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Michael Hogan: Dawn of a new chapter in U of I history

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Growing up in Waterloo, Iowa, the son and grandson of meatpackers, it never crossed my mind that one day I could become president of one of the great public universities in the world — the University of Illinois.

But my horizons widened once I began to hitch a ride to the state college up the road and became the first member of my family on either side to earn a college degree. And now, that long and winding road has brought me to this day, my first as president of the University of Illinois.

As a Midwesterner, an educator and university leader, I couldn't be more proud, or more humbled, by having the opportunity before me. I am dedicated to leading a team of exceptional faculty, staff, students and alumni who will be satisfied with nothing short of advancing the University of Illinois' 143-year tradition of excellence and access.

My story is just one of the countless many that speak volumes about the power of higher education in a democracy founded on the principles of equality and opportunity. College presidents, corporate CEOs and people in every walk of life, from astronaut to zoologist, have transformed their lives and maximized their opportunities through the knowledge and experience they obtained at public universities. The discovery and innovation spawned by the research of those universities has transformed, time and again, the ways we live, work and relate to each other.

It is this continuum that makes me energetic and optimistic about the U of I's continued success and its essential role in helping to get the state of Illinois back on track.

The university is an incredible asset to Illinois: more than 70,000 students enrolled on three campuses; 18,500 degrees awarded annually; \$800 million-a-year in externally funded research; prize-winning faculty and students; training for the health-care professionals who serve our communities; and education of our state's future leaders.

As goes the University of Illinois, so goes the state of Illinois.

Of course, we live in challenging economic times, and these are tough days for public higher education. I faced budget challenges as president at the University of Connecticut and as provost at the University of Iowa, and budget and resources naturally will be among my top priorities at the U of I.

I am confident the university is in the best position possible given the financial crisis it has endured. I commend our board of trustees and the university's leadership for making the tough decisions that were necessary so the U of I could continue to fulfill its essential missions. I also know that faculty, staff and students helped to shape those decisions and I deeply appreciate the sacrifices they have made.

I will have a steep learning curve in the coming weeks and will spend much of that time listening to people and digesting the recommendations of those who have spent the last six months studying how the University can operate more effectively, efficiently and exceptionally in the current environment.

As president at UConn, I regularly visited elected officials to advocate for the university and I will continue that practice in Illinois. I will work closely with the alumni association and the foundation to broaden our advocacy initiative and complete the \$2.25 billion Brilliant Futures capital campaign.

In its venerable history, the University of Illinois has weathered many storms, financial and otherwise, and has always emerged stronger and more capable of serving the state and its people. With your help and support, we will triumph over our current adversities and together write an illustrious new chapter in the history of our great university.

Michael Hogan was named the 18th president of the University of Illinois effective July 1. He is a widely published historian whose specialties are modern American diplomacy and national security studies.

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