

## **Inauguration Address on the Occasion of the Installation of Dr. Richard Carvajal as the Fourth President of Bainbridge College on October 28th, 2011**

Chancellor Huckabee, Chairman Tarbutton, Regent Poitevint, Senator Bulloch, Representative Maddox, my fellow presidents and other campus delegates, college faculty, staff, and students, and of course, friends of Bainbridge College, thank you so much for the trust that you have shown in me today. On behalf of my mother, who has traveled from Washington state to be with us, two of my long-time best friends, Matthew and Patrick, who have also joined us, and of course my beautiful wife, Cheryl, and our two wonderful children, Crystal and Brandon..... I know I speak for the entire Carvajal clan when I tell you how grateful and proud I am to be installed here today as the 4th president of this outstanding institution of higher learning.

This is clearly a moment in time that I will not soon forget, and I want to thank all of you who have joined us to commemorate this special day in the life of Bainbridge College.

And while I am certainly grateful to you all, a special thank you must go out to Dr. Gerald Williamson, who earlier offered a few observations regarding my journey. Yes, one tradition from previous inaugurations here at the college is that someone from the new president's past speaks about the person who is being installed to offer some reflections about that individual. And when I learned of that tradition, I knew that there was no one who I wanted to be a part of this program more than Gerry. My chief mentor since literally my sophomore year of college, I know that anything I have ever been or ever will be in my professional life, I owe to Gerald Williamson. And not only am I glad that he could come and see all of this today, but I think it's important that he was able to tell you a little about my past.

For, I truly believe that it is those stories from our pasts that ultimately tell us much about the people we are today. And I am certainly no different.

As Gerry alluded to in his remarks, when I was growing up, we were poor. Not the living paycheck to paycheck kind of poor. No, I mean the – I wonder if the lights will be on when I get home tonight – kind of poor. When I was in elementary school, my dad ran a janitorial business, and I can remember many a night spent with him picking up trash, stripping and waxing floors, or cleaning toilets. And while I know that that doesn't sound like fun, those were actually the good

years. For when I was in junior high, my parents divorced, and my mother then kept a roof over the heads of my siblings and me by cleaning houses. We ate with the help of food stamps, and I learned to love the taste of commodity cheese. Later, for a brief period while I was in high school, I even lived in my car. But, you see, as tough as things were, I always had a dream for a better future. Looking back, I'm not quite sure why I had the belief that such a dream was possible. After all, so many people who grow up in poverty as I did never find their way out. And everything that defined that period in my life said that the kind of success to which I aspired was not possible. But for whatever reason, I held onto a belief – a dream if you will - that achieving the goals I had set for myself was possible. That dream led me to college, which I attended with the help of financial aid and the money I earned from working multiple jobs. I also got a scholarship for making good grades in high school, which might lead you to believe that I was prepared academically to be successful. Unfortunately, you'd be wrong. You see, very few people from little Crowder, Oklahoma, population 436, had gone on to succeed in college. Heck, even the valedictorians from the prior two classes had both flunked out of college during their first year. I knew that higher education would be beyond challenging for me, but I did not let that fear stop me. Rather, I knew that this was my shot, and I went for it – trying my hardest to make the most of the opportunity that had been placed in front of me. And while that was critical, I also realized that no matter how bad I wanted it, I needed help from my teachers and mentors like Gerald Williamson. With my hard work and their guidance, maybe, just maybe, I could find that brighter future I had looked for while growing up.

Yet again, though, even after I started doing well in my college classes, success in life was anything but assured. After all, I was attending a small, little-known university in rural Oklahoma. As Gerry can attest, our facilities weren't the best. Our student body didn't have the highest SAT scores or grade point averages. Our college didn't always have enough money in the budget to do everything that some more prestigious institutions were doing. Our alumni didn't include U. S. presidents or fortune 500 CEOs. And our faculty and staff, while obviously committed to student success, were often stretched far too thin. And yet, somehow, people like Gerald Williamson convinced me that success was possible, and that I could be whatever I wanted to be, through hard work and perseverance.

So that dream for a better life – the same dream that I had had when I was just a boy – was kept alive.

