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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

May 24, 2017

Dear Southernites and Friends:

It's been a busy couple of weeks around the Jaguar Nation. This past weekend, I had an opportunity to share the stage with an incredible cast of higher education giants at the HBCU Forum and Night at the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. The forum focused on the value proposition of HBCUs, federal funding, student enrollment, and alumni engagement. The forum hosted some of the nation's top higher education experts including Dr. Norman Francis, President Emeritus of Xavier University; Attorney Patrick Swygert, President Emeritus of Howard University; Dr. Harold Martin, Chancellor of North Carolina A&T University; Attorney Johnny Taylor, President of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund; Dr. William Harvey, President of Hampton University; Attorney Lezli Baskerville, President of NAFEO; Dr. Leonard Haynes III, former Executive Director of the White House Initiative on HBCUs, and many other powerful higher education leaders. The keynote speaker at the event was Congressman Elijah Cummings, who both entertained and inspired an all-star crowd, that included other celebrities such as Susan Taylor, the former editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine.

The event, sponsored by Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity and organized by SULC alum, Attorney Dwayne Murray, created a forum for exchanging ideas and developing strategies for growing the national treasures we know as HBCUs. Many cities and states around the country desperately want to increase the educational attainment rate of its citizens, and HBCUs are a great resource for improving educational outcomes of citizens of all races and nationalities. HBCUs tend to offer diverse educational opportunities, training and educating some of the most gifted minds in America, while at the same time creating access to higher education for many students who need extra support. HBCUs are tools that can change individual lives and transform communities.

One of the most insightful recommendations came from Hampton President William Harvey. He suggested that HBCUs must learn to become more entrepreneurial if they are going to overcome diminishing external resources, such as state and federal funding. His management philosophy was music to my ears. Indeed, it is the new developing attitude at Southern University. The much-lauded IMAGINE 20,000 project is premised on the same visionary approach to leadership that Dr. Harvey has embraced over his nearly 40-year career as president of Hampton. Dr. Harvey's management philosophy encourages universities to be engaged directly in the greater business community. The entrepreneurial premise posits that universities should not be limited to simply teaching business principles, but applying them for the benefit of the university itself.

I was inspired. It was comforting to hear the lessons of another successful HBCU applying this strategy. I look forward to Southern University more fully embracing this entrepreneurial approach to education management.

North Carolina A&T University is the largest HBCU in the country. A&T's Chancellor, Dr. Harold Martin, offered a very pragmatic approach to the value proposition of HBCUs. He said the often-used sales pitch of "attend HBCUs because they are more nurturing and caring" is "hogwash." His point was that the modern-day student and their parents are convinced by educational outcomes and quality educational programming. In other words, HBCUs must be able to clearly articulate its value proposition through persistency and graduation rates, quality job placement of its graduates, and the relatability of curricula to workforce demands. He said that quality academic programs will attract students. In fact, it will attract students of all races, not just Black students. This too was a powerful message for HBCUs. Dr. Leonard Haynes agreed with Dr. Martin's supposition by pointing out that a president of a small HBCU shared with him that about 20% of its students were criminal justice majors. Dr. Haynes pointed out that there simply is not sufficient demand in the job market for so many students in this field of study, and they will likely be disappointed when they enter the workforce.

Several of the education leaders spoke about the importance of alumni engagement and alumni giving. I was comforted to know that around the country, our alums were hard at work in Dallas and Los Angeles hosting scholarship fundraisers to support our alma mater. The Bayou Bash in Dallas this weekend was one of the biggest and best ever. Similarly, the Los Angeles Chapter continues to ensure that the Jaguar Nation is strong and thriving on the West Coast. A couple of weeks ago, the Home Chapter hosted its largest ever Crawfish Boil and Music Festival with nearly a thousand attendees, while the Atlanta Chapter showcased the Louisiana delicacy at its Crawfish Boil that drew a large number of not only our traditional alums, but also a growing number young alums from the Southern University Young Alumni Network (SUYAN). When the Federation created SUYAN three years ago, we never imagined this Federation committee would grow as quickly and as large as it has around the country. This infusion of new energy will ensure the Alumni Federation will be around for many years to come supporting our dear Southern University.

Congratulations again to our graduates at our four campuses and Southern Lab over the last couple of weeks. Graduating students is our most important role as a university, and this is our favorite time of the year. I look forward to working with these new alums for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Preston

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National President
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