Ladies and gentlemen please welcome the President of Pellissippi State Community College Dr. Anthony Wise.

Thank you

Distinguished guests, faculty, staff, and students, good afternoon and welcome to Pellissippi State Community College. I am so pleased you could join us for such a historic occasion in the life of this special place, I’m so proud we can host this visit of President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden.

This visit has exceeded all expectations for celebrations during our 40th anniversary year.

There are a number of guests in the audience whose individual presence would spur great excitement on our campus; to have them here together is a great honor indeed. It is always a privilege to welcome Governor Bill Haslam and first lady Crissy Haslam back to Knoxville and to Pellissippi State. He is joined by Senator Lamar Alexander, Senator Bob Corker and Congressman Jimmy Duncan.

As a brief aside, I am not certain, but this may be the first time that the man for whom this building is named, Senator Alexander, is with us at the same time as the man for whom this space — the Clayton Performing Arts Center — is dedicated, Mr. Jim Clayton. We are so pleased he could join us as well. *applause*

We also are honored to have with us our state legislative delegation, national and state education leaders, local mayors and business leaders, and a number of our friends and supporters and I am so pleased you are with us. *whispers* Why don’t you take a seat first?

I had the great privilege of starting my career at Pellissippi State as a member of the history faculty. And over the course of the last few weeks I’ve spent some time trying to use my training as a historian to determine the events and factors that have led us to this particular occasion.

We might be here today because 7 or 8 years ago, a dog-fence peddler and the county mayor joined forces to create a last-dollar scholarship program for high school students entering the region’s community colleges. That dog-fence peddler — Randy Boyd, where are you Randy? Randy is in the back, so Randy is here *applause*— is now serving the state as Commissioner of Economic and Community Development. The last-dollar scholarship program that started as KnoxAchieves and blossomed into the Tennessee Promise this past year is the topic of higher education policy conversations across the country. Particularly over the course of the last 18 hours or so.

We might be here today because of the excellent work of the faculty and staff of Pellissippi State Community College. Among those on the risers behind me are the recognized faculty and staff leaders of the institution, including those who have been honored by their peers and our Foundation for outstanding and innovative work. They, along with their equally dedicated peers in the audience — and watching online — are the reason a record number of graduates will cross our the stage for the 6th year in a row.
We might be here today because our national and state leaders are discussing higher education topics like access and affordability; success and quality. There is growing recognition of the important role that institutions like this one play in the economic development of communities and the social and intellectual growth of our students.

We might be here today because Pellissippi State is working diligently to become a regional — even a national — leader in STEM fields. With the support of more than 6 million dollars in federal, state, and private foundation grants, the College is funding scholarships, state-of-the-art equipment and training facilities, and brand-new programs to support revolutionary changes in manufacturing, engineering and technology. Through our role in public-private partnerships, we are helping to create new, good-paying jobs.

We are here today for the reason we at Pellissippi State are here every single day — for our students.

We provide associate’s degrees for career and transfer programs, plus certificates and continuing education, as well as dual enrollment courses for high school students. For many of our students, attending college is the opportunity of a lifetime.

The students on the risers behind me are first-generation college students, working adults, and single parents. They are international students who have come to our shores as refugees. They are military veterans with years of service to our country. They are community servants — generating $800,000 dollars in economic impact last year through their volunteer hours. They are scholars at a groundbreaking high school on one of our campuses, where students can earn a high school diploma in one of four technical fields and a college certificate at the same time.

Today, we honor all of our students and alumni, but I would like to tell you the story of one of our transfer students.

Ashley Albritton came back to college at age 32.

She and her 13-year-old son Mason, Where are you Mason? He’s right over there in the corner, everybody wave, they sit down at the kitchen table every night to do their homework together, and they compete against each other to see who can get the highest grade over the course of each particular semester. At the end of the term they post their grades on the refrigerator and let the record show who won. I’m proud to report that Ashley made the Dean’s List last fall, but mason made straight A’s.

Ashley hopes to become a medical missionary. She believes that her purpose is to give back and to serve. When she graduates from Pellissippi State, she hopes to go on to earn her bachelor’s degree and then a master’s degree as an advanced nurse practitioner.

Ashley is behind me today, there she is in the front corner, hi Ashley, and she has with her a hand-crafted box that her father gave to her when she was a child. Into this box, throughout her life, she has placed scraps of paper that represent all of her hopes and dreams. Today, she is going to give that box away because the opportunity of a college education is making her dreams come true.

We are Pellissippi State. We craft student success one story at a time.
Alright there might be just one more reason we are gathered here today, because of a man whose work is changing the landscape of higher education in Tennessee and influencing the conversations about higher education across the country. Governor Bill Haslam has made it his mission to increase the percentage of Tennesseans who continue their education beyond high school at the technical colleges and community colleges scattered across our great state. He understands — as we do — the effect higher education has on workforce and economic development and on an improved quality of life. Building on the foundation of the Complete College Tennessee Act, passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2010, he has challenged us to meet the aspirational goals of the “Drive to 55” and the “Tennessee Promise” by increasing access to higher education, fostering higher levels of student success, and creating new partnerships to ensure the economic well-being of our state.

Please join me in welcoming, the governor of our great state of Tennessee, Bill Haslam.

*applause*

Welcome! Thanks
It is always good to be home and I want to thank the President of the United States for giving me a reason to come home early on Friday. It’s an honor for Tennessee to welcome the President, the Vice President, and Dr. Biden to Tennessee and like I said, particularly to Knoxville, my home town. The buzz about Tennessee keeps growing and there’s nothing that creates a stir quite like the President coming to town. There’s a lot of discussion in the country today about the income gap, its growing and regardless of where you are on the political spectrum you need to acknowledge that.

It’s also no secret that Republicans and Democrats have a little different view about the best way to address that. But there is a truth that we all know and that we can all agree on, the best answer of all, involves creating opportunities for more people to be prepared for the jobs of the future. If you take a two-earner high school educated couple, and they both obtain college degrees, their income rises on average $58,000 dollars per-year. Unfortunately, in our country, the escalator has stopped. In ranking the percentage of the population with a degree, the United States ranked second in 2000. Today, we are fifth and most disturbingly, we ranked twelfth among the 25-34 year old age group. More Americans, almost thirty percent, have less education than their parents than the twenty percent of Americans who have more education than their parents. That’s hard to believe in our country. In Tennessee, we want to do something about that. So last year we introduced the Tennessee Promise, the very first state in the country to guarantee every high school graduate two years of community college or technical school free of charge. We modeled it on Tennessee Achieves begun right here in Knoxville and has been in operation for six years. It’s a program that’s not just about access, it’s about success and this campus can prove that.

Since the program was started, the number of students graduating from Pellissippi has increased by eighty percent. This year, of our 65,000 high school seniors, 58,000 of them applied for the Tennessee Promise, ninety percent. Equally notable, 9200 adult Tennesseans, signed up to be volunteer mentors for these students, including I would say, most of the faculty right here at Pellissippi. For the last thirty years, Tennessee’s greatest need has been for better trained workers who can fill the jobs that companies want to bring here. We think the Tennessee Promise is a
game changer when it comes to the future of our state. It is an honor to welcome the President to our state, a state that stands ready to prepare our students for a world of opportunity. Thank you.