

May 9, 2007

## **Speech by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton at the Installation of Gallaudet President Robert R. Davila:**

Thank you very much, Mr. Wu, and I beg your indulgence and that of the United States Congress. Some of you may know that I do vote in committee and I vote on the floor of the House in the Committee of the Whole. I was warned as I left the office that a vote is likely to come shortly, so I very much appreciate the opportunity to say my words of welcome and congratulations to your new president before the bell tolls for me [*laughter*], as we hope it will toll for the District of Columbia every time the bell rings for a vote from here on [*applause*].

Well, I am here above all as a proud daughter of Gallaudet who proudly has an honorary degree from Gallaudet University. And I am here, and honored, at the Installation of President Robert Davila, which makes me think of a word usually reserved for graduations. The word is "commencement."

That word, of course, always has important meaning at graduation time, as it surely will this year on Friday, May the 11th, for the great--for the first graduation since the student rebellion of last year ended. But if "commencement" means the beginning for graduates who have just finished the vicissitudes of a college education, imagine what it must mean for President Davila. We look to our new President for a multitude of new beginnings, for students, faculty, staff, and for this great institution itself.

Students probably regard The Uprising of 2006 as their revolution, yet they and all of us who love Gallaudet and who read history know all too well that revolutions do not always bring the changes that are promised. Too few revolutions are remembered with the fondness of the American Revolution of 1776. And we are still trying to realize some of its major promises, not the least of them that the Revolution was fought because the Americans were denied representation.

May the slogan of that great revolution--a slogan that is honored and revered by Gallaudet students, who, when they are in the District of Columbia, qualify to vote wherever their residence may have been, are qualified to vote. So I say in their name as well: May the slogan of our great Revolution--"No taxation without representation"--come to life in the Nation's Capital this year, with the DC-Utah bill to give DC residents, including the residents of Gallaudet [University] a vote in the House of Representatives for the first time in 206 years.

[*Visual applause*]

I surely believe that under President Davila, Gallaudet will continue in the great tradition signified by the signing of your charter by Abraham Lincoln, as our country began to keep some of the promises inherent in our founding.

Like the United States when it was founded, Gallaudet is first of a kind, one of a kind, and a beacon to all the world. Here, all languages are welcome and possible, sign language, and every other language as well, including spoken English. And here, all are invited to communicate with another, deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people. Would that that could be said in universities across the United States of America.

Your own story, Mr. President, is in keeping with the inspiring stories of many of Gallaudet's own students in this college here today. A little boy who had experienced the wonders of hearing, the sounds of music, and of nature, and the voices of his mother and father, becomes deaf at eight, and then, not even in puberty, goes alone, to Berkeley, for his first formal education, denied his parents, as poor farm workers. Could those parents, or even you, Mr. President, have envisioned that this child would become president of a major university that is recognized and admired the world over?

Your own character, grit, and many of your personal characteristics account for your success. I think that you would concede, however, Mr. President, that even your gifts could not have been offered here and elsewhere without the gift of education that you yourself received. Today, we need to educate each and every deaf and hard-of-hearing person with the desire to go to college. No less than our place in the world depends upon leaving no willing mind untrained.

Demographers warn about ominous signs that we may be peaking in college attendance just as we need quickly to surge, to double and triple our college rates to compete with the very ambitious Chinese and Indians and Japanese and Asians who are exporting their college-trained people just to help us keep ahead. We have the most educated work force in the world today, to be sure, because almost 85% have a high school diploma, up from 25% in 1940, and 28% have a college degree--a five-fold increase.

However, a high school education will not keep us competitive in a global and technological economy. And predictions are that growing numbers of poor, and poorly educated people, meaning that high school and college attendance, could even decline somewhat. This, of course, because the highly educated and very numerous Baby Boom generation is retiring.

As we stare these demographic predictors in the face, there is a premium on Gallaudet and all that it can offer. Your students will graduate not in the century of the telephone, but of the computer. They will go to work in an economy where people communicate digitally, not vocally, where the brain and what it can do counts, not old modes of communication. Today and tomorrow we will type it and e-mail it and use other short-hand and fast digital modes of interoperable communication, and the language is not likely to be English and French, but computer languages, such as C++, [Visual C+++], Java, Pearl and [HTML].

This means that Gallaudet's emphasis on technology puts you already ahead of

the game, the game that is galloping upon us. I have no doubt that if Gallaudet continues to keep looking forward, and does not look back, you will be even better positioned than most, in a world that is less interested in what spoken language you speak, than in what computer language you know.

I believe, Mr. President, that you are a perfect messenger to carry forward the Gallaudet revolution of students and faculty and all of us across the board. All have gathered around you. All love you. All are grateful that you have returned to an institution that has only had eight presidents in all its 143 years, and that you have already served so very well. Who knows? Who could know the university and what it needs, better than a man who has taught here in the classroom of the elementary school and the high school, and nine years in the college itself?

Mr. President, you know Gallaudet as no president has ever known it, in all its iterations and at all its levels. Much is at stake, especially for an institution which depends on the Federal Government for two-thirds of its budget, and where many of us will look especially to you for what is done with the Kendall School and your secondary school. But your broad shoulders are ready-made for the task you have so generously agreed to make your own, Mr. President. It is a testament to your lifetime of work for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in education and as an administrator in the Department of Education. It is a testament to your lifetime of devotion to education that all have gathered around you, from student and faculty revolutionaries across the board and back again.

There can be no more deserved homecoming for you, Mr. President, and there could be no better sign that Gallaudet is on its way and challenging all the rest of higher education to catch up with this great American university. I bring you the congratulations, Mr. President, of the Congress of the United States.

*[Standing ovation]*

[End]