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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

July 30, 2017

Dear Southernites:

The last few weeks have been quite an adventure. The Board of Supervisors affirmed President Belton's decision to terminate the employment of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Whatever your opinion might be about that decision, it marks a major change within the administration of our Baton Rouge campus. As the university moves forward, it remains extremely important that we, as alumni, stay focused on our mission of helping our alma mater become stronger, and deliver a great education to our students.

At the same meeting, Board of Supervisors hired Herman Brister as the new Director of the Southern University Laboratory School. He was previously the principal at McKinley High School, in Baton Rouge. He is a graduate of both Southern University and Southern Lab, and comes from a long line of educators and Southernites. It was my pleasure to serve on the Search Committee, and we welcome Mr. Brister. We also wish him and the Kittens the best of luck as he takes over what I believe is one of the most valuable academic components of the Southern University System. The Lab School represents a critical pipeline to higher education for so many children in the State of Louisiana. The Lab School not only has a traditional brick and mortar PreK-12 program, but also a virtual school.

HBCUs serve a critical role in transforming the lives of so many young people and families across this country. It is critical that we continue to work to preserve and strengthen our sister universities. Our collective survival is important. This weekend, I had the opportunity to travel to Bowie, Maryland to attend the National HBCU Alumni Association Leadership Conference at Bowie State University. Two weeks ago, I had the privilege of speaking to the Texas Southern University National Alumni Association at its National Convention in New Orleans. In a recent article in *HBCU Digest*, JL Carter, Sr. opined that only 50 of the 104 HBCUs will survive over the next 10 years. While I doubt more than 50 schools will fail over such a short period of time, the possibility is disturbing.

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of traveling to Washington, D.C. to attend the *HBCU Digest* Awards and Media Training Institute sponsored by *HBCU Digest*. The Media Training Institute was both informative and timely, particularly in light of the recent media engagement the

University has experienced. It was so exciting to be there in person to see the Southern University School of Nursing and Dr. Cheryl Taylor win national awards. Dr. Taylor gave inspiring acceptance speeches and made the Jaguar Nation proud. The Alumni Federation had again been nominated as a finalist as National Alumni Association of the Year. We didn't win this year, but we are so grateful to have been recognized nationally for our hard work.

I must close by once again thanking First Vice President LaQuitta Thomas and Shreveport Chapter President E. Jean Ware for co-chairing this year's Leadership Summit Committee. The engagement between alumni and university leaders was meaningful and authentic. We were able to ask important questions concerning both challenges and opportunities that our university is facing. We received great feedback from our university leaders, including members of our Board of Supervisors. Attendance exceeded our projections, as we had a packed room at the Jesse Stone Auditorium on the SUSLA campus. I feel invigorated and am looking forward to another very successful year. We are already planning our 2018 National Alumni Conference which will be held in Baton Rouge. Please mark your calendars for July 19-22, 2018.

Sincerely serving Southern,

Preston

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