

**NC State University Chancellor Nomination Statement
by UNC System President Peter Hans
March 18, 2025**

North Carolina State is our frontier university — the institution our state depends on to stay at the forefront in science, technology, industry, and the academic fields of the future. This has always been the great genius of America’s land-grant universities, the melding of brilliance and pragmatism that puts world-changing discoveries into life-changing service for all of our people.

For the better part of 140 years, NC State has been the place North Carolina turns to solve hard problems, to put knowledge to work, to confidently shape the world instead of just coping with it. When this place was founded in 1887, North Carolina was among the poorest and most economically backward states in the nation. Today, we’re a growing, thriving, global center for everything from agricultural science to artificial intelligence to the arts.

I’m not saying NC State gets *all* the credit for that ambitious and unlikely transformation, but it’s not a coincidence that the rise of this extraordinary institution has gone hand in hand with the emergence of North Carolina as a national powerhouse in so many of the fields invented and cultivated on this campus. We need the Wolfpack’s *Think and Do* ethos more than ever as we look to the next era of this great university and this growing state.

And that means we need a leader who understands that NC State’s strength as a land-grant university comes from its bone-deep connection to North Carolina — to our state’s needs, our aspirations, our drive to compete and build and improve lives from the mountains to the sea. NC State needs a leader who understands that this university’s greatest innovation is the melding of practical wisdom and academic expertise in the service of public good.

I am proud that we have just such a leader, a person who not only believes in the transformational power of this great university but also has lived it. Someone who not only believes in the potential for our state to grow and become greater still, but who has devoted his life to that cause. Someone who is incredibly gifted at winning friends, influencing people, and rallying the Pack in an ambitious direction. Someone who has known this institution well and keeps coming back for more. I am proud to nominate Kevin Howell as the next chancellor of North Carolina State University.

Kevin is the personification of what makes NC State an extraordinary institution, the kind of place where a talented young man from Cleveland County can find a home, break ground as the first-ever Black student body president, and then choose to devote his life to the upkeep and uplift of public education. So many of the leaders we remember best in North Carolina history share that full-circle story, coming from humble beginnings, recognizing the role of strong public institutions in changing their lives for the better, and choosing to pay it forward with a lifetime of service and mentorship and reinvestment. That’s the Kevin Howell story. That’s the NC State story.

His years of public service have taken him from NC State to the Governor’s Office, the UNC System, UNC Health, and approximately half of the civic and charitable boards in central North Carolina. Kevin’s legislative

advocacy resulted in funding for projects from engineering to veterinary medicine to plant sciences that elevate the magnificent work of NC State's faculty and staff. He's a wonderful ambassador and fundraiser. He's been a trusted confidant to a full generation of the Wolfpack faithful, and he's never without a smile and laughter and kindness to others no matter their station in life.

He's got a great mind, a generous heart, and a profound love of this university. But don't let the genial exterior fool you — Kevin Howell is a competitor to the core, a former wrestler who hasn't lost the instinct for tackling, grappling, and coming out on top. That competitive drive is what I want for NC State, because I believe this institution — marvelous as it is — has the potential for a truly transformative era. Everyone I talk to in and around this campus believes we're on the cusp of big changes in how we work, how we learn, how we make discoveries and share them with the world. The Wolfpack is ready to run in this new and formidable age, and I believe Kevin Howell is ready to lead them. There can be no sense of complacency. Change is accelerating and he must lead the Pack.

Perhaps most importantly of all, Kevin is profoundly well suited to the greatest challenge that higher education faces in our fraught moment — maintaining broad, bipartisan support for our public mission. In every role he's occupied, from chairing the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce to leading external affairs for UNC Health, Kevin has proven adept at cultivating allies, finding common ground, and ensuring that institutions remain laser focused on their mission of service and progress for the citizens of North Carolina. I know from experience that effective diplomacy in contentious times requires patience, humility, and a genuine respect for the voices and opinions of others. These are all qualities that Kevin Howell possesses in abundance, and character traits I believe are central to building and energizing the diverse coalitions necessary to move our universities forward.

North Carolina State is a strong institution with a great deal of momentum, and Kevin was part of the team that built that admirable track record over the last decade and a half with Chancellor Randy Woodson. NC State also has immense opportunities to grow, to achieve excellence in fields from data science to engineering. North Carolina has done a remarkable job of positioning itself at the high end of the value chain in everything from environmental resilience to next-generation energy development, and it will take an all-hands effort from our friends at NC State to keep us there.

But we can't be content with "keeping us there." NC State will need to push the boundaries and take it to another level. That will entail moving out of our comfort zones. Change isn't easy but growth rarely occurs when we are comfortable. We will need even deeper partnerships across industry, across government, across academic specialties, and across other institutions in the UNC System. It's going to take a leader with an intuitive sense of how to create productive networks of talent, goodwill, and enduring support, someone with a natural appreciation for the whole ecosystem that sustains an enterprise as big and broad as a public research university. In short, someone like Kevin Howell. To me he represents a blend of continuity and change. Continuity with the progress that's already in motion and the change that's necessary to go to another level.

From personal experience, I know Kevin to be a fantastic talent scout, someone who knows how to build a capable team and lead them toward a shared vision. Every chancellor relies on the expertise and experience of their senior leadership, and that's especially true at a place as vast and varied as NC State. Great chancellors know you are only as good as the people you empower and inspire, and I have seen firsthand Kevin's ability to motivate the very best in the people around him.

My deep thanks to the search advisory committee for making this a heartening and healthy process for NC State. Chair Ed Stack — also a former student body president — led us with goodwill and a steady focus on the needs of this institution and the people it serves. We had the chance to hear from talented leaders across this country who know and respect NC State, and I think all of us came away with a newfound appreciation for the great reputation the Wolfpack have built for themselves. Kevin comes into this job with the wind at his back, and I'm excited for him, excited for NC State, and grateful on behalf of North Carolina for the important work ahead. Go Pack!