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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

May 26, 2017

Happy Memorial Day Weekend, Southernites and Friends:

This week, Nykera Dixon, gave an emotional speech to her South Atlanta High School graduating class. She spoke about her grit to perservere in high school. She thanked her mother, Keisha Dixon, for being there and "standing in the gap" for her when she needed encouragement. Nykera tearfully announced that she had been accepted to over 13 colleges and was offered over $319,000 in scholarships. The Atlanta Public Schools student then proudly announced to the Class of 2017 she will "open her eyes this fall as a Jaguar at Southern University." The crowd erupted and her announcement and video went viral across social media. (Please take a look at the video here in *News and Notes*.) Students, like Nykera, all across America are understanding the incredible value proposition of HBCUs and choosing Southern University. We welcome Nykera to the best nation on the planet, the Jaguar Nation!

Earlier this week, the *Baton Rouge Business Report*'s cover story was entitled, "Connecting the Dots." As a part of the cover story, reporter Stephanie Riegel wrote an article entitled "Reimagining Southern." Ms. Riegel attended the Innovation and Development Committee May 10th meeting of the Board of Supervisors that has been tasked to develop the IMAGINE 20,000 project. The proposed Southern University Alumni and Economic Development Center, along with other significant developments around the City of Baton Rouge, was prominently featured on the cover of the magazine. The reporter interviewed John Davies, President of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation ("BRAF"), who confirmed that BRAF had committed to fund a grant for the University to develop a Master Plan that includes the IMAGINE 20,000 project.

The article acknowledged that the conceptual plan, that was submitted to BRAF as part of the grant application, is more than just a "pie in the sky", but rather is very much real. The article spoke about our successful launch of Southern's downtown location that just completed its first semester of classes, which included five law school courses. Beginning June 5th, the SU School of Education will begin offering four courses in the Masters of Education Leadership Program. While the downtown location isn't a full-fledged campus yet, it is making great progress. The IMAGINE 20,000 project envisions a transformation of our main campus, an expansion deeper into North Baton Rouge, and, of course, more expansion into downtown Baton Rouge, all connected by a light rail system.

We are beginning the process of engaging alumni, students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to help develop the plan. While some pieces of the project are certainly underway, like the

Alumni Center and the downtown location, the Innovation and Development Committee has established a process in which considerable engagement by stakeholders will be needed. I cannot thank Board Chairlady Ann Smith and President-Chancellor Ray Belton enough for their leadership in jump starting this project. Similarly, the collaborative spirit of the Foundation's President, Domoine Rutledge, and its CEO, Alfred Harrell, has been nothing short of phenomenal.

I have enjoyed the meetings I have had over the last several days that included possible collaborations with the College of Business, the College of Humanities, and the Law School to create new joint and innovative programs that could potentially become a part of this project. As we "Reimagine Southern," the possibilities of what this University can become are absolutely endless. I've been incredibly encouraged by the response to the *Business Report* article on social media as alums have not only welcomed the concept, but are also eagerly looking forward to participating in the process of the development of the reimagination of Southern University. Even some of our staunchest skeptics are starting to believe and "imagine 20,000" students at Southern University over the next 10 to 15 years. Thanks to all of the many believers of our collective vision for Southern University.

This weekend, as we enjoy family and friends over the Memorial Day holiday, let us not forget the purpose of the occasion. The incredible service and sacrifice that our men and women of the military have given to our country should never be forgotten. We should always remember our fallen heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we can enjoy life and the incredible freedoms we covet here in our country. I want to personally thank all of the men and women in service today for protecting my family and affording me the opportunity to live freely in the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Preston

Preston J. Castille, Jr., Esq.
National President
HBCU Alumni Coalition President