Good morning, everyone. It’s always a pleasure to be in an environment like this on any CSU campus but clearly Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, is a very special place. I’m kind of reminded of a line that I’ve heard Peter Uboertho use a number of times. It’s rather daunting to stand here before you as a graduate with a 2.7 grade point average who somehow made it through life. It’s especially true on this campus. I have a great deal of regard for Warren Baker and for the folks here at Cal Poly. I think this is an outstanding university.

Warren has been a good friend and certainly an outstanding leader in the higher education system in California and I hope will continue to do that for some time. It’s always a challenge to try to determine what one should speak about at a gathering like this especially of people like yourselves who are so distinguished and so dedicated in your fields.

The one thing I’ll promise you, which I’ve always said when I’ve been asked to do graduation speeches, is that you can count on my being rather brief because I learned that (in) graduation speeches, if you’re not brief, you wind up with lots of beach balls and a variety of other things being launched in your direction and I certainly don’t want to prolong your ability to get out into a very nice day.

So let me share a few thoughts with you and perhaps in the future, we’ll have an opportunity, which I would more than welcome, to sit down at a table and actually have a discussion back and forth rather than my talking to you.

This university, as you all know, has gained national and international recognition for the quality of its academic programs, the quality of its students who gain degrees here. In many respects this has been the result of work done by everyone in this room and in this audience today. You richly deserve the congratulations to yourselves and certainly you deserve the thanks of the Board of Trustees and the employers of your graduates.

Let me just touch on a few points today with respect to the new academic year that you begin. First, as I’ve traveled through the system, recently I’ve encountered what I guess I now would call a fair amount of gloom and doom about the State’s difficult financial problems and the impacts of that problem on the CSU. Warren did refer to this and there’s no question that we have experienced significant cuts in the last few years.

These are cuts that none of us wanted to see happen. We did everything we could and will continue to do everything that we can to minimize those reductions but we have not been, obviously, successful in getting by
those reductions. There’s no question about the adverse impacts and I believe there is also no doubt that we will recover from these setbacks and continue to perform the role of the State’s economic engine.

I don’t think there’s any doubt, and few people question it today, that the CSU system, as it stands today, is the economic engine of California. I believe that that is being recognized by public policy makers, by the Governor and by other leaders in our state.

The system graduates roughly 77,000 students each year and those that don’t go on to graduate school, for the most part, go out in the work force and are helping to drive California’s economy, helping to keep it vigorous, helping to be sure that the quality of life that we have all enjoyed is the quality of life that we can return to the next generation of students like Blake (Bolton, your student government president), who are coming behind us.

However, everyone who works or is connected to this system, I think, must accept the fact that when you work in a public university environment, there will always be periods in which the economy and in which the state budget encounter difficulties. I’m sure that many of you in this room today have been through one or more cycles like that. What I would ask you to do with respect to your younger colleagues is to convey to them that this situation will not always be as difficult as it has been in the past few years and as difficult as it may presently be.

You can provide them with the perspective and with the leadership that is necessary to convey to them that we will get out of this situation and there is no question in my mind that we will recover from the cuts that we’ve had to endure. We won’t go through that process like a rocket, but we will come out of this process, I believe, in a fairly gradual way but steadily. And in that respect, I think it should be clear that the Board of Trustees is fully supportive of the compact that Chancellor Reed negotiated with the Governor. The Board is also fully supportive of Chancellor Reed. Charlie Reed is an outstanding leader of this CSU system and our Board will continue to be, as I said, very supportive of Chancellor Reed.

I also believe that the Governor is very supportive of public higher education, and education in general. His background, as I think most of you know, included a commitment to young people, long before he either thought about -- or certainly long before he ran for -- public office. With his own money, he established programs for young people in the inner city, in Los Angeles. That program has been extended around the United States and still with the Governor’s support.

I also think the Governor, from my experience with him thus far, is a man of his word. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that that is a little too (rare). Well, put it this way: it used to be in Sacramento that when you gave your word in the capitol, even if you didn’t have it committed to paper, your word was good and you were expected to perform on your word. I’m sure that’s the case with all of you here when you’re agreeing with a colleague to do a particular thing, he or she is going to rely on you to do that.

