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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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State Museum Auditorium
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Introduction

Members of the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Hollander, College Presidents,
Mayor Holland, Distinguished Members of the N.J. State Legislature,
Staff, and Friends of Thomas A. Edison State College

The inauguration of a President is an historic moment in the life of any institution. It is also a deeply moving experience for those individuals so honored by the office. I, therefore, beg your indulgence while I share this moment with those many persons who have been so important to me in my life.

I am appreciative of my many friends from Illinois, Maryland, and Tennessee who have journeyed over a considerable distance to share in this afternoon's festivities. I wish to give special recognition to Dr. James Fisher, Dr. Kenneth Shaw, and Mr. Paul Wisdom. You might be interested to know that I met these gentlemen while I was an undergraduate at Illinois State University. The time was the Sixties, and we faced each other from opposite sides of a negotiating table. I sat with those representing the interest of minority students, and they represented the Administration as we attempted to negotiate meaningful educational experiences for minority students at that university. It was from this encounter that my interest in the administration of higher education was kindled. From that day, in a real sense, I have been their pupil, and they were, and are, my heartfelt and trusted friends. From them, I have learned much.

To my family and in-laws here assembled, I wish to express my deep-felt appreciation for the nurturing, guidance, and comfort they have provided me from the beginning. I have been blessed with many aunts and uncles, and I could not love one more than another. But there is one aunt and uncle, Dr. and Mrs. George A. Carmichael, with whom I have always had a special relationship. I was born on this day some years ago in a small town in Mississippi. Literally, the first hands that I fell into belonged to my uncle, who was the attending physician at my birth. I am named for him, and I am especially delighted that he and my aunt could be here this afternoon to share this honor with me and our family.

To my parents and my brother, Mr. & Mrs. Joseph H. Pruitt and Dr. Joseph Pruitt, Jr., I am indebted in ways that I am inadequate to ever express and, finally, to my wife, Delores, and my daughter, Shayla, the principal source of joy and comfort in my life, I am, indeed, grateful. Of course, there are many others -- Fred Humphries, Elias Blake, King Cheek, Morris Keeton -- too numerous to mention here -- who understand that the joy of this moment is shared with you all.

I would like my in-laws, family, and relatives to please stand so that I may applaud you and share you with our guests.

Traditionally, presidential inaugurals have been used as forums to share visionary expectations of institutional dreams yet to be realized. So then, what I would like to share with you is our ambitious vision of what I believe to be a promising future for Thomas A. Edison State College. You are all familiar with Dickens' opening to a Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." The currency of that phrase is very much evident for higher education in New Jersey.

I came to visit Edison in October to attend the College's annual commencement. I turned on the television just in time to hear Governor Kean announce the anticipation of a 150 million dollar shortfall in state revenues which would require serious reductions in support of public higher education. In November, I read an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education which ranked New Jersey 49th of the 50 states in support for public higher education as a function of personal income. In December, one week after I had assumed office, I met with Chancellor Hollander and my colleague presidents in the state colleges to discuss the impact of a 3% reduction in salaries for faculty and administrators, an eventuality which was, fortunately, not necessary due to subsequent events. At the end of the meeting, the Chancellor and the state college presidents turned to me and said, "Welcome to New Jersey!"

Higher education nationally and in New Jersey is facing a period of prolonged scarcity of resources unprecedented in recent history. Yet, it is within this context that I am excited and jubilant about the future of this College. As if ordained by destiny, we are doing the right things at the right place and at the right time. The change in demographics occasioned by the aging of our society, while troublesome for our sister institutions, is an encouraging source of growth for Edison State College. The average age of our student body is 40 years old and, as the general population gets older, we have the potential of serving more and more of "our kind of folks."

There are three major issues that require our attention in carrying out our mandate to the people of New Jersey -- quality, resources, and growth. The three are inextricably intertwined and are all crucial and integral parts of one foundation and one college.

The issue of growth for the institution is directly related to the resources question, and expansion and resources are only relevant to the extent that we offer the citizens of this State access to a quality of educational experiences second to none in this nation. Edison State College was founded on a rather simple set of intellectual assumptions. First, learning, once achieved, is of equal value without regard to the forum in which that learning has taken place, and, secondly, that the entire range of life roles played by all of us -- that of worker, leisurite, citizen, parent, and child -- all provide learning opportunities which, in some cases, can be developed to generate and sustain college-level knowledge. Our students are comprised largely of accomplished adults who have been able to achieve college-level learning pursuant to their own agenda. It is both fitting and proper that we are named for Thomas Alva Edison, for he represents in spirit, process, and quality the aspirations and role to be served by this College. The quality of our work in this regard has been a source of pride for the staff, our alumni, and the people of this State.

The final test of the quality of any academy is the quality of the graduates it produces. I heard reported a figure at our last commencement that gives some indication of our achievement on this score. Of the 4,200 graduates from this College, 70% have gone onto graduate and professional schools; 90% to the institutions and programs of their first choice. It is a record about which we are deservedly proud. The challenge of the future is to increase our constituent base, expand the diversity of the clientele we serve, and do so without compromising the high standards of quality which we hold so dearly and for which we have, rightly, become known.

