

## **President's Remarks for Tallahassee Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Day**

### **"The URGENCY of NOW"**

**Thank you to Ms. Cummings for that wonderful introduction and for all that you do to lead our efforts and engagement with Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University alumni. We appreciate your leadership.**

**I am honored to be here with you today as we celebrate the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on what would have been his 90th birthday weekend.**

**Standing on these steps has special significance, beyond symbolism. Many of the laws that govern this great state are crafted and decided upon right here. Resources/dollars that support everything from education to health care to transportation to public safety are decided upon here by the men and women elected by citizens from the panhandle to the Florida Keys.**

**From a distance, or from the perspective of the casual observer, it might seem as though the processes associated with what happens in the Florida Legislature are intermittent, starting at a specific date - ending on another. But when viewed much closer and by the astute observer it becomes obvious that political processes in Florida and equally in our nation in general, don't have temporal boundaries defined by specific dates and times but rather they are continuous: occurring at sunrise, sundown, throughout the night – and throughout all seasons of the year. And thus to influence what happens here, there must be an appreciation for the simple concepts of persistence and perseverance; not waiting for tomorrow, not waiting until your ducks are all lined up in a row, not waiting until you can afford to take a risk because your finances are finally in order. Getting engaged and remaining engaged.**

**This brings me to this year's theme: "The URGENCY of NOW." With regards to Dr. King's dream, what's the urgency? Surely, in 2019 things are much better than they were in 1968? What's the urgency? Why now? I believe the answers to these questions are obvious to everyone assembled here today. As much as we have hoped, prayed and worked, on the day that we celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we can not proclaim in the words of that old negro spiritual – Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty We are Free at Last. There is work to be done**

**and there's no better time to do it than right now! And there's no one better qualified to take on this great work than you!**

**If it is OK, I would like to add one more element to the our theme: Urgency of Now. I would like to add: The urgency of now – and the necessity of persistence.**

**Unless we take action now to address the shortfalls or gaps in attaining a more just society then we likely won't succeed. We will continue to push the can down the road and more and more people in our society will be trapped in a maze of poverty, poor health, poor health care and stifled dreams. And if we assume that there is one piece of legislation for example, one constitutional amendment, one session of the legislature, one time of the year to act, one election to vote in, one march or one act of civil disobedience that will bring inequality, injustice or hatred to their knees, then we will not move closer to the realization of the dream. Our work must go into overdrive NOW, and we will not be able to take any days off!**

**At Florida A&M University, we understand the intent and relevance of this year's theme. Somewhere in Florida, or in one of the 30 states or 70 countries from which our students hail, there is student whose admission to FAMU is being determined by those whose assemble in this edifice – we must work on that student's behalf now and tomorrow. Someone believes that that student's full potential can be measured by a test score along.**

**Waking up in a humble dwelling in Miami, Florida is a future student leader at FAMU and perhaps a future governor. Someone believes that the contributions of that student to this state and nation can be determined by their family's income. That student's family knelt in prayer last night asking the Lord, how are we going to pay for the journey to and through their college experience. We have to work everyday to raise funds to help that family's dreams come true and help those who make the laws and policies of this state and nation understand that we can not afford to lose that fertile mind. The solution to some present and some yet to be revealed problem rests somewhere in the mind of that student. We need them to help make us whole. We need them now!**

**We know at FAMU that we can not assume that the next 131 years will be filled with the wonders of the past without applying a sense of urgency to all that we do. Great things happen ever day at FAMU simply because we refuse to become complacent, rest on our laurels and assume that our work can be put off until tomorrow. We fully understand what's at stake!**

**While our work first and foremost is the business of producing scientists, engineers, teachers, nurses, pharmacists, lawyers, business professionals, journalists, architects, artists and historians, to name a few, we take great pride in the social engagement and commitment to service of our students, faculty, staff and alumni. From the bus boycotts of the late 50's to the efforts of the Rattler nation to help victims of hurricane Michael, we take Dr. King's legacy of service and commitment to community, very seriously. It is woven into the fabric of everything we do.**

**And with regards to our theme and more specifically, the "Movement" and your role in it, please know that you are indispensable. You are on the first team and on the front line. Don't look around for back ups or replacements but do all that you can to inspire others to join you in the struggle. In the society that Dr. King envisioned, there are only winners. In Dr. King's society there are no battles between the haves and the have nots or between the have nots and the have nots.**

