STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS
February 15, 2012
Dr. Peter P. Mercer, President

INTRODUCTION
Good afternoon everybody and welcome to the State of the College. I’d like to recognize two trustees that we have with us today, Chairman AJ Sabath, and our newest trustee, Mr. William Dator. You can tell that they are non-resident members of the College because they are sitting in the front row.

VOLATILITY
If I could choose one word to describe the current state of the college and its immediate environment today, that word would be “volatile.” It is not a particularly new word, and not a particularly inapplicable one over the last several years at Ramapo or anywhere else in New Jersey.

When one looks at the merger announcement that came recently from the governor’s office or the state of contract negotiations at present there is an element of volatility that is perhaps surpassing what we have seen in the recent past. Sometimes I long to be like the ancient Egyptians, who, for one of the dynastic periods, went through entire generations with virtually no change. Their governmental institutions, religious institutions, and social institutions all remained the same. That, of course, is not true of us. I think of it often because so many of you who work so assiduously on behalf of the College find that your planning and work cycles are now continuous. We finish one budget and we immediately start planning for the next one. We finish one academic year and the next one is immediately upon us. We figure out one class’ enrollment profile and immediately we have to start thinking about the next.

Strategic Planning Task Force
To add to that volatility today, we have a new Strategic Plan in view and a Strategic Planning Task Force working on it. The Task Force has been meeting weekly since the start of the semester. They have another meeting this afternoon in fact. In some way this sort of exercise adds to the feeling of volatility because we’re going right back to basics, we are looking indeed at our mission and vision statements before we get into the substance of the goals and objectives and that exploration can be sometimes daunting. To look at one’s fundamental mission and vision can sometimes be so introspective as to create a kind of fear. Let me be clear, I do not think that is the case at Ramapo. I see the exercise rather as a sign of strength and I think most of such markers we can identify today are signs of strength.

Pushing Boundaries Campaign
I look, for example, at our marketing campaign. I know controversial among some of you because the question is raised, “Why do we need a marketing campaign?” Well, in the first place, our own surveys indicated that we were not as well known as we thought we were and that people could not identify with Ramapo in the way we wanted them to. So,
a marketing campaign is a way of heightening consciousness and explaining ourselves better. And, I think “Pushing Boundaries” is a kind of byline that suits us very well.

**Comprehensive Fundraising Campaign**

We also have concurrently our comprehensive fundraising campaign. “Further Our Promise” was announced a few months ago and was coincident with our 40th anniversary when it was originally conceived. Being a somewhat conservative fellow I did not want to make the public announcement until we were at $38.8 million of the $40 million goal. We are now over $40 million. I won’t tell you the magic figure I have in mind that we’ll actually reach by July 2013, but if you want to know directly I’d be glad to share it with you after my remarks. Just kidding, Cathy.

**Enrollment Strategy and the Budget**

There is also our enrollment profile to consider. We have taken a much different tactic than the other institutions in the state of New Jersey. I remind you again, unlike the other colleges, which are all attempting to grow, we are not. We have effectively capped our undergraduate enrollment; we are increasing our graduate enrollment slightly. But that is a risk. The risk being that bringing in more students brings in more tuition and alleviates the short term economic imperatives. But that is a mini expedient; it cannot serve us in the long term and, so for the next year or two, we will have to keep tightening our belts to make sure that we balance our budget. But, I believe that we will balance it and I believe that our strategy is working—that of increasing the quality of our student body and our programs.

I was concerned as many presidents have been that the demographic curve would mean that if we continued to increase our class we would find that we have to reach further down into the pile of applicants in order to make our numbers. Well, our applicant pool is going to be larger come the fall on the order of a 30% increase over last year at this same point. That is a good thing; it enables us to be more selective. It is a good thing for me as I get to tout it in rooms and with audiences like this one. It’s a good thing for the faculty and staff who will have impressive students to teach and encourage. It is not necessarily a good thing if you are in the Division of Enrollment Management, so try to talk softly when you pass those people. They are very easily upset these days—given the challenge that they have to bring in a class on the numbers when we have so many more applicants.

