

SPECIAL MEETING

The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor
January 12, 2026

The regents met at 1:00 p.m. at the Alexander Ruthven Building, University Hall, and via a livestream link on the university gateway. Participating were Regents Acker, Behm, Bernstein, Brown, Hubbard, Meyers and White. Regent Ilitch participated via Zoom.

Call to Order

President Grasso called the meeting to order, called the roll, and turned the meeting over to Regent Bernstein.

Regent Bernstein said, “The Michigan Constitution of 1850 first established the Office of President of the University of Michigan and directed the newly elected Board of Regents to select someone to fill that role. Two years later, in 1852, the board elected Henry Philip Tappan to serve as the first president.

Today, 174 years later, this board will honor our constitutional responsibility by electing Kent Syverud to serve as president of the University of Michigan.

I want to begin by thanking:

- Regent Mike Behm, who served as my co-chair of the search;
- My colleagues on the Board of Regents who met this challenge in a way that reflects the highest aspirations and values of our beloved university;
- The distinguished faculty, staff, students and alumni from the Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint campuses, including Michigan Medicine, who served on our Presidential Search Advisory Committee, many of whom are here today;

- President Domenico Grasso for his heroic work leading our University with integrity, conviction and wisdom;
- Jon Kinsey and his team who supported this complex effort with precision and care;
- Mary Gorman and Alexis Stiles from Spencer Stuart who facilitated this process from start to finish with expertise and experience;
- And, most importantly, I want to thank our Michigan students, faculty, and staff (past and present) who make this the best (and most challenging) job in higher education. You make this an institution that is worthy of these consequential moments.

We have successfully completed a presidential search that begins a new chapter at the University of Michigan. We all know that the stakes could not be higher. For our university and our society.

American higher education faces more challenges now than at any point since World War II. Given our position in the nation and our state, it is imperative for us to have a leader who is prepared to meet these challenges. We need a leader with integrity, character and conviction. We need a leader with experience who will provide stability and vision. We need a leader who understands our university. Who knows, firsthand, what Michigan really means to our students, faculty, our state and society. We found that in Kent Syverud.

During one of his interviews, Kent said... Given our unrivaled breadth and scope of excellence across every discipline, our world-leading health care, our massive research enterprise, and our global reach... The president of the University of Michigan must be someone who believes it when they say, “The University of Michigan is the best university in the world.”

And we didn't have to look very far. Kent earned two graduate degrees at Michigan. He met his wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, at Michigan. They were married at Michigan. He taught at Michigan law school. He currently serves on our Alumni Association board.

In fact, 33 years ago, in 1993, then-Professor Kent Syverud taught my very first class on my very first day at Michigan Law (Civil Procedure). Kent appreciates the challenges we face. He's a deep, steady and broad thinker. He has a track record of success.

But perhaps most important – and impressive – is his own Michigan story. He came to Ann Arbor for law school with little more than a suitcase and a dream. He not only graduated at the top of his class, he joined our faculty and became one of our leading scholars before launching a career in administration at our nation's finest law schools (Vanderbilt and Washington University). And for the last 12 years, he has served as a transformative chancellor and president at Syracuse University. He is a true Michigan success story.

And his leadership will enable many more stories of growth, discovery, transformation and impact at Michigan. For these reasons, it is my great honor to support the election of Kent Syverud to serve as the next president of the University of Michigan.

Regent Behm read the following resolution:

*On behalf of the Board of Regents, and pursuant to Article VIII, Section 5 of the Michigan Constitution, and in accordance with the terms and conditions of a certain letter of agreement that has been previously agreed upon, with its effectiveness being subject to approval and ratification at this meeting, I present the finalist, and hereby **nominate** Kent Syverud as the 16th President of the University of Michigan. The letter agreement will be attached to the minutes of this meeting,*

The motion was seconded by Regent Acker. The motion carried unanimously and was followed by roaring applause.

Regent White said, “This is a monumental day for the University of Michigan as we install our 16th president. We are so fortunate to have Kent Syverud to take us forward, to continue the great tradition that is the University of Michigan. Kent and his family have deep family ties here because they were here for so long getting degrees and raising their family. I want to be the first to say to them: Welcome home and Go Blue.”

