

Newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University president

Our students returned last week for the spring semester and 2021 classes are underway at Northwest Missouri State University! I am feeling a sense of optimism about the future of Northwest, and that is on all of us who have uplifted and helped each other in so many ways during the past year.

Amid this month's violent protests at the U.S. capitol, I'm reminded of the late icon John Lewis, who said, "We're one people, and we live in the same house. Not the American house, but the world house." Our house – our country – was badly shaken Jan. 6, and what happened that Wednesday afternoon has no place in our country. At Northwest, we talk about what it means to be a Bearcat – Bearcats learn, connect, care, practice civility and show pride. These are not just words but characteristics that are embedded in our culture and are quite profound for all of us in this time of unrest.

As Northwest's president, I stand for and with our community in opposing hate, acts of hatred and acts of insurrection. We oppose them through education, growth and by practicing civility. We embrace each other in good times and bad, in agreement and in disagreement. John Lewis also said, "We must be headlights and not taillights," so as Bearcats we shine a bright light that sews love and hope.

At Northwest, we take pride in what we accomplished together in 2020, especially through the pandemic. We broke ground on an Agricultural Learning Center, opened an esports venue, dedicated our Veterans Commons, installed a new soccer pitch, welcomed a record enrollment, and surpassed our Forever Green campaign's \$45 million fundraising goal – just to name a few examples.

At the outset, we established a focus on health and safety, agility, and viability as our guiding philosophy and framework– with learning and success at the core of our decision-making. Through teamwork, these focal points were front and center and, in large measure, achieved.

We credit our community partners – the city of Maryville, Nodaway County commissioners, Nodaway County Health Department and Mosaic Medical Center-Maryville. We thank all frontline workers, businesses and organizations who continue to work with Northwest and support our students. Above all, we credit our faculty and staff for carrying out the daily work of all that goes into a vibrant learning environment.

Northwest has been agile in confronting COVID-19 and will continue to focus on learning and institutional viability in 2021. We are working to address issues of well-being as we all deal with the stressors and anxiety of the pandemic. Vaccinations also will be part of our incremental decision-making as we learn more about their delivery. We're using data and collaboration through a variety of teams to guide us on matters of COVID-19.

In addition to addressing issues of COVID-19, Northwest continues its focus on addressing matters of budget and race. We are focused on learning, our people and longer-term

viability on matters of budget. And we are focused on listening, aligning and acting on matters of race.

To be sure, challenges and opportunities persist. We all must remain vigilant in protecting each other's health and addressing COVID-19. Northwest must continue being strong fiscal stewards, protecting and uplifting our people and providing the economic impact we do for our region. We must embrace inclusive excellence and focus on anti-racism as a broader community.

We began our fiscal year last July with a 13 percent cut to our state appropriations – and yet we still funded some strategic initiatives in 2020. While other institutions are not investing and not changing with the times, we believe it is imperative to invest in our strategy, which drives our success. We invested in mitigation measures and did everything possible to protect our people during the last year. Because of our finance team's diligence and the funding available to us through the CARES Act, Northwest has been reimbursed for most of what we spent on COVID-19 measures. Thanks to funding released to higher education institutions by the state in recent weeks, that 13 percent cut has been restored.

In one year, so much has happened, and Northwest has responded – together. I express heartfelt gratitude for all you do to support Northwest and our communities. As we begin the spring semester, I believe our University is shining bright!

Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest, visit www.nwmissouri.edu.