

# **Research Vessel Western Flyer Homeporting Celebration**

*Remarks Delivered by USF President Rhea Law*

Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Good morning and welcome! Thank you, Monty, for that wonderful introduction. I'm thrilled to be with you today to celebrate the arrival of the *Research Vessel Western Flyer*, which will be a tremendous addition to the Florida Institute of Oceanography's fleet.

Environmental and oceanographic sciences play a vital role in our economy and in our daily lives – not just here in Florida, but around the globe —and USF is uniquely positioned to make a big impact in this area. That's why we have identified this as an important area of focus in our university's strategic plan.

There is so much incredible momentum in this exciting field here in St. Petersburg. I'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who has joined us here today for this wonderful celebration, including our USF Board of Trustees members and the USF St. Petersburg campus board.

USF hosts the Florida Institute of Oceanography, or FIO, a statewide organization that is making a world-class impact. With the addition of the *Western Flyer*, FIO is poised to advance USF and our State University System institutions into an exciting new era of marine science research and education. We have truly arrived on a world stage for oceanographic science.

The *Western Flyer* will be the most technologically advanced ship in the FIO fleet. It is capable of longer missions carrying more scientists and students and will allow for more interdisciplinary expeditions and research opportunities.

The ship will inspire future generations to explore careers in a field we refer to as “ocean STEAM” – Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math — in the context of our oceans and marine life. It will also allow us to develop a robust and inclusive workforce pipeline in this important field.

I’d like to personally thank the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute who so generously granted the *Western Flyer* to USF. Our appreciation for this magnificent ship cannot be overstated.

I’d also like to thank FIO Director Monty Graham. None of this would have been possible without your stellar reputation, your years of experience in ocean science and your network of partners. We are truly fortunate to have you as part of our Bulls family.

I don’t need to tell this crowd that our university has really been on a roll lately. It truly has been a summer to remember here at USF!

First, we were invited to join the Association of American Universities or AAU. This is a tremendous honor and one of the most exciting developments in our university’s history.

Next, a transformative state budget was finalized by the state legislature and signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, and it included significant new increases in recurring operational funding and investments in other top-priority projects.

That includes \$24 million to fund the first phase of planning and construction of a new Environmental and Oceanographic Sciences Research and Teaching facility on the USF St. Petersburg campus.

This facility will create amazing new opportunities for collaboration and continue to enhance St. Petersburg as a global destination for marine and environmental science, education and community engagement.

I know we have Senator Nick DiCeglie and Rep. Linda Chaney in attendance today. I'd like to personally thank both of you for sponsoring the EOS project, you have been tremendous champions for this project, and we greatly appreciate your support.

I also want to thank all the members of the Pinellas legislative delegation for their support and dedication to this initiative. Making this project a reality was a full team effort and we are incredibly grateful.

The addition of the Western Flyer will create incredible synergies between communities, scientists on shore, and students working at sea.

It's always a good time to be a USF Bull, but our future looks especially bright right now. I hope you have your sunglasses ready!

Thank you again for being here, and with that, I'd like to introduce a fellow Bull and terrific partner of our university to say a few words. Please join me in welcoming to the podium St. Petersburg Mayor, Ken Welch. Go Bulls!