Thank you for giving me time on the agenda, Chairman Woolridge, and welcome—everyone—to UMass Boston. I’m Tom Goodkind, machinist for the College of Science and Math, and president of the Professional Staff Union. I’ve worked for thirty years in the upper-level garage, watching students, faculty, staff, chancellors, and strategic plans come and go—as well as the occasional raccoon and skunk.

I want to start by thanking President Meehan for stepping up to resolve an extremely contentious dispute concerning our negotiated and long-overdue salary increases. We understand well that just because it was the right thing to do does not mean that it was easy, and every one of us appreciates your act of commitment to our staff and faculty. And thank you also for your excellent op-ed in the Globe on Labor Day weekend—it expressed powerfully our dire need for more state funding as well as our promise to and for the Commonwealth.

Believe it or not, I also want to thank former President Caret, not for a year of really terrible labor-management relations, but for his prodigious and largely successful efforts to secure more state funding for our University. And likewise, I want to thank former Governor Patrick for cooperating in those efforts.

But of course I’m not here just to say thank you. I also want to talk about where we’ve been and where we’re going—all in three minutes.

Something I appreciated about President Meehan’s article was that it did not do what University representatives have done numerous times this year, which is to blame student fee increases on our negotiated contracts. In a three billion dollar organization, this was always a specious connection, but honestly—did you ever hear a University spokesperson state regretfully that “we must raise student fees because we have 6000 non-union employees who must get the same raises the unions negotiated?” Have you ever heard a University spokesperson cite as the cause of fee increases the 16 million dollars we spend on 81 employees with the word “chancellor” in their title? Or the additional 7.5 million we spend on those with the word “provost” in their title? I don’t think so.
Our campus unions do not support student fee increases, just as we don’t support the increasing privatization of the University. After all, they are one and the same phenomenon.

In my time here, I have seen the University employ numerous strategies in response to the destructive decline in state funding which President Meehan has well summarized.

Of course there was the long period of deferred maintenance. How well that worked on this campus can be seen immediately after this gathering; just call me at extension 6515 and I’ll give you a quick tour of the upper and lower level garages. Please remember to bring your hard hat.

What about private fund-raising? Yes, there has been a laudable increase, but isn’t it a drop in the bucket compared to what we’ve lost and what we need?

There has been an attempt to “wring efficiencies” out of the system, but this has largely amounted to squeezing the classified staff—the people keeping our offices and physical plant running—reducing them by 6% since 2003 while enrollments have surged by 20%. I wouldn’t brag about that sort of efficiency, because it’s the efficiency of an inverted pyramid, which is not a stable object.

There has been the increased emphasis on out of state and international students, thereby degrading the mission initiated by Justin Morrill and described persuasively by President Meehan, and nowhere formulated on higher moral ground than right here at UMass Boston in the dream of our urban mission.

There has been the attempt to grow out of the problem, but that has naturally required more staff and faculty in many areas, and above all, more space. And creating more space has driven University debt to the limit. And who pays for all that debt? The students.

Which brings us to the main strategy for addressing the decline in state funding, and the main symptom of the growing privatization of our once-public University system: digging an ever-deeper well of student debt. We think it is time to declare that well dry and look for new sustainable alternatives.

Fortunately, there is such an alternative on offer right now. You will hear soon, if you have not already heard, of a ballot question proposing a 4% tax on annual income over one million dollars, the proceeds of which are to be divided between education and
transportation, two pressing needs of the Commonwealth. (For those of you whose yearly income exceeds one million dollars, let me reassure you: if you earn one million and one dollars, your additional tax will be four cents, so no need to panic.)

Called the “Fair Share” Amendment—since it would require multi-multi-millionaires to pay their fair share—this would raise approximately one billion dollars annually. It’s not a solution, but it’s a start—a start at reversing the root cause of the structural funding crisis the University has faced for the last twenty years, a slow-motion crisis which simply cannot be resolved through growth, fund-raising, greater efficiency, chiseling employees, or squeezing blood from the student stone.

I suggest that as leaders of the University, the Trustees, President and Chancellors have a responsibility to step out into the public, as President Meehan did on Labor Day weekend, and tell the whole truth: not only must we have more state funds, but we know what must be done to get those funds. It is no longer enough to assert, as President Meehan asserted, that “states are spending less on public higher education because of the demands they face in areas such as health care, K-12 education, and transportation.” The truth is that states are spending less on almost all of these essential common goods because they have less revenue to spend. And their loss of revenue is without a doubt due to an aggressive multi-decade nationwide transfer of money from the bottom to the top, with regressive tax reform as one of its key instruments.

You may believe that Trustees and Chancellors cannot be expected to step into the thick of such a controversial public policy debate. But we need look no further than the Boston Olympic bid to acknowledge that the University can be a vigorous proponent of controversial positions when it deems it necessary to do so.

It is necessary now. It’s time for all of us here to recognize the true interests of the University in the Fair Share amendment, and to rise to meet the demands this historic effort will place upon us.

Thank you.