And while I was certainly fortunate to get that kind of support, my good fortune definitely extended beyond the classroom. A few weeks after graduating with my bachelor's degree, for instance, Cheryl and I started our married life together, and she has been a wonderful partner these past 20 plus years. But like so many other things in my life, our union probably never should have been possible. To understand why I say that, you have to go back a generation. My father, a man of Mexican-American descent, who worked his way out of the housing projects of Los Angeles, met, and fell in love with my mother. Their story might have been fairly typical, except for the fact that my mother's father disowned her for marrying my dad because of the color of his skin. And then sometimes, it is truly sad to see how history can repeat itself. For similarly prejudicial reasons, Cheryl's father chose to break off all ties with her when she picked me. In other words, for two generations, my family has known all too well what it feels like to be thought of as different, and to suffer because of it. Sadly, that strain that my parents endured ultimately played a role in their separation. And, if I'm being honest, there were probably many who knew Cheryl and me years ago, who never would have predicted that we would enjoy a long and successful marriage due to the challenges that lay before us. And yet, we decided that together all things were possible, so we went for it.

As Cheryl and I settled into our life together, I also started my career.

And while I have had multiple experiences in that career that taught me valuable lessons, there is no question that the period of greatest professional growth for me came during a tenure as the chief student affairs officer at a small college in Kansas. Many of you have heard that story, and you know that in just a six-week period, we dealt with everything from active meth-amphetamine labs on campus, to – and I'm not exaggerating here – a prostitution ring in our residence halls, to understandably harsh media attention after our football coach asked a judge to excuse a registered sex offender from a court date so that that student of ours could play in a football game, to four car loads of our students driving to a rival college, where they got in a fight with well over 100 of their students, and ultimately, one of our students shot one of theirs. But if you've heard that story, then you probably also know that those first six weeks on the job were just the beginning, and the real challenges came when we tried to turn things

around. You see, after tackling the drug trade that was poisoning our college, I became the victim of criminal threats. A log was thrown through the window of our home. A bodyguard was assigned to me everywhere I went on campus. An unmarked patrolman stopped someone who was trying to scale our back fence in the middle of the night. And most significantly, my family had to go into hiding on only a few moments notice due to fear of what retaliation might be attempted after I expelled a particularly dangerous student. And while neither Cheryl nor I could ever say that those times were easy, we can certainly say that the lessons we took away from that experience taught us much about what is possible. Despite everything that I have described, despite the fact that many in our community didn't think that it would be possible to turn things around, others there saw a better future. They saw what we could become. They refused to let us quit. And just as Cheryl and I had convinced one another when we started out, those dedicated members of our community again convinced me, that together, all things were possible. It definitely took a lot of hard work, but because we did not quit, and because we believed in one another, just three years later, we had completely changed the culture on campus, and we had become the 7th fastest growing community college in the country. Now you might be saying, 'That's great. These are all good stories about another time and place, and about another college,'... but what do they mean for all of you who are proud to call this institution your community's college? Well, I believe that the lessons learned from these stories can and will serve as a foundation for a future that all who love Bainbridge College can create together, and let me explain how.

Some of you have heard the story of Caesar Chavez, who in the middle part of the last century became an inspirational leader in the battle for civil rights. A child of migrant farmworkers, this man – with only an 8th grade education – led a long-standing effort to improve worker's rights in agricultural fields throughout the southwest. So many obstacles stood in his path, and there were many – including some of the individuals whom he sought to lead – who became discouraged, and who thought that achieving the goals that Chavez had set was simply not possible. And legend has it that it was those naysayers who were on his mind when he had a dream while on a hunger strike to protest an Arizona law. "No, no se puede," they would cry out to him, which loosely translated means, "No, these

things are not possible.” But in that dream, Chavez responded with a call that ultimately became a rallying cry for an entire movement. “Si, si se puede,” he called out. “Yes, together all things are possible.” Well, like Chavez, and like all of those in my past who would not let me quit, I too see a future of tremendous possibility. And while there are many reasons to believe that we cannot accomplish those goals that we have and will set for ourselves here at Bainbridge College, to that, I say, “Si se puede.” Together, all things are possible.

