President Peters: Good afternoon everyone. This is not an official meeting of the University Council so I won’t gavel us into session. I’ve been before you many, many times and usually talking about mundane things; sometimes not. This has been the most difficult week in our history, over a hundred year history, and so I thought – I really am very pleased to be here, to come before you and I’ve been thinking about all of you and I’ve been hearing about what you’ve been doing so I thought I’d just come and give some thoughts. I’ve written some things down for the historical record and my thoughts aren’t completely shaped because I’ve been going through this crisis largely dealing with the victims and the parents of the victims and others and focused on that and trying to make the decisions with the help of you and our administrative group to get us moving to – never back to normal but Virginia Tech used a phrase – they’re going to be above normal when this is all done and I think that’s probably a pretty good mantra.

Anyway, I’m going to read and comment on some things. Then we do have some people here who can answer some technical questions. I’ve got to leave pretty soon for the last of our services for our fifth victim, Gayle Dubowski, so I’ll talk about that in a minute. Anyway, I just wanted to thank you University Council for attending in the midst of everything that has happened to each and every one of us. This is personal for all of us. I know we’re all sensitive to the emotional balance between coming to terms with the experience of last week and returning to our primary responsibilities as stewards of an institute of higher education. I know that transition has been difficult to me, to move from mourning and grieving to getting back to teaching and learning knowing that the transition will be painful and long-term but necessary and inevitable.

Let me start by saying how proud I am of each of you, your colleagues and our students. I’ve seen so much strength in the face of this difficult situation and I hear about it. People tell me stories, almost all of it uplifting and positive, very little of it petty or irrational or reactive. I expect that and it happened, contemplative, thoughtful, caring. Not a lot of second guessing. I’ve seen our faculty and staff constantly putting the needs of others above their own. That doesn’t surprise me but it warms me nevertheless and has kept me going. People pulling together. I’ve seen people working together who normally haven’t had a tendency to work together. I’m equally proud of the response on and off campus to February 14. In the midst of the unthinkable, everyone did what they were supposed to do. You know, we have highly trained professionals in every area and when that moment came, the professionals did their job and there’s no piece of paper that you reach for when the call comes that we have a gunman on campus and there’s shots fired, there’s no manual. There’s no plan, there are trained professionals who have thought through what to do and have practiced and acted and even then, the situations are always unique. You know, we did have situations this year, the flood and so forth, that gave us time to ponder our reactions to a lot of things. But we were pretty professional even before that and we learned from Virginia Tech as we all have. So, I like what the American Council on Education (ACE) said, you know, that’s our big global association for
secondary education said “The swift response by NIU staff to lock down the campus and warn the community should be considered exemplary”. We wish we never had to do that but we did it. I think that’s a strong third party endorsement of our efforts and the efforts of our security people and now the efforts of each and every one of us as we move the campus forward toward opening. I know each of you have had experiences and involvement with our students and families and, you know, six degrees of separation; I don’t think there’s six degrees here, it’s about two. Everybody knows each other. As you know, I’ve attended the services for each of the young students who lost their lives and I have to leave pretty soon for the last one. I saw so many faculty and staff and students and alums attending those services and giving aid and comfort and so many of them have come up to me and encouraged me to go on and I just see such tremendous strength in these individuals; the students, the victims, their parents. Actually, it gives me great faith about the country. You know, I get pretty turned off as you do about reading the news and what people do and how they treat each other and some of the insanity that we put up with and you wonder but boy, when you talk to people in a crisis, people who are going through the depths of it and they say – parents, who’ve lost their child – were worried about NIU, pretty uplifting. I’ve talked to so many of the victims and our list of students who are injured and let me tell you, there’s a strong group and, you know, today we lay to rest our last student but then we have others coming back who really are going to need our help and those are in the class and those who know people are in the class, everyone, that’s where you come in again. I can report that these students are strong and those that are remaining in the hospital – although I can’t say anything except that they’re making remarkable progress. They are exceptional. I think I told the story, I don’t remember – I don’t know what media I’ve talked to any longer and I don’t read it anyway – now – I will someday – but I was talking to a young man who was fairly seriously – well, seriously injured and was being released from the hospital and I talked to his mom and his mom got him to talk to me. He wanted to but it was a struggle to get him to the phone and – a typical NIU student. We started out – I said “how are you doing son and how are your injuries” and he talked about the pain and everything and he was then into coping. You know, I’m not a psychologist; I’m just a father but I heard him working it out. He started talking to me about the day and his mother then told me after that he had not talked about it until then. It made me feel a little bit useful and then I said “well” – and then he said “well I’m really looking forward to getting back to classes – they start Monday don’t they”? And I said yeah and then he was getting tired and I said “well look, God bless you and remember to call me anytime you need anything and I said you know, anything you want, I’m open to you” and then he paused and said “while I’ve got you on the phone, if I miss a lot of assignments, you know, is my professor going to cut me some slack?”. I said “I can’t answer that” but it was at that moment that I knew we’re going to be okay. A lot more stories than that; someday I’m going to share them. I think it speaks well of this institution that we found so many ways to support our students and I’ve seen that in their families, try to heal the wounds and that so many of our faulty, staff, students and alumni, they’ve really stepped up. The support we’ve given to the families is tremendous. We have liaisons from Student Affairs who are constantly keeping in contact and I think, you know, the way you’ve supported each other. The way people have supported me keeps me going. The alumni, the donors – our donors -, schools, great schools, are, you know – our community. Our community suffered too. Don’t forget that. The DeKalb community suffered and I know they’re going to be doing some welcoming back activities. Before I came over we had one man I understand come to our Foundation office – a person from our community – obviously not a wealthy person – but whatever money he had in his pocket he
gave. You know, you can say it’s not the money – that’s what we’re getting. All over the world, we’ve been getting support. You can read the condolences on our website but in addition to that, just the thousands of e-mails and now the cards are coming in from schools in New Jersey and Wisconsin – art work and prayers. I got this one this afternoon, I just read it and I wanted to bring this one because this one kind of has some special meaning for us. It’s, you know, a little angel and it says “To the faculty, staff and students at NIU” – that’s you – “my thoughts are with you” and this is written “with prayers and sympathy to your entire university community at this time of loss and sorry” – the mom of a slain Virginia Tech student. Virginia Tech has been great by the way. They know. Now we know. Now, now, okay, now we focus on healing. We’re grieving, we’re mourning and then we’re moving forward. So in the coming days you’re going to hear me consistently repeat the theme of our fight song “Forward, Together Forward”. I think it’s appropriate. I know that you’re going to be right there with everybody leading me forward; pushing me forward.