**Making the Case for Ramapo in Trenton**

The volatility also extends to Trenton. As you know, in the previous three years I served as the chair of the presidents’ council of the nine public colleges. It meant that my own role on behalf of Ramapo College in Trenton had to be somewhat circumscribed because it was really my duty to speak on behalf of the whole. I am now relieved of that responsibility and I can assure you that my visits to Trenton are now more frequent and my visits to our local legislature are even more frequent than that. Just this morning I met with Senator Robert Gordon in his office.

I will be in Trenton three times next week…second prize was four times. Why am I doing this? Because it is important to us to continue to emphasize to our friends in the
legislature and also to those that are neutral that Ramapo cannot continue to receive proportionately less by way of appropriations. The recommendation of The Report of the Governor’s Task Force on Higher Education, popularly referred to as the Kean Commission Report, that a rational funding formula be found is an imperative and it is one that I intend to participate in directly by making suggestions about what that formula might look like.

We also know that higher education committees have been created at both the assembly and senate levels. I have met with both chairs of those committees whose roles initially will be to vet the proposal for a new bond issue which we believe will be forthcoming. I want to make sure that Ramapo gets its fair share of whatever bond issue is ultimately approved—assuming that will happen. So, I will continue to spend time in legislative offices and in Trenton in order to make that pitch. I can tell you that, in my view, and I don’t think I am unduly impressionable, it is starting to have some effect. I am receiving assurances that our legislative representatives will have our best interest at heart.

COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENTS
Now, moving away from the general themes about the state of the College, I want to speak to some particular ones. Our students continue to do wonderful things to push boundaries that in the past might not have even been contemplated.

Faculty-Student Research
Ramapo College senior Brendan Flanagan has been accepted to the International Studies Association’s annual Human Rights Conference in Glasgow, Scotland to present his paper titled “Applying Insights from Recent Transnational Justice Scholarship to the Northern Irish Case.” This is no small thing. He will present his research among today’s leading international scholars in human rights.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention his faculty mentor, Rebecca Root, assistant professor of international studies and political science. It is that combination: mentorship by a faculty member or members and the willing pursuit, doggedly, of a topic by a student, that leads to celebrated occurrences such as this. Confirmed keynote speakers at the Conference include Henry Shue, professor of politics and international relations at Oxford University, and David Mepham, the UK director of Human Rights Watch. These are huge names in the field of international human rights and our student Brendan Flanagan will be there among them.

Club Excellence
Another example of our students pushing boundaries is the Ramapo College Chemistry Club. The Club won the North Jersey American Chemical Society contest for the best student club presentation at the annual Chemistry Exposition at Liberty Science Center. The Club presented experiments that focused on DNA extracted from cheek cells and iron found in breakfast cereal as well as chemical elements found in other foods. This is the second consecutive year that our Chemistry Club has earned this award.

Kiplinger’s Recognizes Ramapo
Kiplinger’s Personal Finance magazine has named Ramapo College for the seventh consecutive year among its “100 Best Values in Public Colleges.” We now rank 48th on that list. That is important. It means that we can hold out to prospective students and their families that we are recognized by an objective third party as providing good value, and not just good monetary value by charging a reasonable price, but also good educational value via the delivery an excellent product.

Media Praises Ramapo Internship Program
Meadowlands Magazine recently did a feature article on Ramapo College in its issue focusing on sustainability. The story, “Ramapo College Interns Assist Dealership in Going Green,” noted the leadership and contributions of two Ramapo interns at Prestige Mini and BMW.

The interns, Alexander Sim and Peter Carson, led the research and design of the Prestige facility and enabled it to earn its Platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. Now, this is important for two primary reasons:
1. It brought distinction to the College
2. Sim and Carson were both offered jobs by Prestige at the conclusion of their internship.

I have told our friends at Prestige that there are lots more where they came from.

Ramapo Sets Example for P3 Legislation
Recent media reports have also identified Ramapo as setting an example under the Public Private Partnership (P3) legislation with our reroofing system project. That is very important because we are hoping to take advantage of the extended legislation to establish other projects. Being known for this project means that we are likely to be in the minds of legislators when they are deciding who gets what by way of appropriations. It is seen as a very significant feature of our own self-reliance that we have taken advantage of this legislation.

