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Dr. Cheryl Green Formally Invested as Sixth GSU President



With the pomp and circumstance usually reserved for royal pageantry, Dr. Cheryl Green was officially “invested” as Governors State University’s sixth president as hundreds of faculty adorned in academic regalia, staff, students and visitors from across the country stood to witness the historic moment at the university’s Center for Performing Arts.

Though tradition holds that university presidents are invested within their first year of assuming office, because Green assumed office during a pandemic, the ceremony was delayed until two months beyond her first anniversary date.

The ceremony, marked by a series of heart-felt tributes and congratulations, including a message from Gov. J.B. Pritzker, built to an emotional high when Board of Trustee Chair Lisa Harrell and Trustee Jim Kvedaras performed the official investiture.

“By virtue of the authority of the Board of Trustees, and with the confidence of the full board, we place the official medallion around your neck as an outward symbol of your

authority and responsibility as the sixth president of Governors State University (GSU),” said Chair Harrell as she and Kvedaras draped Dr. Green with the presidential medallion. Harrell and Green then celebrated with a spontaneous high five.



Distinguished guests and speakers included GSU Trustees, Manchester University President David McFadden, University of Wisconsin (UW) Oshkosh Chancellor Andrew Leavitt, Dr. Raymond Cross, president emeritus of the UW system, President and CEO of Abundant Living LLC Dr. Cynthia Armster, CEO of Solid Ground Behavioral Services Inonge Mason and Northeastern Illinois University President Dr. Gloria Gibson. Others included Western Illinois University President Guiyou Huang, Patricia Mell Ragland, president of the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park Advisory Board, Joliet Junior College President Judy Mitchell, and Chicago State University President Zaldwaynaka “Z” Scott.

Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, president of Tennessee State University (TSU) and international president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, sent virtual congratulations for the investiture ceremony.



Emcee Tony

Labriola called the circumstances under which Green assumed her presidency “unimaginable” and commented that a GSU investiture has been delayed only once before in the university’s 52-year history. That was when the first president Dr. William Engbretson was invested two years after Governors State University was founded as an experimental, two-year institution with no walls.

In a pre-recorded message, Pritzker also commented on the university’s history, noting he made a campus visit to help kick off the 50-year anniversary. He congratulated Green on leading an institution committed to social justice and excellent education and ended with a “welcome home,” to Green, a native Chicagoan.

Sen. Patrick Joyce, whose Illinois district includes the university, also welcomed Green home to the Chicagoland area. Additionally, Joyce called out GSU’s distinction as the only regional comprehensive public university in the Southland and the state’s only Minority-Serving and emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution. That makes GSU the only public university in the state to hold both designations, he said.

Green brings a “new excitement and enthusiasm” to the university during challenging times, Joyce said. “Your energy, passion and commitment to improving the lives of students is commendable.”

Joyce’s remarks were part of a recurring theme weaved through the ceremony: the acknowledgement of an explosive social and political landscape marked by unrest and a raging pandemic.



John Atkinson, chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), reflected that he met Green shortly after the murder of George Floyd, kicking off a summer of racial and social upheaval across the country. In response, the IBHE created a strategic plan to help close the educational equity gap in higher education, efforts GSU has long championed.

“We know this is the core of who GSU is and what you do,” he said. “And I know Dr. Green is the leader who will champion equity and ensure GSU is at the forefront of this work.”

“And, to the Board of Trustees and the greater GSU community, you know how to pick a winner,” he added.

GSU Faculty Senate President Marlon Cummings, who also recently assumed his role as part of the shared governance structure, reminded Green that faculty was committed to partnering with her.

“We are here to help, committed to listen and committed to engage,” he said.

Civil Service Senate and Student Senate Presidents Sheryl Jones-Harper and Ruben Lopez also commented on the challenges Green faced during her first year and the successes won despite the obstacles.

“The jewel is no longer hidden,” said Harper-Jones.



Recalling Green as an undergraduate student at what was then Manchester College, McFadden said he was proud that Green is living out the passion for social justice she cultivated there.

Calling Green “a champion,” McFadden said the university strives to duplicate its success to graduate persons of faith, principles, and conviction. “Our mission is to graduate as many Cheryl Greens as we can,” he said.

While seeds of passion were planted at Manchester, UW-Oshkosh is where Green’s crisis management and tactical skills sprouted. There, she was tasked with responding quickly to control a coronavirus outbreak on campus, impacting thousands of students living on campus. Campus leaders had a playbook for the next outbreak due to her critical coordination of custodial crews and healthcare workers, Leavitt said.

“It was Dr. Green’s leadership —responding to the coronavirus that helped us with the next virus,” Leavitt said. “It was the blueprint that we followed in meeting the challenge of COVID-19.”

That far sight is one of three essential skills a leader needs and what Green possesses, said TSU’s Glover.

“We know on this journey you must possess sight, insight and far sight,” Glover said. “Sight to look at things; insight to look into things; and far sight to look beyond things indeed, you are called for this purpose.”

Glover’s recorded remarks set a spiritual tone continued by Harrell who called Green a “leader with a servant’s heart.”

“She sees her greater purpose,” Harrell said. “And we see it in her interaction with students and staff, faculty, community members and the board. She leads not from position power —which she certainly has —but from a space of authority and respect that cannot be demanded but is earned. She is a bridge builder. “



Following Harrell,

Green was received with a standing ovation and first recognized her family members, some of whom traveled from Tennessee to attend. She pointed to her family's historical roots in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, a small town founded in 1887 by freed slaves Isiah T. Montgomery and Benjamin Green.

“Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and even Booker T. Washington had a direct and profound relationship with the town,” she said. “During its inception in the deep south, it was a rare and distinctive place. It had its own post office, bank, hospital, high school, zoo, manufacturing plants and town government, all during the Jim Crow south. It was —by every analysis—commonly referred to as the *jewel of the delta* and my family history and lineage is directly tied to this town.”

Green drew parallels between the “jewel of the delta” and the gem of the southland, GSU whose mission is to provide exceptional and accessible education. In quoting Nelson Mandela, Green said “education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Throughout Green's speech were references to strategies and initiatives to execute three broad and strategic goals:

- Magnify the visibility and brand of GSU
- Expand resources and opportunity of faculty to provide academic excellence
- Engagement and extracurricular opportunities for students.

The investiture ceremony was the culmination of a series of events, beginning with Convocation to celebrate the beginning of the academic year, Sculpture Wine and Dine, as well as several U.S. Constitution Day-themed events.

Following the investiture, guests gathered lakeside for a reception, and a fundraising gala for student scholarships was held later that evening.

Watch the investiture ceremony highlights [here](#) and the full ceremony [here](#).