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Richard F. Wilson

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Introduction of President Wilson
Craig C. Hart
President, Board of Trustees

Three hundred and sixty eight days ago I stood at another podium on the campus, this time in the Hansen Student Center, and made an introduction. I suspect that some of you, perhaps many, were in the audience at that moment, but that few of you knew the man who was being introduced.

To many of you at the time, Richard F. Wilson was a stranger at that moment. You could judge him only by what you heard or what you read.

He is a stranger no longer. Consequently, I need not recite for you again the biographical details or extensive career accomplishments, which I provided when we didn't know him.

But I would like to return to the list of adjectives that I recited during my first introduction. These were descriptions that those of us who were involved in the search for our new president heard repeated time and time again when we spoke with people who knew Dick well.

Inspirational.
Decisive.
Fair-minded.
Energetic.
Ethical.
Approachable.

In those 368 days since that introduction in the Hansen Center, we have had the opportunity to judge the accuracy of these descriptions for ourselves. In my judgment, what we heard about Dick Wilson rings even truer now that we do know him.

Any transition of leadership presents challenges. In the case of Illinois Wesleyan's 18th president, the transition was a rather special case.

We cannot forget, nor should we forget, that this community was still dealing with our collective grief at the loss of President Minor Myers jr. when we went forward to find his successor. Following an admired president would be difficult under any circumstance. The fact that we had lost President Minors so suddenly and unexpectedly brought yet another layer to the complexity of this transition.

As I consider all that has transpired in this year, I cannot help but be impressed with the manner in which Dick Wilson has negotiated the transition. He has accomplished it with grace and dignity, putting the campus community at ease while providing leadership in moving us forward.

And he's only begun.

Bart Giamatti, writing when he was president of Yale, observed that being a college president was no way for an adult to make a living. Indeed, we expect a college president to be all things to all constituents.

However the job of college president is defined today - and we should not doubt that the definition is constantly changing - I am confident today that Dick Wilson is the man for this job at this time in the University's history.

As he has assumed our presidency, Dick has had a bit of a secret weapon. As a full partner in his work at the University, Pat Wilson has brought keen insight into the nature of this job, based on her own professional background as well as her personal experience as the daughter of a college president. As the year has unfolded, Pat's crucial support has been apparent week in and week out.

Although my figures on this score are approximate, I believe they are close when I report to you than in the eight months since Dick started work, he has traveled about 20,000 miles on behalf of the University, and Pat has been with him for more than 50 percent of those miles. Many of these trips have been to meet and greet members of the University's alumni and friends spread across the United States. Again, this is only an estimate, but the Wilsons have personally met about 2,000 of the University's alumni.

At the same time, Dick and Pat have attended countless events on the campus; have welcomed students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends for numerous events at the President's House; and have represented the University on any number of occasions here in Bloomington/Normal.

On one September Saturday, when they were being frantically whisked across the campus by golf cart in order to fulfill multiple speaking and greeting obligations, the Wilsons might have been forgiven for wondering what on earth they'd gotten themselves into.

But I sincerely doubt that even crossed their minds.

As he has gotten to know this institution and the members of this community have gotten to know our new president, I believe we can see that a match has been made between a person and a place, between a president and an institution. In very short order, Dick Wilson has come to appreciate this University as the special place that we believe it is. He takes such obvious pride in learning of and then reporting to others on a student's accomplishments or of a faculty member's success. He has begun, partly through spearheading a strategic planning process, to imagine what our future might be.

Like colleges and universities everywhere, Illinois Wesleyan faces critical challenges as we moved forward. These are our challenges. We will meet them together. We will meet them with the faith that has guided this University through its long history. And we will meet them behind the strong and caring leadership that our 18th president has already begun to provide.

Please join me now in welcoming to the podium for the official installation, Richard F. Wilson.