Madam Chancellor, it is in no small part due to the outstanding contributions of today’s honorary degree recipient that we are able to gather here in person once again. Dr. Penny Ballem currently leads B.C.’s COVID-19 immunization program—one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the world—but that is only the most recent highlight of her long and accomplished career in health care and public service.

Born in Montreal, Dr. Ballem earned her medical degree from UBC in 1978. A much-lauded hematologist, teacher, researcher and women’s health advocate, Dr. Ballem now serves as a Clinical Professor of Medicine at UBC, a fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, and a senior fellow of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.

Beyond the academy, Dr. Ballem has distinguished herself as a public servant, generating a legacy of programs and policies that continue to benefit our province. She was a driving force behind the founding of B.C. Women’s Hospital, and was our longest-serving deputy minister of health, overseeing the creation of the province’s current structure of health authorities while managing serious public health threats, including SARS and avian flu.

Later, during her seven years as Vancouver’s city manager, Dr. Ballem advanced initiatives to secure more supportive and affordable rental housing, strengthen reconciliation and mental health, and transform Vancouver into one of the world’s greenest cities. In 2019, she was appointed chair of Vancouver Coastal Health, and last year took the reins of Immunize B.C., delivering life-saving jabs into the arms of more than 90 per cent of B.C.’s eligible population.

The author of more than 60 peer-reviewed articles and a respected bridge-builder between health practitioners and policy-makers, Dr. Ballem’s counsel is widely sought by federal and provincial leaders. She has served many boards and her honours include the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal for Public Service; the Marion Powell Award from Women’s College Hospital for leadership in women’s health; and the Cannell Award from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada for contributions to women’s reproductive health.

Madam Chancellor, Penny Ballem embodies SFU’s values of excellence, engagement and inclusion. For her enduring contributions to medicine and the wellbeing of all British Columbians, I ask that you now confer upon her the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.