

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

INSTALLATION SPEECH OF ROBERT R. DAVILA, NINTH PRESIDENT OF GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY:

This has truly been a wonderful experience. I'm at a loss for words. But I know I can't escape without giving you a few. I just want to tell you that I stand here today, humbled and honored. I accept both the honor you have bestowed upon me and the enormous responsibility to be the steward, the leader of our great university. I thank the students, faculty, and staff for their warm welcome and introduction.

I share much in common with students and the faculty and staff who are here. I thank the Board of Trustees for their continuing support and encouragement. Without all of this support from the community that I am now leading, I would not succeed. And I hope we can continue to support one another and stick with our mission. I consider this maybe the toughest job and the greatest responsibility that I've ever accepted. But my experience in the last four months has taught me that this community, of which you are all members and that we all share responsibility for, can do anything when we put our minds to it. And in no time more than today, 2007, have we really needed this kind of united responsibility.

Truly, the students who come here to study deserve nothing but the best possible education that we can give them. And that's truly the fundamental purpose of our university. This university has proven time and time again over the years that it can do wonderful service for individuals and helping to shape their lives in a way that students deserve and that will carry them throughout their lives.

Just a small example: On Sunday I spoke to a gathering in Connecticut. It was a chapter of the GUAA--the Alumni Association. And I stood up on a raised platform, as I am doing now, and gave an address. There were about 150 people, all dressed in their finery. It was a beautiful audience to speak to. And during the middle of the speech, I was looking at the audience and the thought struck me. I thought: Wow, look here. These are people who've had success in their lives--mothers and fathers, homeowners, professionals, a few lawyers, a few chemists, people from the technology fields--a few teachers--people from a variety of professions.

It reminded me that when I was a young man, when I was ready to leave college, people did not have opportunities to have those kinds of jobs. That's progress that we've made since then, and we have to credit this great university and the people within it for that success and the success that deaf people have made over the years. I thank God that I'm still young enough to have benefited from those opportunities, and now old enough to appreciate what was and what will be for others. It's truly wonderful.

We love this university. There's no other reason I would have wanted to come here to work after I was fully retired. I would have stayed in retirement, but the only reason I could fathom, or imagine, to be called to come out of retirement to come to work and help

Again, like I said. I can't do this alone. It's a responsibility that all of us share for the future and for our community's sake, and the competition we face with the development of global economy and technology that influences how people live and work and learn all over the world. We have a greater responsibility than ever before to be sure that we provide students the preparation, the education, the knowledge and the tools that are needed to succeed and be competitive.

And so what we do here on campus for our people levels the playing field for them for when they leave college. And that responsibility will never change. In fact, the responsibility for us who remain concerns our knowledge and expertise in different fields and will increase as time goes by.

I'm really proud to be called to be a leader of this university. I feel humbled with this responsibility, but I'm encouraged by the experiences I've had in the last four months that we have wonderful people here on this campus, people willing to work, willing to sacrifice, willing to do everything possible to keep us No. 1 in the field of work that we do.

So I accept this responsibility, and I accept the mission of the university to prepare young people for the larger competitive society that they will enter sometime later. We really wish to do the best for them and we have demonstrated that we are capable of doing that. That will never change.

I want to thank you for asking me to be your leader. I accept that responsibility. I cherish that responsibility. I'll do everything I can, and I'll be calling on you all, because together we can't lose.

Thank you very much for this wonderful opportunity, ladies and gentlemen! [Cheers and visual applause]. And thanks go to the Board for their continuing support. And, of course, I want to thank my family for giving me so much of themselves.

Thank you very much.

[Standing ovation]

[End]