

Leaders Lead, They Do Not Reiterate

From Martha's blog:

Excerpt from convocation remarks...

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It was gratifying to see so many people turn out for Thursday's town meeting. I will be referring to my notes many times over the next few weeks as we navigate the all-too-familiar sea of budget cuts.

My remarks included some thoughts I think bear repeating:

"This is a time for candor and for realistically facing conditions in our university budget. But it's not a time for hand-wringing or retreat. Frankly, I'm not the handwringing type. This university has weathered worse challenges in its 100 years of service to education and we will, no doubt, face others over the next century. When compared with the trials of our predecessors - The Great Depression, a time when salaries could not be paid, and even an attempt to close our doors - our present troubles seem small. We are still living in a land of plenty. As a nation, we are suffering because of the actions of the stubborn, the incompetent and the unscrupulous. We don't know who to believe and we don't know who to trust. But here at Southern Miss, I hope you will take heart, as I do, that smart people can solve problems and we are, in fact, smart people.

I hope you will take heart, as I do, that the problems before us today are only about money. Take heart, as I do, that the essence of this university remains intact. We are still a place characterized by a spirit of humanity: kindness, compassion, respect and support for others. We are still people who believe in our ability to produce necessary or desired results. We are still a university that can find the balance between the collective good and the good of the individual. We still enjoy traditions passed from previous generations. We celebrate our diversity and know the importance of respecting differences in race, culture, ethnicity, interests, thought, socio-economic background and beliefs.

Take heart, as I do, that we have strong and able leadership at the department levels and much improved communication between executive leadership and the governance groups.

Take heart, as I do, that we are a productive campus with much to celebrate. Just this past week I learned that we have doubled our number of NSF career award winners. Previously, we held two of these prestigious awards. Today we hold four, thanks to the efforts of Paige Phillips and Doug Masterson from the department of chemistry. David Butler, professor of political science, won \$800K from the Department of Homeland Security. Gordon Cannon, Robert Bateman and Frank Moore received \$700K, \$500K and \$320 from the NSF for their work.

Just this past week we learned that our outstanding honors college senior, Paul Saputo, has already been accepted to law school at the University of Virginia and Duke. Paul is a great young man who has benefitted from the boost our Honors College has given him.

Just this past week we learned that our student leader, Bentley Anderson, has obtained a summer internship in Senator Wicker's Washington office.

Just this past week we were able to sell the bonds for our new residence halls at a favorable rate and will break ground for this much-needed 900 bed facility on the Hattiesburg campus in within the next 30 days.

Just this past week, I accepted the first gift for our Centennial scholarship campaign and we will soon kick off fundraising for that very important project.

Just this past week I learned that the master plan for the new Southern Miss Gulf Coast campus at Cross Creek is ready for IHL approval in April and a production crew from Animal Planet spent time taping and filming to do a segment on Dr. Robin M. Overstreet at GCRL.

Just yesterday I learned that our Dean of Students, Eddie Holloway, has been named the IHL Board's Black History Month Educator of the Year.

Morale is important. Being clear is important. Being perceived as caring and concerned is important. Flatly saying your precious airplane is not “on the table” when everything else is, is poor planning, bad public relations, and more of a crystal clear insight into your true character than you ever wanted to reveal. You may not have sensed it in the room, but that move cost you. You may not sensed it around campus and the community, but people are talking about you and Southern Miss. They are not talking about grants received, honors earned, or student placement; it is about that silly little airplane. It

represents so much and you refuse to see it out of ignorance, arrogance, or greed. How do you suppose that makes you look to many people on campus and in the community? Your answer to that question, and your actions based on it, may well determine the rest of your presidency.