



November 3, 2025

Every election season, we hear promises of simple fixes to our nation's biggest challenges. Just close the border. Just cut costs. Just test more. Just move on. But if American democracy has taught us anything, it is that there are no "justs."

I learned that lesson early, not in politics, but in Mrs. Martin's second-grade science class. There I learned about machines, and I marveled at the power of simple ones — how a lever could lift a heavy rock that I could never move on my own, how a pulley could raise a bucket from a well with ease.

As I grew older, I came to appreciate the beauty and necessity of complex machines. Engines, clocks, and computers require many parts working together in balance and calibrated with care. They can accomplish what no single lever or pulley ever could. They also demand patience, maintenance, and cooperation to keep running.

As we enter election season this month, it seems like our nation is more divided than ever. Different sides of the aisle operate in absolutes. But as you make your plan for going to the polls, I'd urge you to think of American democracy not as a simple machine but as a complex one, designed with checks and balances, competing interests, and interlocking systems of accountability.

The big issues require some nuanced thinking. For example, with immigration, we hear sweeping statements like "close the border" or "open it," as if human movement, global economies, and humanitarian crises can be solved with a pulley and rope.

With health care, we debate whether to "just lower costs" or "just offer choice," forgetting that true reform requires the integration of innovation, prevention, access, and affordability. With education, we imagine that "just testing more" or "just funding more" will solve the problem, when in truth, education thrives only when teachers, families, communities, and students work together.

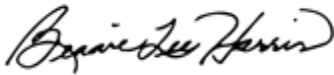
With global affairs, we are tempted to say, “just stay out” or “just take charge,” as though international conflicts, trade, and alliances are a wheel that can be spun in one direction. In reality, America’s role in the world is a network of interdependent relationships that require diplomacy, strategy, and shared responsibility.

Our democracy deserves more than quick fixes and slogans. It calls us to embrace the hard work of complexity and build coalitions, honor diverse perspectives, and pursue nuanced solutions.

As your Chancellor, I see this lesson every day. A university is, in itself, a complex machine. It cannot run on the strength of a single program, department, or idea. It requires students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members to contribute their part, with each dependent on the others. Only when the gears work together is the machine able to fulfill its purpose of transforming lives and strengthening society.

The same goes for our democracy. If we insist on treating it like a simple machine, we will break it. But if we dare to embrace its complexity, we can keep it running. And we might just find more common ground than we thought we could.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris

Chancellor