**Dr. King envisioned a world in which we would all be judged by the content of our character. In Memphis the night before his assassination, Dr. King stated, "Like anybody, I would like to have a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will." I urge you today to do God's will. Don't wait for the perfect day or perfect circumstances. They may never come. Don't be petrified by fear of the unknown. There will be a place for you too in the Promised Land. As we say in the NAACP, the struggle continues and we need you in it. Thank you!**

I want you to know that the Florida A&M University community recently celebrated Dr. King by bringing Dr. Everett Ward to campus, the president of St. Augustine's

University and General President of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., of which King was a member.

Dr. Ward leads the Alpha's with the theme "The Urgency of Now," which is so appropriate during these times, as you have chosen it for this occasion, as well. Dr. Ward challenged us to not be apathetic as we continue the work of creating the world Dr. King envisioned. At FAMU we have accepted the mantle and so today, I challenge you to do all you can because, now is the time!

This week, former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. David Satcher, visited Tallahassee to encourage the importance of student activism, which has always been a part of FAMU's DNA. From the bus boycotts of the late 50's to Coach Willie Simmons leading the Rattler football team to help victims of hurricane Michael, we take Dr. King's legacy of service and commitment to community, very seriously. It is woven into the fabric of everything we do.

At FAMU last week, we also welcomed the youngest living member of the Tuskegee Airmen, Lt. Col. George Hardy, 93 years old, who's recollection and memory of his life from 50 years ago as a ground-breaking aviator is remarkable. He helped open the door for future African Americans to fly and helped to integrate the armed forces.

Hardy flew 70 combat missions as an aviator before returning to the states in April 1971. His decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor, the Air Medal with eleven (11) Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster. Lt. Col. Hardy is truly an American Legend and we are proud to have had the opportunity to expose our students to living history. As the late James Eaton said, "African American history, IS the history of America."

This weekend we participated in the naming of the Rev. C. K. Steele Memorial Highway. Rev. Steele represents Tallahassee's direct connection to the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King. Rev. Steele, was the first Vice President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and shared the vision of social equality through non-violence, making a monumental difference in this city organizing the Tallahassee Bus Boycott.

As many of you know, I am from Memphis, Tennessee, the place where Dr. King led the protest for sanitation workers and was assassinated shortly thereafter. I proudly served as President of the NAACP there, and so this day has special significance and meaning to me. I have dedicated my life to serving young people through education as a means to bring about the opportunities that Dr. King

envisioned. And we are accomplishing these lofty objectives at FAMU today and have done so every day for 131 years.

Let me share a few FAMU success stories, because Rattlers are on the move, everywhere!

- On Capitol Hill Congressman Al Lawson represents the 5th Congressional District, which includes Tallahassee and Jacksonville.
- Dr. Mareena Robinson Snowden made history. She is the first American-born woman of color to earn a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology...
- G. Scott Uzzel recently became President and CEO of Nike's Converse brand...
- Tiffany Greene, is a graduate of our School of Journalism and Graphic Communication. You see her broadcasting college football and other sports events on ESPN...and
- Amir Windom and Woody McClain, both FAMU graduates, released their movie "Canal Street" this past weekend. McClain played in the Marching "100" at FAMU and Windom is a Grammy Award Winning Record Executive who has worked with Bruno Mars and Pharrell Williams.

Rattlers are as committed to the opportunity to help their fellow man –as they are excited about going to a homecoming game. Whether it is donating supplies during a hurricane or simply extending a hand to someone who needs it, our students understand sacrifice and scholarship and stand ready to accept the challenges– traits that were exemplified during the civil rights era.

Our motto, "Excellence with Caring," matters. It means we are about the business of creating champions, students of depth and diversity, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., envisioned.

FAMU refuses to sit down, or accept the status quo. We want more scientists, more teachers, more doctors, more nurses, more pharmacists, more lawyers, more engineers, more business professionals, more journalists, more architects and computer scientists and everything in between. And we are laser focused on producing them.

At FAMU, we work every day to bring about the day of which Dr. King so eloquently spoke about. FAMU is Rising and with your support, we will not fall or fail. "We Shall Overcome!"

Thank you!