Now most of you, if not all of you, have attended the sessions chaired by our experience counselors and we had someone from Arkansas come in and someone from Virginia Tech and you probably have participated in some of those to help our faculty understand what they might encounter when classes resume on Monday and I’m sure that that’s a moment that will be difficult for so many but you’ll be there to help our students and hopefully you’re helping each other too because this has to be talked through and talked about. This is a unique experience for an institution of higher education. I’ll be interested in your feedback on those sessions as well as the other steps that have been taken. We need to exchange information with the right people so we can make adjustments. You know, there’s going to be so many decisions that have to be made as a result of decisions that we made that we were forced to make. As you know, some 300 counselors are arriving this weekend from all over to be available for individual students as they enter class. It’s hard to predict how many students will seek help; my guess is quite a few but we prefer to error on the side of caution there. Certainly, we’re aware of the many calls that were made to our hotline and in my just talking to students, they’re receptive to talking. I think that’s very good and healthy. We’ve heard from professionals in the community that a fair number of students have contacted them. You’ll see obviously an increased security presence on campus not to alarm, but to calm and we’ll continue that for some time.

Now, our plans for Sunday, the memorial service - they’re moving forward and some of those details have been shared. We’ve got some people here who can answer a few questions but I’m satisfied that this event will strike the correct tone in paying respects to the victims as well as the entire NIU family and our neighbors in the community. Remember, NIU will be on an international scene. Barbara, Barbara Peters, who’s been kind of monitoring the media for me said at one point on one day there were 3.8 million hits on our website and I’ve been hearing from people all over the world and you have too and we’re sorting all that out right now. We also attend to take a solemn note of last week’s tragedy with five minutes of silence starting, you know, at the time tomorrow at 3:00 on Thursday. Church bells will ring throughout the community and we’re going to have a brief informal gathering of NIU people – this is ours; this is for us. I don’t believe there are any speeches; may I’m supposed to make some remarks. Okay. All right, I will, but they’ll be brief and then I think we’re going to have some hot chocolate and hug each other in Holmes Student Center. All right.
The outpouring of good will and support from our neighbors has been gratifying and many have come together with tangible plans to express their support and to welcome our returning students. This is going to be good for our students to be welcomed by good DeKalb citizens.

Now one thing, you know, for the record here that makes me especially grateful is that our commitment to the principle of shared governance has proved durable and resilient and was there when we needed it. Most, if not all the decisions that have been made, were done in the full spirit and the full affect of shared governance. This man was at my side most of the time. Sometimes I had to make a decision because of the moment but we talked an awful lot about shared governance and those decisions that we could seek input we did.

So I thank all of those here and in our institution who gave so generously of their time and will continue to and ideas. Everybody tried to do what they could do – to the food service people on that frigid, frigid morning when the international media was here and I was walking from camera to camera and not knowing – at one point someone put an earplug in my ear and I was on international CNN and I was hearing a deliberation on Kosovo in Heague – there was some kind of a vote – and then they broke in and someone with an accent that was foreign to me asked me a question and I didn’t know what the person said so I just repeated what I felt at that time and someone stuck a microphone in front of me and spoke to me in Japanese. Of course, those who know me know humor is a big part of my life; I hope it comes back. It’s not quite there yet. But at any rate, our system of shared governance has worked and I ask you to join me in moving forward, together forward. I started this by saying I wanted to read some of this in the record because a hundred years from now when we’ll be here and thriving and well, we won’t take over that neighborhood – but we will have filled out our 240 acres and bought another 240 and we would have produced thousands and thousands of teachers and doctors and poets and lawyers and political scientists – they’re going to write about and this won’t be a chapter; it will be a division it might even be a whole book but they’re going to talk about what we did after – they’re going to talk about the event and they’re going to talk about what we did and that’s our challenge isn’t it? Our challenge is to move forward, together forward and to honor our students and we’re forever branded; it’s a mark we carry and I hope the mark – it’s one of what comes out of tragedy. We’ve always been branded but I don’t think we ever realized it and that is we’re a caring and a healing place and I hope that’s what comes through. I know I can count on each one of you and I know you will expect me to do the same.

With that, we have some people here who know some things and I know Kathy has to leave quickly and I do too but Kathy can answer questions about the memorial so get her first. We have Brian about the moment of silence or any other student issues. We’ve got Gip Seaver about logistical things and we have the Provost here. Any questions? You can come up to them after. There’s not much to say is there? Not much to say. God bless you.