This must be a very special event. I say that because it's usually hard to get Minnesotans into a temporary shelter in the bitter cold unless it's on a frozen lake.

Of course, we are all here today because this is a very special event. This is a celebration many years in the making. We are here today to celebrate the rebirth of a historic structure. Celebrate the construction of a modern transportation center. And celebrate the creation of three-thousand new jobs!

The past few years have been very hard for many families and businesses in our community. The renovation of the Union Depot that begins today is some welcome good news.

Many of you - in fact, most of you - helped make today possible and deserve thanks.

I want to express my thanks to the Board and staff of Ramsey County for their leadership on this project, especially Commissioners Ortega and McDonough, and Tim Mayasich and Steve Morris at the Rail Authority. Thanks to Hennepin, Dakota and Washington Counties. Thanks to the City of St. Paul and the Met Council. To the St. Paul legislative delegation - especially Representative Alice Hausman. To our railroads partners and the federal Department of Transportation.Thanks to the LOCATE Task Force and the U.S. Postal Service.Thanks to the St. Paul Chamber, our local labor leaders and our new Met Council Chair Sue Haigh - for everything she did in her previous roles to advance this project, and everything she is about to do in her new role to ensure it reaches it's greatest potential. And thanks to those leaders who helped launch this project but cannot be present for today's milestone - especially Chairman Jim Oberstar.

Transforming the Union Depot into a 21st century, multi-modal transportation hub for the Upper Midwest is a big idea. For just a moment, in the privacy of this cold tent, we need to do something very un-Minnesotan - we need to congratulate ourselves. Everyone who contributed to this project deserves congratulations for embracing a vision as big as the opportunity presented. And for making a plan bold enough to meet the needs of our economy - not in 2012, but in 2050 and beyond.

This century is still young but the new rules for economic success are becoming clear. One of those rules is the more you connect, the more you grow. The Union Depot will connect the places where people live and work in our region. Not only St. Paul and Minneapolis but Woodbury, Hastings, Inver Grove Heights, Hudson, Wyoming, Rochester, Lake City - and many other cities. Another rule of the new economy is "be bold" - because the competition is fierce and the rewards for second-best are few.

The Union Depot is a major investment and a long-term commitment. But in today's global economy, an investment of this scale is not a luxury - it's a necessity. The other developed economies of the world, and the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil are investing massively in their future prosperity by building infrastructure. In Minnesota, we are re-thinking our competition. We need to become as interested in South Korea as we are South Dakota.

As a young girl, I passed through the halls of this great building to board train to visit a ranch in Montana where my grandparents worked. I remember seeing the towering marble columns and brilliant glass with the eyes of a child. And I remember thinking that this building was built by serious people to stand the test of time. Only a few years later I was elected to Congress.

During my service in Congress, I have had the opportunity to visit the Depot literally dozens of times. This is one of my favorite places, not only because of what it is, but because of what it represents. None of us here - none of us as individuals, none of the organizations we represent - could have done this alone. This facility is evidence that a new era of progress is possible -- progress forged through partnership.

This building is also a statement that we are preparing for the future. The Union Depot is just the beginning.

We are really breaking ground today on the future of the East Metro and a new economy for the wider region. There is more work to be done. There are many more opportunities to explore. But today, we celebrate the big plans and real progress we are making, together.