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Dr. Brendan Kelly Begins Tenure as New President of Arkansas State University System

LITTLE ROCK – Dr. Brendan Kelly today officially began his appointment as only the third president of the Arkansas State University System.

The ASU System Board of Trustees voted to hire Kelly, who had served as president of the University of West Georgia since 2020, on June 5. He succeeds interim president Dr. Robin Myers and the second system president, Dr. Chuck Welch, who left the system in January after nearly 13 years to become president and CEO of the American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASCU) in Washington, D.C.

Multimedia links:

[President Kelly video message to ASU System constituents](#)

[President Kelly photos](#)

[President Kelly letter to ASU System constituents](#)

“The ASU System is open for business and will expand the state’s economy by improving lives and opportunities – starting with our students and their families,” Kelly said. “I believe strongly that if we do what’s right for a student, and then we make it work for the institution, we’ll never go wrong. The energy that exists in most communities emanates from institutions like the ones that we represent. I’m excited that the ASU System comprises not only seven outstanding campuses, but also some terrific communities in Arkansas.

“We have the opportunity to galvanize communities, look to the future to ensure the ASU System is ready to meet it and work to expand the impact of higher education within Arkansas and beyond,” he added. “From cutting-edge research initiatives to skilled workforce training, I’m confident the ASU System has the ability to meet the demands of our rapidly evolving economy.”

Kelly said the ASU System role appealed to him “because it represents one of a handful of roles in the United States in which one has the ability to influence and shape higher education

throughout an entire state. I am grateful to each member of the ASU Board of Trustees for their faith in me to offer leadership to a university system that has the capacity to provide access to high quality, higher education to the vast majority of Arkansans and many more beyond the state borders. This is an opportunity to support the economic evolution of the state at large.”

Prior to joining UWG, Kelly was chancellor at the University of South Carolina Upstate in Spartanburg and Greenville from 2017-2020 and was appointed as interim president of the University of South Carolina in 2019. He was vice president of university advancement and president of the UWF Foundation, Inc., at the University of West Florida in Pensacola from 2013-2017, where he led a successful \$50 million capital campaign. His teaching career spanned 13 years in Florida and Michigan in communication arts.

His focus at UWG has been innovative programming both inside and outside the classroom with an emphasis on creating valuable life and career outcomes for students, with a commitment to launch and advance student careers upon graduation. He served on the board of directors of multiple regional and state economic development entities, as well as the Atlanta Regional Higher Education Consortium.

While leading and implementing the “Becoming UWG” Institutional Strategic Plan, Kelly has led UWG to record-breaking fund-raising efforts, including the largest gift in institutional history, and oversaw an enrollment resurgence. The UWG campuses in Carrollton, Newnan and Douglasville have a combined 12,769 students and are expected to exceed 14,000 this fall. Its spring enrollment was 11.4% higher than last year, while its graduate enrollment surged 41%. UWG recently completed a move in athletics from the NCAA Division II Gulf South Conference to the Division I Atlantic Sun Conference.

“We’re thrilled to have Dr. Kelly officially beginning his leadership of the ASU System,” Board Chair Christy Clark said. “I know he is eager to get busy, and our board is eager to support him and his vision for the System and our campuses. We look forward to a smooth transition as he leads our experienced System team and chancellors.”

Trustee Price Gardner, who chaired the search on behalf of the board, said: “We are excited to welcome Brendan Kelly as our new System president. We believe Dr. Kelly’s experience and outstanding record of achievement throughout his career will continue the growth and development of our System and lead us in addressing the ever-changing challenges facing higher education and our focus on student success. He has been described as a visionary, talented communicator and a person with the ability to elevate the reputation of the institution and further its mission. Our board looks forward to the opportunity to work with him.”

Kelly is a member of the AASCU board of directors and was named “One of the Most Influential Georgians” by Georgia Trend magazine and James Magazine. He was active with the National Forensic Association (NFA) and speech/debate competitions for many years and was honored as a NFA Hall of Fame inductee and with the NFA Eddie Myers Distinguished Service Award.

He received a Bachelor of Science degree in public relations and a Master of Arts degree in communication at Eastern Michigan University and his Doctor of Philosophy in rhetoric and political communication at Wayne State University.

Kelly and his wife, Dr. Tressa Kelly, have three children – Bree Luckey (married to Drew Luckey), Liam and Kieran.

The [Arkansas State University System](#), based in Little Rock, serves more than 35,000 students annually on campuses in Arkansas and Queretaro, Mexico, and globally online. The System includes [Arkansas State University](#), a four-year Carnegie R2 research institution in Jonesboro with degree centers at ASU-Beebe, ASU-Mountain Home and ASU Mid-South in West Memphis. [Arkansas State University Campus Queretaro](#) opened in September 2017. The system's two-year college institutions include [ASU-Beebe](#), with additional campuses in Heber Springs and Searcy and an instructional site at Little Rock Air Force Base; [ASU-Newport](#), with additional campuses in Jonesboro and Marked Tree; [ASU-Mountain Home](#); [ASU Mid-South](#) in West Memphis; and [ASU Three Rivers](#) in Malvern. [Henderson State University](#) in Arkadelphia became the system's second four-year institution member in February 2021.

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