

UCCI President Installation
March 12, 2019
Remarks by the Hon. Ezzard Miller

Harry S. Truman, America's "common man" 33rd president, took over the most powerful job in the world after the death of war-time president Franklin D. Roosevelt, 12 weeks into his Franklin's fourth term.

Truman, who brought World War II to its equally brutal end, and steered the United States through the then-intensifying Cold War, is what the people who know these things call a "Level 5 Leader." They are defined in leadership literature as those having "humility plus will", and as those who "do not shy away from facing and accepting brutal truths and realities of data, numbers and situations, but at the same time...do not lose hope of a better future."

That philosophy is captured in this often-quoted Truman maxim: "Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better."

I recently had the privilege of attending a meeting at which President McAfee outlined her vision for the university.

I take this opportunity to thank her again for including my colleagues and me in her outreach to the community.

I cannot tell you how impressed I was as I listened to her speak on the three pillars of her vision, prioritising social and cultural capital, with special emphasis on civic responsibility.

Another pillar is accessibility to, and relevance of, the university's offering to learners with diverse needs, interests, abilities, and aptitudes.

In the middle of these two vital pillars, she positioned teaching and assessment.

Of course, meeting the needs for our top-flight academic students is very important, but I am heartened that she is also focusing as intentionally on building positive and productive citizenship across-the-breadth of students, and on catering to diversity in every sense of the word.

Needless to say, I have experienced presentations in which an otherwise healthy plan's death knell is sounded by that old, at times obstructionist cliché, "We must cut our coat according to our cloth."

I say a resounding "No" to that or any other counterproductive attitudes—we do not need to resign ourselves to mediocrity. We must never short sell our youth. We must never deprive future generations of Caymanians of the opportunity to be all that they can be.

Rather, let us widen our pool of resources, and apply our industry and our creativity to securing a bigger cloth—a much bigger cloth—beyond our wildest dreams.

Then let us use our imagination to cut and design the coat generously and with style, relevance and practicality, so that it fits not just a few but the length and breadth of our youth crying out for the realisation of their hopes and dreams and boundless potential.

I am pleased to say that when I met with Dr. McAfee, I didn't hear any of that often-heard defeatist talk. I heard a big vision suited to the needs of the Cayman Islands, an optimistic plan, and the will to make it happen.

And from what I sensed, Dr. McAfee has the necessary steely courage to rise to Harry Truman's challenge to "seize the opportunity to change things for the better".

She spoke about her vision for expanding facilities and information systems, funded by enlarged revenue streams and strategic partnerships.

Her vision brought to mind the philosophy of the late celebrated and revered actor Christopher Reeve, who said: "So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable."

While Reeve was an enormously talented and successful actor, some of us know only two things about him—that he played the role of Superman and that he ended up in a wheel chair with life-threatening conditions following a horse-riding accident.

Few of us know of his journey from that terrifying near-death experience, through the valley of despair, contemplating suicide at his lowest moments.

But the human spirit is indomitable. Fighting back, though kept alive by machines, he co-founded the Reeve-Irvine Research Center, which to date has given more than \$65 million to research and more than \$8.5 million in quality-of-life grants.

The foundation's funded new technology has already enabled paralyzed persons to walk and, according to the University of California at Irvine, "In the years following his injury, Christopher did more to promote research on spinal cord injury and other neurological disorders than any other person before or since."

Indeed, despite unspeakable barriers, where there is a will, the impossible will soon become the inevitable.

Dr. McAfee has the vision and obviously the courage to transform the university into an institution that understands its essential and singular role in nation building.

I join Christopher Reeve in his unwavering faith in the transformative power of strong, determined leadership. I believe that this university can become the beacon of light that it should be for the broad range of youth and adults crying out for a better life.

Indeed, this evening can become the turning point in that transformation, reversing the persistent sad loss of potential among our many youth and adults.

As the university embarks upon its exciting journey into nation building, I call on the Government and the private sector to engage with UCCI and to provide the necessary resources to the Board and to Dr. McAfee.

One important game-changer would be for both Government and the private sector to relinquish piecemeal training being delivered in their individual silos.

I urge the two sectors, instead, to engage UCCI to provide their post-secondary education and training—whether professional or technical.

I would also like to see Government challenge and support UCCI to undertake research to enable better decision making—not just at the university but across Government.

And, finally, Dr. McAfee, congratulations on your inauguration.

My very best wishes to you and your faculty and staff on this enormously important and rewarding journey you have embarked upon.

I look forward to joining you in making it happen.