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Chancellor's 2014 Commencement Speech

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on May 11, 2015

Location: Carrier Dome

Remarks: Chancellor's 2014 Commencement Speech

*The Chancellor was introduced by Eric Spina,
Vice Chancellor and Provost.*

Welcome everyone – graduates, faculty, staff, family, friends – to the Class of 2014 Commencement of SUNY-ESF and Syracuse University. It my great honor to welcome you, and to be followed in this welcome by the outstanding new President of SUNY-ESF, my friend Quentin Wheeler.

This is a happy day. Each of you who are graduating today got here because of your own hard work. Each of you who are graduating today also got here because of an array of supporters.

Some of your supporters – your faculty and the staff – are sitting in front of you and working all around this Dome and outside it. Some of your supporters – your family – are right behind you, where once again, as always, they have your back. And some of your supporters – your friends in the graduating class – are sitting with you now.

I want to very briefly speak to you, the class of 2014, about each of these three groups – your faculty and staff, your families, and your friends in the class of 2014.

First about your faculty and the staff, at both Syracuse and ESF: We of the faculty and staff learned so much from you, the graduates of 2014. You enriched our lives with ideas and questions and problems and initiatives. You changed us through your achievements in class, in competition, in the wild and around the world. You were unique in your take on things and in what you did here. That is why we will miss you, and why the new students coming here in a

few short weeks can never replace you. On behalf of your faculty and staff, I thank you.

Next your family. Please reflect on your parents and grandparents, spouses and partners, children and relatives and family friends. Some of them are here today and some of them, so important to you, could not be here, because they are separated by distance or by health or in some cases by tragedy. About your family, seen and unseen today, I say this: You learned a lot in this place. It may take you years to appreciate just how much you learned. But what we added here was just a tiny increment compared to what you came here with, thanks to your parents and family. The wonderful person your families sent here is still inside you, and still defines you, beyond our poor power to gild or to alter.

I say this because you graduates need to understand that your families are having many mixed feelings right now, on this Mother's day. A lot of them are feeling wonder. For me, the most amazing moments as a parent have come when one of my kids, my kid, accomplishes something that I know I cannot do.

Well, one of their kids is about to become a graduate of a great university. Your families today look on in wonder as well as in joy.

But mixed with that wonder, their worry about you will go on. Every single family member out there today remembers vividly at least one moment over the last decades when the loved one sitting today in cap and gown was sick, or was in trouble, or was infuriating – or was just plain lost. Your families know you too well to stop worrying. You have aged them, in countless ways.

I will give you one example. I have a son, who is now a glorious adult. On his first day in nursery school, my wife and I dragged him out of bed early. We washed him and fed him and dressed him and then delivered him to a group of smiling teachers. They promptly sat all the kids down in a circle for “sharing time”. That meant each kid had to share one thought with the whole group, in front of all the teachers and parents. And my son, with a smile in his eye and a crowd of adoring parents around him, said only four words: “My parents beat me.”

My point is that each of you, in your unique way and for your own unique reasons, has a debt of gratitude to pay to the people who you aged while they

got you to this happy day. Can you join me in now thanking your families for getting you here?

[Applause]

Last, I ask you think about all you learned here from your classmates. You learned from them at unexpected times, not just in class. Each of your classmates had something to teach you, including the ones who were not your closest friends. I learned long ago that everyone – absolutely everyone – has something to teach me if I will just be patient enough to listen. And I learned more from my classmates than anyone else.

Yet when I graduated, I lost touch with so many of them. I was busy. There was no Facebook. And I had other priorities. Big mistake. Don't do what I did. There are so many people among you who care about you, based on a shared experience that can never be replicated again. Please work hard to stay in touch with more than a few of your friends here.

On behalf of Syracuse University, on behalf of all of us in this Dome and of the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who care about this place – and who care about our newest graduates – I say to you: well and truly done. We honor your work. We respect your achievement. And we will miss you. Please stay in touch, and fare well.

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