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Farewell Reception for M. A. "Venkat" Venkataramanan
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
University Chancellor and President Emeritus, Indiana University
Indiana Memorial Union
Tudor Room
Wednesday, April 27, 2022
4:30 p.m. (Remarks start at 5:00 p.m.)

Thank you. I really am greatly honored to have the opportunity to help celebrate the luminous career of one of Indiana University's most distinguished and dedicated faculty members and administrators—a person who over many years has been a truly great servant of this campus and the university.

All of our speakers this afternoon have spoken eloquently about Venkat's numerous outstanding accomplishments over more than three decades as a scholar, researcher, and administrator of the finest caliber.

And I will add further to this by describing some other contributions that Venkat has made to this campus and the university more broadly, including some that are maybe lesser known.

Venkat's service to the IU Bloomington campus has been—in no uncertain terms—quite superb.

Beginning with his appointment to the faculty in the summer of 1987, Venkat was a key contributor to the rise of IU's Kelley School of Business to become one of the finest business schools in the nation and the world. While at Kelley, he earned various awards and honors for excellence and innovation in teaching. Especially noteworthy though, and a premonition of things to come, was the central role he played in the development of the school's nationally ranked residential and online programs.

I had been aware of Venkat's reputation as one of the stalwarts of the Kelley School for many years. But I only came to appreciate the full range of his remarkable talents over the past decade when I had the good fortune to work with him and observe, first-hand, the extraordinary partnership that he and then Provost Lauren Robel formed together—a partnership that was, in the most accurate sense of that grossly misused word, truly transformational.

In 2012, he became vice provost for strategic initiatives and proceeded to navigate with the greatest of professionalism, problem-solving skill, and decorum—a myriad of important, difficult and consequential challenges then facing the campus.

Venkat oversaw IU Bloomington's campus-wide strategic planning process—initiated by former Provost Robel in 2013— to reimagine and invigorate academic programs across IU's flagship campus in anticipation of IU's Bicentennial in 2020. As a result of this work, the campus initiated extensive new multidisciplinary programs, which are now flowering, and strengthened existing programs to recruit and retain the talented faculty who are—and will always be—at the core of our teaching and research missions. This work also resulted in the enhancement of student services across the Bloomington campus to ensure that our students would have every opportunity to achieve their academic and personal goals, graduate on time, and confidently enter the job market, fully equipped for success.

But there were two events in particular where Venkat's unique skills were at the very heart of IU Bloomington successfully weathering two of the greatest crises in its history—the mold outbreak of 2018/19 and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21.

One after the other they hammered this campus and in both cases, they caused many similar problems. One area in particular was the halls of residence, financially one of the major components of the IU Bloomington budget. Students had to be moved out of residence halls, sometimes at short notice, and the halls had to be renovated or simply

had to stand empty or with substantial reduced socially-distanced populations. This was all of course unplanned and presented huge problems—ensuring additional off-campus accommodation to allow the campus to keep operating, addressing the reduced or modified staffing that continued to be required by the halls for meals and other services, and providing greatly expanded cleaning and sanitizing services. And of course on top of all this during the pandemic, the university had to transition to what was at first primarily an online centered hybrid mode of instruction

The weight of much of this at IU Bloomington fell on Venkat's shoulders. But with enormous skill and creativity he and Provost Robel successfully led the campus through these very difficult and unprecedented times. And as I alluded to earlier, we were extremely fortunate that Venkat already had extensive experience with residential and online instruction based on his former responsibilities in the Kelley School that could be drawn on to help address the grave problems then confronting the campus in these areas.

Of course, all of this had an extensive impact on the finances of the campus, the kind of impact that brought some other campuses and institutions around the country to their knees. But again, thanks in very large part to Venkat's wise, creative, and careful financial stewardship, IU Bloomington's weathered these twin crises. The advent of a record freshman class this year and an overall record class, an achievement incidentally in which Venkat also played an important part, helped ensure IU Bloomington has remained fiscally strong. This in turn has allowed IU Bloomington to continue to make important investments to keep the campus affordable and accessible, to enhance the student experience, to further the teaching and research efforts of our world-class faculty, and to provide one of best residential campus experiences in the country.

Venkat will leave his post as one of this campus' finest-ever administrators, a true leader who rose to every challenge with which he was confronted, a university citizen of the utmost professionalism and integrity, a teacher who inspired and changed lives for

the better, a scholar of seriousness and dedication, and a leader who led with decency and humanity and who was revered and respected by all.

I am sure I speak for all of us in expressing our most grateful thanks to Venkat for his remarkable service to Indiana University and in wishing him the very best in all of his future endeavors.

Thank you.