

President Don Davis  
Statement to Board of Regents  
January 29, 2002

As part of an extended president's report, I would like to share a few recollections and thoughts with you. Please bear with me for the next few minutes.

My association with Cameron spans nearly half a century. I came when my dad became president in the summer of 1957, returned as a student in the 1960's, was Cameron's champion in the Oklahoma House of Representatives during the decade of the 1970's, and, after being recommended by a search committee composed of faculty, staff, students and alumni, was selected by the A&M Board of Regents as President in the summer of 1980. Some of you remember some of those events. Very few remember all of them.

Only Nance-Boyer, West Hall, the Gymnasium and the Physical Facilities buildings remain from the campus of the 1950's. The 1960's brought our first Davis Student Union, and then its expansion; the construction of Burch and Howell Halls for classrooms; the Library; the Physical Sciences Building with its three fume hoods to facilitate the teaching of chemistry; and the Administration Building.

During the latter part of the 1970's, we in the legislature were able to provide some capital funding for higher education. Cameron's projects included the Fine Arts Complex, which I sponsored as Chairman of the House Appropriations and Budget Committee. The complex remains an attractive and functional home for our Fine Arts departments.

Toward the end of the decade, Cameron joined the frenzy to build dormitories financed by revenue bonds, and Shepler Center was born. We came face to face with financial reality early in the 1970's. The assumptions upon which our housing and auxiliary enterprises bond issues was based were proved erroneous. We couldn't make our mortgage payments. Just to satisfy principal and interest requirements on our debt, more than half the Davis Student Union, half of Shepler Center, all of the Business School, all of West Hall and the now demolished Cameron Hall were leased to outside agencies.

Some at Cameron can still recall the "Property of U.S. Government - No Trespassing" signs which were posted in strategic locations across campus. To add insult to injury, Cameron faculty were not allowed to participate in the educational programs of the federal government housed on the campus. And, we received no funds from the lease of nearly half our campus over and above the sums required to be paid to bondholders and as reimbursement for cleaning, maintenance and food services.

Within days of my becoming president, I learned the unvarnished truth about our auxiliary enterprises. We were more than \$6 million in debt. We had committed most of our assets to ventures which would allow us to break even at best. We had withheld from our students and faculty



facilities which were absolutely critical to the success of our academic and student affairs programs. Some of our faculty remember their offices and teaching areas in the South Hall and North Hall WPA projects.

Oklahoma's booming economy and interest rates that soared to annual rates of 18 percent and higher in 1981 and 82 provided an opportunity to free us from our bonded indebtedness. I knew from my experience as a bond lawyer that if we had \$2 million which we could invest at 18 percent, we could establish an escrow that would pay off the \$6 million we owed which had been borrowed at six percent interest. So I set out to gather up \$2 million.

Speaker of the House Dan Draper and Senate President Pro Tempore Marvin York allowed me to write the legislation which authorized Cameron, Northeastern and Northwestern to use earnings from one of the state's surplus accounts to satisfy bond payments at the three institutions. State Treasurer Leo Winters then used the designated surplus account to purchase a \$50 million certificate of deposit from First National Bank in Oklahoma City. The bank immediately prepaid approximately \$6 million in interest which would become due on the CD at a future date. Those funds then became available to purchase U. S. Government bonds, which were paying 18 percent, for use by the three universities. The bonds were put in trust and Cameron was debt-free, and had \$1 million in reserves released from the original bond issue for the renovation and repair of the buildings in the auxiliary system.

Governor George Nigh had intended to use the \$50 million from the surplus account to build a new prison. Needless to say, he was chagrined to learn that he would have to wait until the certificate of deposit at First National matured some years in the future to reclaim the full principal. All the future earnings were safely in an irrevocable trust benefitting the three universities. It's the only time I can remember in recent Oklahoma history when higher education won out over prisons in a battle for funds.

The process I have just described for satisfying a debt through the pledge of other bonds is called defeasance in the language of bond lawyers and underwriters. After studying what we had done, other universities in the state used the same mechanism to pay off much of their debt at 30 to 40 cents on the dollar. Cameron's leadership became a benefit for the entire state system.

On our campus, the effect of reclaiming the university's resources and putting them to work in support of our academic mission was perhaps the most singularly significant event of the last 20 years. Suddenly, we had room to grow the university. The School of Business found a home, as did History, Political Science and Sociology. Other departments were reallocated much-needed space. We were able to achieve the goal of providing a private office for each faculty member. It is almost laughable to think that such a basic necessity did not exist before. The reclaimed space also allowed us to begin building the system of delivering the myriad of services we call Student Affairs today. And, finally, our students and faculty could wander our campus at will without fear of prosecution for trespass.



With room to grow our programs, we turned our focus in the mid-80s to achieving an expanded mission of providing graduate programs. It seemed a logical course, since there was no resident graduate education south of Interstate 40 and west of Interstate 35. But, it required a change in institutional function, and no change in function had been authorized by the State Regents for any Oklahoma institution since Cameron made the transition from a junior college to a baccalaureate college in 1966, some 20 years earlier. The other colleges had opposed us in 1966 and were likewise united in their opposition to the proposed expansion in 1986.