Regent Ilitch said, “I’m so excited. This is such a beautiful day at the University of Michigan. I just want to thank the members of the search committee and our co-chairs, Mark and Mike. It’s an enormous amount of work, but it’s a labor of love. One of the most impressive things about Kent was his deep roots in Michigan. I was so impressed by his love of the university, which is second to none. He has the highest integrity, is extremely experienced, and very well-respected by all walks of life. Through references, through people who have volunteered their thoughts, their experiences they’ve had working with him over his very stellar career. I got one text, which I thought was lovely, they said, the “University of Michigan community ‘crushed it.’

I want to thank the University of Michigan community for participating in this search and to please give both he and Dr. Chen a warm Michigan welcome as they transition in the new position and they show grace and allow them to get acclimated. Welcome back, Kent and Dr. Chen. We’re very, very happy to have you here with us and partner with us during this really important period.”

Regent Acker said, “To your family, President-elect Syverud, welcome home. As the regents said, we had to make sure that we found a president who was coming here for the weather. But in all seriousness, when we did this search, when we talked to people that knew you throughout your career, the words that kept coming up over and over again were ‘quietly transformative.’

That was the phrase — integrity and all of the things that we hold dear as an institution. We couldn’t be happier to have you here to fill this chair. And we’re really looking forward to, I’m really looking forward to, working with you and refreshing your maize and blue attire over the next few months. Welcome home.”

Regent Behm said, “During the search process, I heard a few words that described President-elect Syverud that I had never heard before, and one person described you as a ‘fearless listener.’ And I can’t think of a type of compliment, with regard to what we’re dealing with right here on campus and how welcome that will be.

Also, some of the qualities that you have with implementing goals, after imagining those goals and making them happen, like Jordan just referred to. And then also how that will positively affect our campuses at Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint.

And then finally in the last 24 hours, it has been amazing how many emails and texts that I’ve received from friends, colleagues across the country, and 100% just ecstatic with regard to you becoming our president, Kent.

And on a lighter note, one of them came from one of your colleagues at Vanderbilt, and he said, what an incredible hire this was. I think that is an incredibly high compliment. So welcome!”

Regent Hubbard said, “I look forward to partnering with President Syverud as we build on Michigan’s proud tradition and chart an ambitious, forward-looking path for the University of Michigan. It is an exciting time for our university, and I’m really optimistic about the future ahead. And I look forward to working with everybody in our campus community.

One thing we heard from the search advisory committee, from the entire community, is they wanted someone who understood Michigan and had been at Michigan before, and we found our guy. Welcome.”

Regent Meyers said, “I’m going to concur with the comments of my colleagues, so much has been said it would be redundant to keep going. I’d like to thank President-elect Syverud. Your wealth of knowledge, experience and higher education and, most importantly, life, will serve you well as the next president of the University of Michigan.

I’m really excited to hear about your interest and commitment to the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus and the University of Michigan-Flint campus — two important parts of the university campus portfolio. And to President Grasso, thank you for your service to the University of Michigan over this period of transition. The future is bright. Go Blue.”

Regent Brown said, “I’d like to second all the comments of my colleagues. I’d also like to take a moment to point out how unique this institution is. It is a higher education model that has transformed not only our state, but the world.

I want to thank again all of the people in the community that participated in the town halls and the listening sessions attended by members of the board. That’s what makes this institution so great. We are a public institution, solely for the public good.

As the regent that grew up in upstate Michigan, I was particularly excited to have a candidate who has for many decades owned a home in northern Michigan, near my childhood

home. This tells people all over the state of Michigan, maybe those who have never been on this campus, we will have a president who understands you and understands how to make the University of Michigan important and impactful to all the citizens of the state. So, thank you.”

President Grasso said, “It is an honor to welcome Kent Syverud as the next president of the University of Michigan. Kent, as a Michigan alumnus and former faculty member, you understand how special this place is. I speak from experience as an alumnus who returned to lead the institution – your homecoming will be like no other. It is a great honor and responsibility.

Over the past year, our community has worked diligently to reaffirm pride and trust in Michigan, to showcase our impact as a research university, and to prepare the institution for new leadership. I have had the privilege of working with an exceptional team, doing my best to help propel Michigan firmly into the passing lane.

As I prepare to hand over the wheel to you, I am confident that you will not only keep the University in the fast lane but also press the accelerator to the floor, realizing the University’s full potential as it begins its next chapter. You may move so fast that you risk a speeding ticket, but as an accomplished attorney, I have no doubt you would mount a successful defense.

As a university chancellor, you already know you’ll encounter bright, dedicated, creative, and opinionated faculty, students, and staff. Michigan will amplify those encounters. I sincerely believe the collective dedication to the UM is unmatched in higher education. We all want the best for this jewel of academic excellence, transformative research, and public service.