And what will that future entail? Ladies and gentlemen, I see a future where this institution will become a learning college for the 21st century – where our faculty know that their role is not simply to impart the knowledge that can otherwise be readily found, but rather, to skillfully facilitate an environment where all of us are lifelong learners, learning from and teaching one another – yes, an environment where our students walk away from each lesson with a full understanding of the topic and, just as importantly, of its relationship to the life goals they have set for themselves. What’s more? While our primary mission will always be centered on excellent teaching and learning, our faculty will likewise create knowledge through professional research and publication, and our students will benefit from that exercise by joining them in such endeavors. And are these goals possible? Yes, because together, all things are possible.

I likewise see a future where Bainbridge College has built a robust student life program, with a world-class one-stop student enrollment center, outstanding recreational and educational programming, a leadership development program that will train the new generation of leaders for our communities, and a full complement of fine arts, lectures, and intramural or competitive athletics that will add to the cultural fabric of our region. And when you hear those who will try to convince you and others that such things are not possible at a place like Bainbridge College, I ask that you join me in saying to them, ‘no, you are wrong, because together, all things are possible here.’

I see a future where this college has addressed its many facility needs and has created the classroom and support settings needed to promote our learning mission. In that future, we will have more than doubled the square footage of our existing library, we will have created a new central quad and pedestrian campus to promote the “One BC” feeling that has so long been desired, we will have explored the possibility of new athletic fields and/or residence halls, we will continue to grow our very successful site in Early County, and

we will have developed even more learning sites to effectively meet the educational needs of our entire service area. And, with great celebration, we will have finally opened that new academic classroom building that we have long hoped for in order to meet the needs of one of the fastest growing colleges in the nation. And are these lofty goals possible? Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that we will answer that question in one united voice,... together, all things are possible! And finally, I see a future where we have continued to meet the educational demands of the communities we serve by offering the full complement of programs and degrees that are needed by the citizens and employers of our region. And what will that include? Well, it will most certainly include technical programs that train our workers for the jobs of tomorrow. It will include a full offering of continuing education programs that provide community enrichment and employer-tailored training. It will include outstanding transfer programs so that no matter what goals for the future our learners bring with them, they will be able to begin their journey effectively right here at home, and once and for all, it will also include an answer to the long-standing question of whether or not to offer baccalaureate degree programs so that those who wish to achieve that goal will know if they can do that right here in their own community. Just as in the time of Chavez, there will be many who will question whether these goals, or any that I have outlined today, are possible. They look at our rural location. They look at the size of our budgets. They look at the lack of suitable facilities. And they look at the fact that our current faculty and staff are already stretched thin. They look at these challenges, and they say, "No se puede. No, these things are not possible." But those of us who call this place home know better. For we know what they don't. Just as the lessons from my childhood taught me, this community knows the value of having a dream about what our future can be. Just as I learned during my time as a student in college, this college community knows the value of taking advantage of every opportunity presented to us. Just as my family has learned many valuable lessons as a result of the bigotry we faced, the Bainbridge College family has similarly learned to respect that which makes us different from one another, and those differences have now become a source of strength in our communities. Just as I learned from a community which was committed to saving a college that faced far more challenges than most will ever see, we know that the bond that exists between this

college and those who care about it is absolutely strong enough to carry us through potential challenges. In fact, we know that that bond here is as strong as it is any place in the country. And, most importantly, just as I have learned time and time again during my own personal journey, this community, this Bainbridge College family, believes and knows just how much we can do by working together.

After all, examine our inspiring past, and look at the quality of our present-day people. Look at what we've overcome, and look at what we've built together. And, finally, look at our resolve to continue to change the lives of our students, their families, and this entire region every day. As a result, we stand as one group, united in our faith that an amazing future for this college is not only possible, but it is assured. Yes, never have truer words been said. Si se puede. Si se puede. Si se puede.

So now, in closing, I ask that as we prepare to leave this hall, and as those immortal words from Chavez echo in our minds, may we all also remember the words of another great American, Ronald Reagan, who, on the occasion of his Inauguration as President of the United States, gave us the blueprint for success that we will now follow. He said that reaching our goals "requires our best effort and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds,...to believe that together, with God's help, we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us."

Well, ladies and gentlemen, those words are just as true in 2011 as they were 30 years ago. As Georgians, we certainly know what hard work looks like, and we know, that with God's help, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish.

May we all go from here today ready to make that future we see a reality. May God bless you, may he look down favorably on the work that we will do together, and may he forever bless all who are proud to be the faculty, the staff, the students, and the supporters of Bainbridge College. Thank you very, very much.