In the end, we prevailed. Instrumental in that victory was State Representative Jim Glover of Elgin. With the authorization to offer graduate programs, Cameron satisfied all criteria for sharing in Section 13 and New College funds, a source for capital improvements and major equipment purchases which before had been available only to those institutions designated as eligible in the State Constitution. It was the first time since statehood that any institution had been added to the funding pool. We had taken a giant step toward parity in funding with other regional universities.

During a dinner in Lawton in the Spring of 1992, OU Regent Vic Williams and I concocted a plan to transfer governance of Cameron from the A&M Board of Regents to the OU Board. I drafted the legislation effecting the transfer, perfected it with the assistance of Fred Gipson, then OU legal counsel, and Representative Sid Hudson inserted it in a conference committee report which could be voted up or down, but not amended, by the entire house and senate. It was approved, and Governor David Walters signed the bill into law on the Cameron campus.

In the meantime, Vic Williams died, leaving Cameron and me without a direct link to our new governing board. I can still remember the first meeting I had with Chairman Murray Gallatt, who told me he vaguely remembered having a conversation with Vic about the transfer, but could recall none of the details. "Now, tell me once again," Murray commanded, "why this is such a good deal."

There were regents I had long known and admired, like G. T. Blankenship, who figured out how to make the new association not only a good deal, but a great one, and made us in the Cameron community feel welcome.

The Cameron-OU relationship has indeed prospered through a give and take process in which each institution capitalizes on the strengths and resources of the other. OU offers its baccalaureate nursing degree and masters in communications on the Cameron campus, and perhaps soon will expand the health sciences offerings with the establishment of a clinic for the OU Med School's Family Practice Residency. In turn, Cameron has exported its uniquely formatted MBA to nine sites in Europe as a partner with the OU College of Continuing Education. That partnership will expand to 19 new Marine Corps sites across the United States and the Pacific beginning later this spring.

President David Boren and I have been friends and colleagues for more than 30 years, first in the OU College of Law, then as members of the House of Representatives. When he was governor and I was appropriations chair, I sponsored some of his legislative program. We have worked together well as presidents of our respective institutions, and recently have agreed to redouble our efforts to find new joint ventures for Cameron and OU. In the coming months, we hope to launch new initiatives.



Cameron has never been in better shape academically. Our superbly qualified and committed faculty have long provided instruction unequalled in Oklahoma and are making significant advances in both pure and applied research. We are without peer in the state in the application of technology to learning and the development of campus-produced online courses. We are in fact ready for whatever the future may bring.

Our over all institutional accreditation, approved last fall by the North Central Association, is for the longest duration authorized by that organization, and has virtually no restrictions on our ability to satisfy our mission. We have fresh disciplinary accreditations in business, technology, music and education, where our CAMSTEP program has been designated as a national exemplary model. Our Army ROTC program is the largest in Oklahoma and top-ranked in the region. The cumulative grade point average of all our athletes is a 3.0 and four of our eight teams have been ranked in the top 30 in the nation in their sports during the past year.

The citizens of Lawton have given phenomenal support for our initiatives. We have more endowed faculty positions than does any other regional university, and trail only OU and OSU in the state. Over the past 10 years, our foundation assets have grown from less than \$2 million to more than \$14 million, even with recent problems in the stock market. Membership in our President's Partners organization is approaching 300. The group is composed of individuals who either give \$1,000 annually, or have completed a 10-year pledge of \$1,000 annually. State foundations such as Noble, Sarkeys, Kerr and McCasland join the local McMahan Foundation in providing support for our programs, and the \$6 million computer given us by WalMart certainly ranks among the largest gifts to a regional institution.

Cameron pierced the OU-OSU-Tulsa University cartel on research grant funding from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology, the first regional university to do so. Our two privately funded research laboratories in the biological and physical sciences are unique entities in our institutional tier.

More than 100 leaders from Southwest Oklahoma participated actively in our Smart Economy Task Force which has charted a course for promoting high-tech business development in our area and creating good-paying, quality jobs for our citizens. As an outgrowth of the study, the State Regents and the City of Lawton have put their money in a partnership with Cameron for a three-year project to provide a development professional to boost knowledge-based industry in and around Lawton. This is the first project of its kind for Oklahoma and I believe establishes a paradigm for shaping our state's future. State Regent Bill Burgess has been tireless in his support for Cameron.

Those of us on the Cameron team are justifiably proud of our accomplishments. We have been good stewards not only of the public funds, but, more importantly, the public trust. Our united and untiring efforts have made us an excellent university. We have accomplished our mission.

I have been privileged to lead these efforts as president for 22 years. It has been an exciting and enriching experience for me. It has made me proud and at the same time humbled to be associated with the most incredibly intelligent and caring people on earth — the Cameron faculty and staff. I cherish the time spent with Cameron students. I am professionally fulfilled.

All good things must end, and it is time for me to retire. I request that my retirement be effective June 30, 2003. The search for my successor should involve Cameron faculty, staff, students and alumni and can be completed in time for a new president to assume duties no later than January 1, 2003. I would like to be designated President Emeritus when the new president comes and complete the 2003 Spring Term with an off-campus assignment.

I want to thank this board of regents and the A&M Board for providing unfailing support during my service as president. Your counsel and guidance have made possible the extraordinary accomplishments of Cameron University.