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Winter New Student Convocation

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on January 13, 2020

Location: Setnor Auditorium

Remarks: Winter New Student Convocation

Good morning. On behalf of everyone at Syracuse University, the faculty and staff, I welcome you to your university.

After my brief words of welcome, you are going to hear from Dean Emerita Cathryn Newton, an ocean scientist, a paleobiologist and environmental expert. She's the University's first professor of interdisciplinary sciences. This title reflects the broad scope of her work across many disciplines and topics, including earth sciences, higher education, paleobiology, shipwrecks, mass extinctions, biodiversity and enhancing research opportunities for all students. Professor Newton's work on mass extinctions and deep-water coral reefs is based on extensive field work and intensive research in museum collections around the world. She's won many awards for her teaching and her research and served as the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for eight years. She also is a teacher who cares about every single one of her students and has won the Syracuse University Scholar-Teacher of the Year award. She's now a senior advisor to both the provost and me.

After Professor Newton's speech, you're going to hear from Benjamin Pierce, who is from the Class of 2022. He's an art video major in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, which graciously hosts us in this space today. Ben is going to share some remarks about his success and how to become involved on campus.

For my remarks, I just want to note that there are some very different audiences in this room, at this convocation. Some of you are the parents and families of our 100 new first-year and incoming transfer students. Our new undergraduates originate from 17 states and seven countries. Today, we greet

43 discovery students, who are returning from their first semester abroad in the expansion of Syracuse University's programs around the world.

Today, we also welcome in this room 15 exchange students from many countries, here to spend a semester as our guests. I want to acknowledge our diverse class of 156 incoming graduate students from 14 states and 21 countries. There are also 16 wonderful, full-grown Fulbright Scholars with us today from 14 different countries—from Botswana to the United Kingdom—who will be studying and working in the School of Education this semester.

Hopefully that speaks to you the truth that people from every state, every part of the United States, as well as—right now—from more than 150 countries and many Native American nations study and work on this campus every day.

This is going to be among the most diverse and international places you have ever been. How diverse? I just want to give you a great example: in my spare time on Sunday mornings, I teach students how to drive a car. There's a lot of people who are students here who, in America, need to drive a car and haven't learned how to drive a car yet. It's a helpful skill in Syracuse, and it's challenging to do it in snow. By the way, it does snow here, today's experience notwithstanding. In the last couple years, my driving students have come from New York, Puerto Rico, Uzbekistan, Portugal, China, Korea, seven other countries and Greenland. I mention this because one of the wonderful things about this place is how wonderful our students are, including because of where they come from, which is all over.

I am deeply proud and grateful that this University has wonderful students from Norway, where my grandparents emigrated from, as well as from Hawaii and South Dakota and Texas and Maine, and Germany and China and Haiti and El Salvador and Iran and Nigeria, and every other state and country in the world that can, at its best, produce wonderful people. In my experience, every state and country can and does produce wonderful people, and they come here to study and work.

I want to speak to all new students who are on this campus for the first time: In a few moments, Dean Maurice Harris will ask you to rise and to receive and accept the charge. The words I will speak to you, and the words you will speak to me, are adapted from a charge first spoken on this campus in 1871.

The Chancellor who spoke them, Erastus Haven, and the students who heard them could not have imagined what Syracuse University would become in 2020. Back then, we owned one building, the Hall of Languages. And it was heavily mortgaged. We had almost no money. The spot where you sit right now was a hayfield, as was almost everything within hundreds of yards of us.

Yet, those students, back then in 1871, discovered many of the same things that you will discover here. They learned that education is not something bestowed on you with a degree, but something earned through hard work and through discipline. And through unplanned and unexpected wonders that happen all over a great university, including in the middle of the night. A good education encompasses the full breadth of disciplines, from arts and humanities to the sciences. You are going to learn not only from your teachers but also from your peers. And in the process, if we're doing our job and you're doing yours, you will become a teacher yourself. You will forge friendships that will last a lifetime.

That's what happened to those students in 1871 when they left this place a better place and they became better people. They were followed by 149 other cohorts of students and countless faculty and staff, each of whom contributed in various ways here. Such that the University you see around you today is not a bunch of buildings and people and course requirements; it is the accumulation of all the work and dreams and ideals and inventions and innovations of everybody who came before you.