Unfortunately today, we have people in Sacramento to some degree who may give their word and then may not keep it. I believe the Governor is a man of his word. Obviously, we’re going to find out whether that’s the case. In the course of developing this compact, he has given his word that he will support predictable, stable and growing funding for the CSU system. And we will do everything we can to hold him to that commitment. But I believe he is a man of his word in that respect, and will do everything he can to fulfill the commitment.

Let me turn again to a subject that Warren raised a few minutes ago. That is the subject of the education of Science and Mathematics students in California. It’s reliably documented and I’m sure you’re aware of this: that in the next 20 years, one in five jobs in California will come from science or involve science. Unfortunately, it’s also true that California students today are not science-literate. In fact, we rank near the bottom of the states with respect to science literacy.
That is a rather amazing fact given the innovations that have come from California in Silicon Valley, in biotechnology recently and certainly in coming scientific fields, nanotechnology and others. We must do everything we can to remedy that situation. You all have been leaders in this field and your president certainly has been a leader in this field. (You) have brought this problem to the forefront, (including) Warren’s service on the California Council on Science and Technology.

In 2002 a very important report was published, entitled, “Critical Path Analysis of California’s Science and Technology Education System.” That title does sound rather scientific, doesn’t it? As a result of the findings contained in that report, the Council is now exploring, at Chancellor Reed’s request, the need for a Professional Science Masters Degree and the feasibility of implementing such a degree on 17 CSU campuses. This strikes me as critical to all of us in relation to the quality of life we enjoy in California and it definitely is of great importance to the State’s business community.

Where programs like these have been implemented in other states, they’ve been aimed at better-preparing students for employment in the business environment, often by incorporating business course work into a more traditional science curriculum. At least eight institutions in California already are offering PSM programs, including Cal Poly and CSU Fresno. If this needs (further) analysis (as) Chancellor Reed has asked the system to do to confirm the need for these programs, I hope Cal Poly will continue to be in the forefront of the leadership of the system to implement these programs throughout the state. We’ve got to pursue all avenues for remedying our lack of science literacy.

In this regard, (there is a troubling recommendation in) the recently produced California Performance Review, CPR, which some people acknowledge is now an appropriate acronym. I don’t think we’re quite on life support, but we definitely are struggling, let’s put it that way. (The CPR was) done at the request of the Governor. (It includes) a recommendation to withdraw state support from the California Science Center in Los Angeles.

As the Co-Chair of the Commission (asked by) the Governor (to) review the recommendations made by the CPR team, I intend to join former Governor George Deukmejian in recommending to the Governor that he not implement this recommendation in the report. The performance review is a wide-ranging look at all aspects of state government. The report contains 1200 recommendations for improving the operation of many state agencies and programs.

The (recommendation) for the CSU system is largely that we should continue to do the excellent job that you all are presently doing. The report does call for a post-secondary accountability structure based on “educational opportunity, participation, student access and public benefits.” The CSU system, and the Board, have always supported accountability and evaluation of our performance in relation to our mission. I’m sure that the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees will continue to be supportive of these principles.

Finally, let me say this university, its faculty and staff have long led the effort to add graduates to the workforce in the fields of science and technical and applied disciplines. Since 1942, you have graduated 105,000 students with degrees in these fields. Your graduates are quickly employed or they go on to graduate school and become even more rapidly employed after they finish their graduate degrees.

And as we all know, U.S. News has for 12 years ranked Cal Poly as the most outstanding public university in the western United States. That’s an unbelievably fantastic achievement and my congratulations to all of you because you all share in that distinguished award. Your role as leaders in California and the nation is an achievement that all of you can share.

But while celebrating your continuing excellence, we ask that you not let up. That is, in these difficult fiscal and budget times, you continue to set the example for the entire system and I’m confident that given your reputation and given your dedication, that you’ll do exactly that.
Thank you for listening to me today and thank you for doing what you do.