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Veteran's Day Remarks

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on November 11, 2016

Location: Hendricks Chapel

Remarks: Veteran's Day Remarks

*The Chancellor was introduced by Jordan Robinson,
SI Newhouse School of Public Communications, Class of '15, G'17*

Good morning. Thank you all for being here today, and thank you to the many folks who worked so hard in recent weeks to enable Veteran's Day celebrations and events at Syracuse University. Those people include:

- Ron Novack and Lauren Pyland of the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs;
- Margaret Lambrecht and Me'Shae Brooks Rolling of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families;
- Peg Stearns and Carrie McDonald of the Veterans Resource Center;
- Lt. Adam Kelly of our Air Force ROTC Program;
- Master Sergeant Darnell Applewhite and Laura Bates of our Army ROTC; and
- All members of the Veterans Day Planning Committee.

Can you join me in thanking all of them? [applause].

I give a lot of speeches, and some of you have the burden of hearing too many of them. My mother taught me to write and to speak. She came from a small, mostly Norwegian farming town in South Dakota. She hammered into me two rules for writing. First, use short, clear sentences. Second, use your own voice and your own words. Don't stick in long quotations from others. So I almost never quote anyone else. Today I break that rule. I want to read you some paragraphs someone else spoke this week. I can't improve on them.

“Over the past decade I’ve had the honor and the privilege to get to know many hundreds of veterans. None of them went to war for a political party or political ideology. Instead, they served and sacrificed for their neighbors, their teammates, their teachers, and for their families. They didn’t shed their blood for a ‘red state’ America, or a ‘blue state’ America, but instead for ‘our America’ and on behalf of all their fellow citizens.

This is not to say that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines don’t have and deserve their own political belief systems and values. However, it is to say that the culture of the military is such that while individual differences are acknowledged and even celebrated, it is a higher purpose- the ideal of citizenship and service—that transcends what divides them in a way that unifies their purpose and their actions. This is what our veterans offer to this community - it’s what they have to teach us.

It is my hope that on this Veterans Day we will reflect on the selfless service and profound sacrifice of the countless men and women who have worn the uniform of our nation through times of war and times of peace. I hope this reflection will serve as an opportunity for all Americans to see a path to something bigger than ‘red states’ and ‘blue states.’ Let the example of our veterans represent an illustration of how this community can bridge our differences and unite as Americans. This is the best gift we could bestow upon our veterans, because it’s how we best honor to their service.”

Those words were written and spoken by Syracuse’s University’s incomparable vice chancellor, Mike Haynie.

The South Dakota mother who taught me to write lived long enough to move to upstate New York and raise five kids. They married, in sequence: a modern artist and painter; an Irish-Italian Catholic from a Bronx New York family; a Florida woman from a Jewish family; a Chinese-American Buddhist and first generation immigrant; and a woman from an Appalachian family.

This was difficult for my mother to absorb. There were stumbles along the way. But, at its best, that family grew better and stronger, and eventually produced 14 grandchildren. Any one of them would be someone you would be fortunate to have in your community or your workplace.

On a much greater scale, and to a much greater purpose, Syracuse University, at its best, has successfully taken in all kinds of people and built a mostly unified family from them. There have been stumbles along the way, but more than almost any other place, it has been inclusive since its founding in 1870.

On an even greater scale, and to a truly noble common purpose, our uniformed services have, at their best, successfully taken in all kinds of people. There have been stumbles along the way. But, in my opinion, there is no institution in America that can be more proud of the range and quality of the people it has produced.

That is one simple reason it is so important to me that veterans are so deeply embedded in the DNA of Syracuse University. And it is one reason I am grateful to be able to say a clear and simple thing: More than at any college in America, at Syracuse University, every day is, and will be, Veteran's Day.

On this Veteran's Day, as our keynote speaker, we will hear from a courageous and inspiring example of our many, many Syracuse University alumni veterans.

Richard M. Jones is executive vice president, general tax counsel and chief veteran officer for the CBS Corporation. His commitment to Syracuse is so extensive I cannot do it full justice here: He is a board member with the IVMF. The Wounded Warrior Project. The Uniformed Services Justice and Advocacy Group. The Easter Seals Dixon Center for Military and Veteran Community Services. The list goes on.

Above all else, he is an inspiration. After high school, he enlisted in the Army to help his ailing father support their family. He became an Airborne Ranger, an achievement attained only through exacting training. He served with the 75th Ranger Regiment and the 10th Mountain Division. He had every intention of making the Army his career. But his parachute malfunctioned during a jump. He endured severe fractures in his legs and in his back. That changed his plans. He left the Army. He turned toward new goals.

It is to the lasting good fortune of this University that he built a connection with the late Professor Horace Landry, who led the accounting program at the Whitman School of Management. Thanks in part to Professor Landry, we are now blessed to have Rich as one of the great advocates of the effort to turn this campus into a world leader for veterans.

I will leave it to Rich to share more of his story. I would simply say that he exemplifies all I feel on Veterans Day: Humility and deep gratitude.

Ladies and gentlemen, would you please stand, and join me in welcoming, Richard M. Jones.

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