Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here with each of you to mark Duke Law School’s tradition of philanthropy in support of our students.

I thank those members of our faculty and administration who are here today. I also note that several members of the Law School’s Board of Visitors are here in their capacity as donors. I am grateful to each of them for their many contributions to our school, including their generous support of scholarships and other financial initiatives that benefit our students.

This luncheon is the one occasion in the life of our law school where we honor the commitment of one generation of Duke Law graduates to another. Today we celebrate that all important handshake across the generations. And, in keeping with the season, we give thanks for it.

Any great institution, whether of learning or for other purposes, is a compact among the generations over time. Each generation is a trustee of a legacy, and each generation attempts to do better for those who will come later. It does not have to be this way. It is not a law of nature that we be caretakers, creators, and conservators. This is the mystery and wonder and power of communal life, of altruism, and of philanthropy.

To our donors, I say that your support for student scholarships is evidence of both the extraordinary generosity that characterizes our alumni community and your abiding faith and hope in the future of our profession. Thank you for your vision and your generosity.

As we acknowledge those who have created and supported scholarships, we recognize that financial aid has never been more important to our students and their families. Particularly during these difficult economic times, a scholarship can make a Duke Law education possible for someone who might not otherwise be able to afford it. A scholarship also reduces a student’s debt burden, thereby allowing a student to consider a career in lower-paying but important areas of the law — particularly in public service and legal aid. Our ability to increase scholarship aid in recent years is helping make these opportunities possible.