Bully for Ramapo
Inside Higher Education magazine recently mentioned the College in an article “Bullying and the Law.” Many consider the New Jersey law, which went into effect in September, to be the toughest in the nation. And we have a lot of collective expertise on the subject at Ramapo. In 2010, Dominique E. Johnson, assistant professor of law and society, authored "In Schools We Trust? Leadership in loco parentis and the Failure to Protect Students from Bullying and Harassment." Also, in 2011, the School of Social Science and Human Services hosted the successful Understanding & Preventing Bullying Conference for members of the College and the surrounding community.

Ramapo Attracts Talent and Leaders
Those are just a few examples of our internal accomplishment that have achieved external accolades. We also continue to attract well known talents and leaders. Yesterday, poet Terrance Hayes was here. Hayes is celebrated as the recipient of the National Book Award for Poetry, holding fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation.
And, we will at the end of this month host Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz on Wednesday, February 29 who will present “Where Economics & Politics Collide: The Uncertain Future of the Eurozone.” We think that will attract a great deal of attention, in fact, it already has. That event will be at 5:00 p.m. in the Sharp Theater of the Russ & Angelica Berrie Center for Performing and Visual Arts.

Roadrunners Setting Admirable Pace
Our teams are doing very well. The Roadrunners are definitely hitting the season in stride. The men’s volleyball team is 7-2 overall. The women’s basketball team is 15-9 overall. And, the men's basketball team clinched a spot in the 2011-2012 NJAC Men's Basketball Tournament with a recent 85-74 road win against rival Rutgers Newark, improving to 16-7 overall. It is always a special delight to beat Rutgers.

Expert Faculty and Staff
We also have many Faculty and staff presenting nationally. From my own office, Jennifer Tunnicliffe was invited to present at the 2012 North American Association of Commencement Officers Annual Conference. She led a presentation on “Celebrating What Works: Tapping Appreciative Inquiry to Build Community through Campus Celebrations.” Our faculty and staff are extremely talented and many of them are regarded as experts in their field.

CONCLUSION
Keeping Ramapo Competitive
We do have a great deal going on. There are signs on the horizon though that we will have to do more. Yesterday there was an article about how six colleges are reducing their tuition. You are going to see a lot more of that because the competition in higher education is going to increase significantly.

I have talked about the fact that demographically the curve starts to go the other way next year and in New Jersey and in the adjoining states the percentage of high school students going off to college decline just because the raw numbers decline. That means that schools in Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut will be competing for our high school graduates even more fiercely than they do now.

There are also signs that the competition is becoming more difficult because they are adopting policies that for example eliminate the differential between out-of-state and in-state tuition. If they do that and our in-state tuition is high then of course our own students see less incentive to stay in New Jersey and more incentive to go elsewhere which amounts to the same thing. I don’t see any need on our part to reduce tuition. Our tuition for what we provide is defensible, but we will not be able to increase it the way we have in the past. So we are going to have to be at least as prudent as we have been in the last several years but we are well-positioned to do that.

Remaining Steadfast
Our ancillary operations are starting to earn a significant return. We are managing the affairs of the College I think well in all of their manifestations and we all should have, I think, a strong vision of the future that includes each of us in it. Things are going to get better not worse; I am quite convinced of that. We are starting to see an uptick in the economy and that will gradually transfer, I believe, into an improvement in our fortunes. We simply have to remain steadfast. Our policies are beginning to work and we are beginning to see return on investment in every sense that we hope for. We simply have to stay the course.

*The Newfoundland Dictionary*
I want to add just one small element of instruction.

I was asked after the last State of the College what I thought I added to the education of the people participating. That is a tough question but I have decided to add something today. I am reading from *The Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. This is a legitimate scholarly work available for inspection by any of you that are dubious on the point. And I raise this because one of our colleagues lent me a book by a Newfoundland author and, there on the second page, was my favorite Newfoundland word. That word is “dunch.” I am going to read you the definition because I believe that about now it applies to you. Dunch: dull, heavy, stiff with long waiting. For those of you that are not feeling unduly dunch, I am available for questions.

Thank you.