So much of what happened here was well beyond the imagination of that Chancellor. It was amended by students and faculty members working together here, and that includes the many students and faculty who have helped you already in your adjustment here. The orientation leaders and

resident advisors and peer advisors who I'm so grateful to for being here today. There are so many new things that were created out of this synergy, and that lasted. Programs and departments, lots of activities. The Daily Orange, one of the nation's oldest and best student newspapers. The Crouse Chimes, which are the bells way above in this building that have been run by student Chimemasters for more than 125 years. And so many new things that have just been created in the last six months.

So, when you hear the charge, you will rise to hear it and accept it, I ask you to resolve to make this university your own way to be for you. I want you to build something here and make something here and leave something behind here that you alone could contribute. We want you to, we want to help you do this. This is your university as much as anyone else's now, and we believe that you can do it because so many people before you who sat in this space on this day as incoming, transfer or discovery or exchange students have done it.

And I really want to drive home how true that is. From recent research, it is breathtaking how many people started in January or as a transfer student in this year and have gone out to do amazing things for this university and in the world. I'll give some quick examples. The most recent is Hassina Adams, who moved to Central New York from Johannesburg, South Africa, found this community to be a welcoming community. She started in a nearby community college, where she didn't have help navigating and had to develop real advocacy skills. She transferred here, and very quickly after she transferred here she joined the Dean's Team in Arts and Sciences to help other new students and visitors. She became a Ronald E. McNair scholar, connecting with other students who love conducting research. She's a member of the Renée Crown University Honors Program, which is an incredible community that fosters diversity and inclusion around campus fellowship and inquiry. She became a Remembrance Scholar, which honors the students from Syracuse University who were lost on Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988. She stretched herself in order to develop new talents. She's been open to new experiences, new perspectives and new ideas. There are

hundreds of other transfer students who have their own unique story like Hassina does.

Al Davis, who transferred here as an English major, became interested in sport management, ended up owning the Oakland Raiders, winning three Super Bowls and being the first NFL owner willing to hire an African American head coach and a female executive.

Shirley Jackson, who transferred here also as an English major and stuck with it to become one of the most brilliant and influential authors in the twentieth century. Marty Whitman, who transferred here from a small college in Nebraska, became a brilliant businessman and investor and now is the namesake of the Martin J. Whitman School of Management, our business school.

Eileen Collins, who transferred here from community college, planning to become a math teacher, but ended up as an astronaut and the first female pilot and the first female commander of a space shuttle.

There are hundreds more stories like this of people who started at this university, in the way you're starting, on the day you're starting. So now on a day like today, I just ask you to realize this is your school as much as anyone else's and I pray you realize the opportunities here like those who went before you.

To the parents and families of the incoming class, there are some of you, mostly sitting on the wings I see, I want to say a few words of welcome. Many times, I've dropped one of my own kids off at a university. Many times, I've sat where you now sit, and with one of those kids I dropped him off at two different undergraduate colleges in two years. Each time, I was happy and proud that they were starting at a great university, but I was also anxious and concerned. And not just about where my kid would live and food in a residence hall. I was concerned because I realized, sitting where you sit now, that once again a piece of my soul is going to be walking around a different

campus. And it's beyond my ability to completely control or protect or influence.

Some of you may be feeling that right now, what I felt each time. I can testify it does not get easier the second time you do it. My wife and my family have poured so much into each of our kids, so much time and love, and energy and worry and inspiration. And it really was a labor of love, but it was labor. And we got very used to it, and it defined the best part of our lives.

And then suddenly, I was looking over at my kid, and some guy in a robe was telling me to go home, and all the effort seemed worthwhile. It seemed like we were successful. But boy it was hard. My wife and I did a hard thing each time we dropped our kids off. We did go home. We knew our kid had to make his own way, or her own way. I hoped the university would have good people, like Syracuse University does have, along with faculty and staff and the student body, people to catch my kid, inspire my kid, like the people who inspired us, Hassina Adams, and Al Davis and all the other transfer students I just told you about.

I went home, as I know you must now do. The happiness I can share with you is that it was only a few weeks before my kid started calling me up and bringing laundry. And like I said, we do have an elaborate parent and family weekend in the fall. And opportunities to visit in between that are worth attending, I urge you to. I learned that I could take joy in each day in a different way giving my kid a place where he could be treated as an adult and would grow in amazing ways.

So, parents and family, I thank you for all you've done and will do for these members of this class. Like all of us, I am the beneficiary of the great work in developing these students. And because of your work, these students are who they are, and there is trust.

Good luck to all of you students and families. Congratulations on being here.

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