

President H. Patrick Swygert
Howard University Opening Convocation
Washington, University
Sept. 23, 2005

CONGRESSMAN FORD

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

STAFF

FACULTY

SPECIALLY INVITED GUESTS

AND MOST OF ALL, THE CLASS OF 2009

Welcome to our 138th Annual Opening Convocation and welcome to Howard University.

It is my distinct pleasure to host this ceremony once again, inaugurating another academic year. As always, there is that sense of promise and hopefulness for bright new beginnings as we participate in this activity.

With more of the semester--more of the academic year ahead of us than behind us-- it is still in the realm of possibility that we can achieve all our goals and fulfill our obligations. This is what makes the beginning of the school year special. It is the beginning of a brand new journey, a journey that allows us to take a different approach to those endeavors that had not worked very well in the past.

For us at Howard, and a significant number of students in our midst, this semester is special for another reason. We

have in our midst close to 70 students from the Gulf Coast-- victims of Hurricane Katrina, perhaps one of the worst natural disasters to occur in this country in the past century. These students have come to us devastated by the lost of their homes, material possessions, pets, friends and families in some instances, the college environment in which they began their education and their entire lifestyles as they knew it.

Specifically, Howard opened its doors to students from its sister schools, Xavier and Dillard. On Tuesday, September 6, the first two dozen students were welcomed to the campus, and in the following weeks others have come as well.

In the wake of the disaster, Howard also launched another initiative, (www.hbcurelief.org), and the HBCU relief website. Designed to serve as a national reference point for

individuals needing information, or wanting to contribute to the relief effort.

Certainly, our hearts go out to these new members of our community today as it did weeks ago when the disaster began to unfold right before our eyes through the national media. We are grateful that some students have chosen Howard to continue their education and we pledge to make their experience here a truly rewarding one.

Further, I want to give these students the assurance that the Howard University family stands ready to help them as they seek to continue their education and rebuild their lives.

Again, welcome to Howard University.

Before the disaster struck New Orleans and the plight of the victims took center stage in our lives, we were preoccupied

with far more routine tasks. On August 20, we held our traditional *Welcoming and Pinning Ceremony* for new students and their families. I was thankful and deeply touched by the citation the Howard University Student Association (HUSA) presented to me commemorating the 10th anniversary of my presidency at Howard University.

I remain deeply honored at the privilege I have to continue to serve as the University's 15th president especially as the University continues to grow in so many ways.

Last spring, for example, we graduated our largest class ever. This semester, meanwhile, we are off to a great start with an impressive undergraduate, graduate and professional student enrollment and a higher than projected number of National Achievement Scholars. This solid enrollment of diverse domestic and international students ensures that we can continue to carry out the University's

historic mission of providing high quality education and diverse opportunities to our students.

At the last count, 1,571 students were issued registration permits, just 29 short of the projected 1,600. Sixty-five National Achievement Scholar finalists are among the incoming class. As of August 22, the combined SAT average of the freshman class is 1,090. The male average is 1,116 and the female average 1,077. The grade point average is 3.20 (3.10 for males and 3.24 for females).

We applaud all our students' achievements and look forward to your contribution to Howard University, the legacy you will leave behind upon completion of your education at one of the finest institutions of higher learning in this country.

Every student who comes through the gates of Howard has a contribution to make. For our students, the Howard

experience has never been just about earning a degree but about acquiring a well-rounded education on their place in the world.

The disaster in the Gulf States has reinforced the extent to which we need visionary leaders not only in politics, sociology, history and all the critical areas of the humanities but in less traditional areas like environmental management and disaster preparedness. Certainly, we will continue to train our young people to assume positions of leadership and responsibility and we vow to be a part of that process of introspection that, hopefully, will yield answers as to what we need to do differently.

I know that there are those among us who will take up the challenge as you have done in so many

The semester started off too with the news that Howard was again in the *USNEWS*' 2006 "America's Best Colleges" issue, ranked among the top 50 national universities, cited as "Great Schools for Great Prices." This year, the University ranked 24th this year, a rise of four positions from last year.

And, the Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science (MS)², a public charter school committed to academic excellence, also became operational this fall.

Founded on an academic model, designed to prepare students for college and careers in math, science, and engineering. The school is characterized by a highly qualified instructional staff, state-of-the-art technology designed specifically for middle school students, a longer school day with fast-track instructional programs, and a wide

variety of after-school enrichment activities developed by Howard University faculty and staff, and small class sizes with a low student- to- teacher ratio.

Those students are here today and I would like to extend a warm welcome to them as well.

The Middle School is another excellent initiative on the part of Howard University and I know that in the long run, it will yield great benefits for our community.

As we begin this year, allow me once again to express my heartfelt thanks to all of you your support, and your loyalty to *Alma Mater* over the years.

There is little doubt that there is much to be proud of, but equally, that there is much more to be done. I can only do it with your continued support and your prayers.

Thanks again to all of you and my very best wishes for a productive semester.