In January, I appointed a College-wide Task Force to review the current Edison educational model with the objective of increasing our ability to

serve larger numbers of students with a minimal increase in personnel and without compromising our qualitative standards. That Task Force completed its work in April, and we have already begun implementing many of its recommendations. This careful self-examination and thoughtful analysis should enable us to fund a greater proportion of our growth, while at the same time maintain reasonable charges so as to not create undue financial barriers for those adult learners who could most benefit from our programs. Growth and size of enrollment in and of itself is not necessarily a good thing, but, in that this College was created as a portal of access for adult learners, it is crucial in being responsive to the mandate which created and sustains us.

Several years ago in the keynote address to the National Conference of the American Association of Higher Education, our friend and colleague, Pat Cross of Harvard University, pointed out that traditional colleges and universities are now a minority component of postsecondary education. Most of the dollars, students, and faculty in postsecondary education are involved in business, industry, organized labor, and the military, not on college campuses. In some areas, this dichotomy is appropriate, for higher education does not pretend to do all things for all people. In some cases, the noneducational sector has been forced to develop their own process because of a rather myopic default on the part of traditional education. Edison State College stands as a bridge between these two great forums in which postsecondary education takes place.

To this end, the Division of Community Affairs has been restructured by the creation of three central subunits: corporate and management services to interact with the educational requirements of businesses and individuals involved in the educational processes -- learner services to carry out

similar functions with organized labor, state agencies, local governments, museums, hospitals, community organizations and other groups interested in similar outcomes -- military services which supports the educational objectives of our nation's armed forces and the men and women who serve them.

Programmatically, the College offers three baccalaureate programs, and we expect a fourth -- a baccalaureate program in nursing -- to be implemented this fall. This, together with the associate programs that articulate with our baccalaureate degrees, enables the College to offer an extremely broad range of choice to assist our students in satisfying their educational objectives. I do not foresee in the near future the need for any additional degree programs unless there are clearly identified areas by external constituencies that could only be served well by using the Edison model. Our primary objective for the short-term is to fill-out our currently approved degree programs with the addition of our nursing area, to stabilize our internal policy apparatus, and to expand our enrollment and services, working with the people of this State and with other undergraduate colleges and universities in the region.

In that all of our instruction is taught by accredited colleges and universities in New Jersey and in the nation, we represent the most important activity in this State of truly systemic behavior. This is only possible because we are an autonomous state college that works in cooperation with, and not in competition with, the rest of higher education in this State. The College's Statewide Testing and Assessment Center is an important example of how Edison supports higher education by doing the prior learning assessment for the twenty colleges and universities that are members of our Center.

I hope I have shared with you in a meaningful way what we view to be

our present and near future. Our somewhat longer-range plans suggest the appropriateness of the development of what we call the electronic college. The fundamental notion of this endeavor revolves around the ability to offer media-delivered instruction through computers, video discs, video cassettes, telecourses, and other technological marvels which provide the opportunity for students to pursue self-directed learning activities resulting in appropriate credit recognition and degree recognition for the learning outcomes achieved through these processes. Edison views the development of this effort consortially to make these efforts available for our students but also for the students enrolled at other colleges and universities in the State of New Jersey.

Likewise, the time has come for the application of prior learning assessment techniques to graduate-level degree work. While this College has no defined aspirations to develop graduate degree programs, we are ideally positioned to work with our colleague institutions in doing the essential research and validation to allow graduate degree-granting universities to incorporate these processes and make them available to students seeking graduate degrees on their campuses.

We are, therefore, mindful and attentive to a caution expressed by the Middle States Visitation Team on the occasion of their laudatory reaffirmation of our accreditation last year. They observed, in the words of the Committee, "The unfortunate tendency of experimental institutions to turn a conservative, indeed contradictory, face toward future experimentation of the kind that was the genesis of Edison's creation." All of our colleges and universities are special and different, but Edison can legitimately claim to be "differently" different, and in positive and important ways. The blossom of our future will come from developing and strengthening these differences and special qualities.

Simply stated, you can expect Edison to stay good, get better, become bigger, and to expand on the strength that results from the uniqueness of our model. This we will do within the context of scarce resources. We will succeed, carried on the efforts of an outstanding staff, committed students, and we will prevail with a little help from our friends. We were once referred to as the glue which holds higher education together for the adult learner in New Jersey. That was an appropriate description capturing much of the spirit with which we work with our colleague institutions. As we work to enhance and build on the strengths of our unique role in this State, we will do so in the spirit of cooperation and support for others who follow different paths and for different reasons.

To the students, staff, and, especially, the Board of Trustees of this College, I am appreciative and humbled by the confidence shown in me by giving me the opportunity to provide the leadership for what I believe to be one of the most important colleges in America. Know that you will have the full measure of my efforts and any ability or talents that I may possess in returning the trust and confidence you have shown in me.

Thank you.