our heritage.

We have the land, the locations, the people, excellent programs, and we are fortunate that we can build upon them by expanding in areas of need.

There's the subway...making us an ideal hub.

I am not suggesting that we are perfect...for us to continue to succeed, there are things that we can do better.

We need to be efficient, and that is why operational efficiency is one of my priorities.

Our organizational structures that were developed when we first came into existence are not viable.

We can no longer operate as if we are a small university.

That's why we introduced PRASE – the Process re-engineering and service enhancement led by our Provost and VP Academic, Patrick Monahan and VP Finance and Administration, Gary Brewer.

The goal is to develop more effective services and use of resources.

A more efficient organization also leads to a more engaged and happier workforce - a key element if we are to implement our goals.

I don't want York to simply be a good place to work...I want York to be a great place to work.

Part of valuing and respecting people is having those who feel they are making a difference.

The Better Workplace, led by Rhonda Lenton, Vice-Provost Academic and Sharon Hooper, Assistant Vice-President Human Resources, is about doing just that.

Change is not going to happen overnight...but we have a solid foundation, and things are happening.

Moving Forward

We are on track...we have all the pieces to move forward.

But what we need to do is put all the pieces together, and continue to work together.

Let me give you just one example of how we are doing that...our expansion in engineering, for which we recently received \$50 million from the government for a new building.

Our faculty of science and engineering is too small for a university of this size.

There's no university in North America with 55,000 students that does not have an engineering school and does not have a larger science school.

This is why I have been using the phrase comprehensiveness, which we wish to become.

Build on excellence, build on what we have ... and it will make the university more comprehensive...like what our founders had envisioned.

Let's look at demand - in the last five years, demand for engineering went up 30 per cent...the highest increase for a particular discipline.

Population growth - according to Census Canada, York region is one of the fastest growing areas in Canada.

A majority of that population growth is made up of immigrants and children of immigrants – those who have a tendency to send their children to professional schools for science, engineering, business and commerce.

These areas also tend to experience significant growth in small and medium sized high-tech enterprises, ideal for our knowledge economy. Our University has an opportunity to capitalize on this.

But this is only one example.

This brings me back to students, our number one priority and the reason we are here.

When I talk about academic excellence, student success and community engagement...it's about creating a better learning environment for students – with new programs and new opportunities that are relevant to their future careers, their future development as citizens.

We want our students to be able to think broadly, to imagine new things, and to build networks.

In order for this to happen, we need to work together...we need your help.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that in 52 short years, the goal that York University would become one of the leading teaching and research universities continues to become a reality.

York has so much to be proud of.

We have an incredible culture of student success, academic excellence and community engagement. And we have a York spirit that is second to none.

I hope that you share the sense that York is a truly special place and take pride in what we have accomplished together.

As the 7th President, I am blessed to be surrounded by so many talented students, faculty and staff, and I hope that together we can continue on this journey.

Thank you.