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Coming Back Together Gala

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Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "Coming Back Together Gala" (2014). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 84.
<https://surface.syr.edu/chancellor/84>

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on Saturday, September 20, 2014

Location: The Oncenter Convention Center, Ballroom

Remarks: Coming Back Together Gala

The Chancellor was introduced by President and Chief Executive Officer of ARC Media, LLC, Angela Robinson, Class of '78

Thank you as well as to our Coming Back Together alumni co-chairs, Reinaldo Pascual and Kim Blackwell, to our student co-chairs, Chantal M. Felice and Anthony Herbert.

Welcome back all CBT alumni to Syracuse University.

Bienvenidos a todos alumnus CBT a la Universidad Syracuse. Estoy muy feliz que ustedes estan aqui. I am happy and grateful that you are all here.

Let me speak to the topic on many minds in this room. Many of you—students and alumni—have spoken directly to me in the last few days of your concern that Syracuse University will abandon its longstanding commitment to educational opportunity for underrepresented minorities. Many of you have told me stories of what Syracuse has meant for you and of your hope for what it will mean for the students who you care about and who you hope will continue to come after you. You have again reminded me of what I have long known: this is a private University that, when it is at its best, has been a leader in admitting and educating students from all backgrounds, all races and ethnicities, and all classes. We are currently among the private research universities with the very highest socio economic diversity in the nation, and today about 3 in 10 of our freshman are students of color.

Many of you have told me of your fear that Syracuse University is about to turn its back on that history, on that present accomplishment, and on that source of pride.

Not on my watch. I have spent 25 years of my academic career being a quiet leader in achieving racial and economic diversity and opportunity in higher education. I have done that at every school I have lead, including at the University of Michigan, at Vanderbilt Law School and at the Washington University School of Law. For 25 years, I have bristled at and bitterly fought a wrong idea. I first heard this wrong idea while sitting in a faculty meeting at the University of Michigan: A former dean asserted in that meeting that you could not have both academic excellence and racial and ethnic diversity; instead you need to make tradeoffs between them.

That is wrong. It has always been my view that academic excellence and diversity go together, and should be pursued together. That is what I passionately argued that day at the University of Michigan, at the faculty meeting where we adopted the affirmative action policy that was subsequently endorsed by Justice O'Connor for the Supreme Court of the United States in *Grutter v. Bollinger*.

Since that day, more than 20 years ago, I have given very few speeches on this topic. Lots of people were talking the talk in universities; a lot fewer seemed to be walking the walk. I discovered people always have excuses and reasons for not walking the walk. But at the University of Michigan, at the Vanderbilt Law School, at the Washington University School of Law- and in the litigation I worked on for years that led to the *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, we walked the walk.

And so, I might add, did Syracuse University over many years before I came here. Academic excellence is not a tradeoff with diversity, and I continue to deeply resent suggestions of such a tradeoff. In my view, in

this country, you can't have one without the other. And you better have a savvy and hardworking and always evolving strategy to achieve both.

Given my views, and the hard work and occasional nastiness that my family has endured because I have practiced these views, I hope you can all imagine how hard it is tonight to see so many of you here, who are deeply committed to these values—who have helped make these values live through thousands of students at Syracuse University—how hard it is to see you afraid that I, as the new Chancellor, am going to lead a charge toward Syracuse becoming just one more rankings-obsessed, non-diverse place that just talks the talk.

I know your anxiety is provoked by an array of circumstances, but most immediately by the news that the University has expressed an intention to have fewer Posse Foundation programs in the 2015 academic year than in the current year. I have heard anxiety that CBT itself—this very reunion going back many decades—will be discontinued.

Tonight should be an evening of remembrance and celebration, not anxiety for the future. I want to assure you tonight that I am having Provost Eric Spina and his team look very closely into the details of proposed changes in the Posse program. Whatever the outcome of the examination, I am very confident that the Syracuse commitment to diverse educational opportunity is going to be sustained— and that any changes will enhance our impact, not detract from it. Syracuse University is and will remain a leader and model for programs supporting academic excellence among strong, vibrant communities that include many African American and Hispanic students.

I need your help doing this. Necesito su ayuda, por favor. So many of you have helped so much already. You have helped with scholarships and mentoring and networking and support. You have helped our students, who are the best students anywhere and who deserve the best from us. There will be a CBT in 2017. In 2017 with your help we will be an even

better university. I pray that in 2017 no one will have anxiety about Syracuse continues to be a leader. And I pray that I will never again have to bear witness on my own behalf, because the achievements of this great university will resound louder than any testimony.

Muchisimas Gracias, y Many Thanks.

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