Center for the Musical Arts Groundbreaking
Presidential Remarks
January 29, 2015

I want to thank each of you for being here today as we celebrate the groundbreaking for the Center for the Musical Arts.

I want to start by recognizing some of our distinguished guests.

- U.S. Representative the Hon. Louie Gohmert
- Tyler Mayor Mr. Martin Heines
- Mr. George Faber, Director of Fine Arts for Tyler ISD
- Several of our friends from the East Texas Symphony Orchestra board of directors:
  - Dr. Cheryl Rogers
  - Ms. Linda Rowe
  - Ms. Joi Smith
  - The Rev. Dr. Allison Thompson

Since the late composer Marvin Hamlisch was the first performer to take the stage at the R. Don Cowan Fine and Performing Arts Center in 1997, this facility has been the crown jewel for the arts in this city and region.
Our Vaughn Auditorium and the Braithwaite Recital Hall have been host to presidents and prime ministers, astronauts and astrophysicists, legendary performers and well-known journalists. We have built a tradition of bringing Broadway-quality performances, including Mamma Mia this past Monday night. Plus, the Cowan Center is home to the highly regarded East Texas Symphony Orchestra.

As wonderful as that tradition is, we have long realized that our own university music programs were limited by a lack of dedicated rehearsal space.

Braithwaite Recital Hall’s small stage cannot hold a large musical performing group, and the practice spaces in our upstairs classroom area were designed for small groups of 5 to 15 performers. Our music room works for the Patriot Singers and the University Chorale, but practice spaces for individual students consist of temporary sound booths that we placed in the west lower lobby. Substantial spaces for key instrumental music programs such as symphonic band or an orchestra are simply non-existent.

Despite our lack of appropriate facilities, UT Tyler’s music program is a quality one and has still been energetically
expanding, using whatever hallways, open air spaces and classrooms that they were able to commandeer. Music majors have increased nearly 70% over the last six years. When I went to the first fall performance of our own Wind Ensemble, there were more than 60 players on the stage. However, because of space limitations and safety issues with respect to sound levels, we have reached maximum enrollment for this program

So the time has come to move to the next level.

This addition of approximately 20,000 square feet will allow for the addition of a symphonic band program immediately and an orchestra in the foreseeable future. It will also contain practice space for our students to perform in a group environment that manages sound safely.

Not only will this project help our music program grow, but I am confident that it will benefit many of the other areas of this institution. We are surrounded by schools and community colleges, such as TJC and Kilgore College, that are home to very strong music programs. However, many of those students cannot choose UT Tyler and continue to participate in instrumental music in a fully-developed way. So we lose many
students (who would be glad to come to Tyler or stay in Tyler) to other universities because we simply do not have what they want.

Many of those students are not music majors, but major in other areas such as biology, engineering, and pre-professional programs such as pre-law, pre-med and pre-pharmacy. They simply enjoy music. This facility will allow us to recruit those quality students.

This project has been long needed, and it would not have occurred without the support of the University of Texas System Board of Regents. Through their commitment of $6 million in funds, we can make this project a truly fitting addition to the crown jewel that is the Cowan Center.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Board of Regents, particularly Regent Alex Cranberg, for supporting this construction project. Also, Former Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa and EVC of Academic Affairs Dr. Pedro Reyes were key to securing UT System’s support.