Susan and I are delighted to welcome you, your wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, your sons, and your grandchildren to this campus. I know Ruth holds two Michigan degrees, and we always love welcoming alumni back to Ann Arbor.

I want to thank the faculty, staff, students, and alumni who served on the Presidential Search Committee. Your service has helped shape the future of our university.

Kent, I look forward to working with you in the coming months as you prepare to lead the greatest university in the world, forever committed to the public good. You and the University of Michigan can always count on Susan and me for whatever you may need. And now, allow me to pass along the Block “M”, as you prepare to switch from the Orange and Blue to the Maize and Blue.”

President Grasso presented President Elect Severyoud with a Michigan baseball cap.

“Congratulations again, and Forever Go Blue. I’m now very pleased to invite President-Elect Kent Syverud to the microphone.”

President elect Syverud said, “Thank you, Chair Bernstein, members of the Board of Regents, and President Grasso. I gratefully and cheerfully accept appointment as the 16th president of the University of Michigan.

Thank you as well for all the kind things you have said today; I should warn you all right away that I am a better listener than I am a public speaker. I like listening, including to people who disagree with me. I like it because when I listen I always learn something, including sometimes that I am wrong. I believe always in starting with grace. There are so many people to thank for this day.

The eight regents of this University are volunteers who in normal times give up much of their lives to the mission of the University. These are not normal times. Our regents have had to step up in so many more demanding ways in recent years to keep this school going forward. You have done so selflessly and tirelessly, often under great stress. I am deeply grateful and I look forward to working with and learning from each of you.

To President Grasso: Thank you for stepping up to lead and heal when your school needed you. And thank you as well to your wife, Susan, for helping you embody the servant leadership that Michigan has needed.

The search committee for the president was so impressive. Their quality and their care for this institution was inspiring, and I thank each of them. The search firm team at Spencer Stuart, led by Mary Gorman, was rigorous, attentive, and patient. Thank you, Mary.

I want to thank Syracuse — both the university and the Central New York community. For the last 12 years, I have been blessed to work with and know and love that unique and wonderful community. I intended for that community to be my home long after I stepped down as chancellor. Only one place, Michigan, my alma mater, could change that plan.

Most of all, I thank my family, who are here today. My wife, Dr. Ruth Chen, and my sons Steven, Brian and David, who have come here today from California, New Jersey and New York. It has been 13 years since I agreed to interview for a job, and I did not intend to interview for this one. Ruth and my sons coached me to do this. They each passionately believe in the maize and blue, and they once again have supported me every step of the way.

The search committee asked me, ‘Why Michigan and why now?’ The simple answer is I believe Michigan has been, is now, and must remain the best public research university anywhere. That has been my experience. This university gave me everything I have become. I came here to go to school because you gave me a scholarship, the resources so I could afford an education. In May of 1978, I arrived in front of the Michigan Union on a Greyhound bus, with one suitcase containing almost everything I owned. I walked across State Street, and my life was changed, as it has been for so many thousands of others before and since at Flint and Dearborn and Ann Arbor and around the world.

You taught me in the Law School and LS&A. I met and married Ruth here, who was a doctoral student in toxicology. I made life-long friends here. I became a rabid Wolverine sports fan, and boy did we pass that on to all our children. Ruth and I eventually came back here to teach and conduct research, and once again this community gave us everything. Great students, colleagues and neighbors. Great ideas and libraries and museums, and parks and the most beautiful state anywhere. Michigan Medicine saved the life of one of our sons and showed us what first-rate healthcare could be.

We owe Michigan everything. To pay that forward by helping steward this special place now really is the greatest honor and responsibility I can imagine. Thank you for trusting me with it. I have a lot to learn and to listen as I get up to speed in the next few months. I ask for your patience and your help. These are challenging times for Michigan, for higher education, and for the world. We have a choice how to respond. We can curl up in a ball and cry "woe is me" and whine. Or, we can do what Michigan has always done at its best. We can lead.

We can lead not by arrogantly lecturing others, but by modeling each day, in small ways and in big ones, the values and the ideas and innovation and the civil engagement that the world so badly needs. I want to help us to do that, always remembering our special obligation to the people of the state of Michigan - all of the people of the state of Michigan, who created this institution and who merit our priority. I am ready to help steward us in leading. I hope you are too. Thank you and Go Blue!"

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 pm. The next meeting will be held February 19, 2026.