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Chancellor's Message for 2016 the Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner Celebration

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on January 31, 2016

Location: Carrier Dome

Remarks: Chancellor's Message for 2016 the Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner Celebration

The Chancellor's remarks were presented as a video.

Good evening and welcome everyone. Welcome to the 31st Annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Junior celebration at Syracuse University—which is once again the largest University sponsored event in the nation to honor Dr. King's legacy.

I plan to be with you tonight in the Dome for this important celebration. I am taping this message in advance just in case my flight is delayed by the weather. So if you don't see me there right now, please know I am doing my best to get there promptly, including so that I can join you in celebrating this year's important unsung heroes.

First, I want to thank the many people who worked so hard and are responsible for today's events. They are heroic in their own right because their hard work brings us closer to delivering on the dream of a multiracial nation united in justice, tolerance and peace.

This past year has been particularly challenging in our nation. Lives have been lost. Things have been done and said that have produced unrest in many cities across our country, and protests in our streets and on many college campuses. There are new and complex conversations about our communities, and their futures. There is doubt and there is fear. But Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. left us a testament of hope to respond to that doubt and fear.

Dr. King would have wanted us to be brave, to use this day to educate, to remember, to forgive, and most importantly to resolve to do better and act for the future.

Here at Syracuse University, we can and we will do this. Our new Chancellor's Workgroup on Diversity and Inclusion is listening closely to the voices of our campus, especially those who are marginalized or discriminated against. We are committed to offering safer spaces for students, faculty and staff in our diverse communities.

I know that Workgroup is developing new programs and is going to recommend new policies that will bring us closer to Dr. King's dream of genuine inclusiveness. This spring, we will seek your input on all of this through a campus climate survey. It is vitally important that you let us know how we can make each of you feel welcome and included in our shared community.

We know we have work to do. We know our work is done better when we do it together. That was the message of Dr. King and I know it is part of the message of our keynote speaker today. I deeply thank Dr. Marc Lamont Hill for being among us today, for he truly understands the power of each individual to make a difference. He also reminds us of the power of communities to shape each individual.

Like Dr. Hill, like all of you, I am a student of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's writing and thought.

I want to share with you the most moving passage I have treasured among his speeches—this one is from a speech he gave at Vanderbilt Law School, where I was once the Dean. I remind you that, because Rev. King was permitted to speak these words at Vanderbilt Law School in 1962, the University Leadership punished the Law School by taking away its liberty to schedule outside speakers. I remind you of this to show you I remember well that University leaders can be wrong, especially when they refuse to listen to passionate voices.

Here is what Dr. King said about the ethics of integration in 1962:

LAW CAN HELP. 'Let us never succumb to the temptation of believing that legislation and judicial decrees play only minor roles in solving the problems of integration. Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless. The law cannot make an employer love an employee. But it can prevent him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin. The habits, if not the hearts of people, have been and are being altered everyday by legislative acts,

judicial decisions and executive orders. Let us not be misled by those who argue that segregation cannot be ended by the force of law. But acknowledging this we must admit the ultimate solution to the race problem lies in the willingness of men to obey the unenforceable.

Court orders and federal enforcement agencies are of inestimable value in achieving desegregation, but desegregation is only a partial, though necessary step toward the final goal which we seek to realize, genuine intergroup and interpersonal living. Desegregation will break down the legal barriers and bring men together physically, but something must touch the hearts and souls of men so that they will come together spiritually because it is natural and right. A vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws will bring an end to segregated public facilities which are barriers to a truly desegregated society, but it cannot bring an end to fears, prejudice, pride, and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society. Those dark and demonic responses will be removed only as men are possessed by the invisible, inner law which etches on their hearts the conviction that all men are brothers and that love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation. True integration will be achieved by true neighbors who are -willingly obedient to unenforceable obligations.

That is what Dr. King said in 1962. The law has come so far since then. But are we yet true neighbors? Do we yet really show in our actions every day that all of us are brothers and sisters? Not yet, I think, not yet. But we will get there and get there only through acting for the future.

Thank you for helping that happen at Syracuse and at its University. Have a wonderful evening tonight.

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