



Southern University Alumni Federation

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year, Southernites!

Last week, I traveled to Shreveport to participate in Calvary Missionary Baptist Church's "40 Hour Prayer Vigil." This is the 34th year that the church has held the vigil. At the end of every year, the church, pastored by Rev. Joe R. Gant, Jr., dedicates an hour to pray for Southern and Grambling. Unlike the competition and rivalry we will witness tomorrow when our basketball teams meet in the F.G. Clark Activity Center, this gathering of our universities is intended to bring Louisiana's two public HBCUs together in prayer and solidarity. That said, I must confess I said a little extra prayer to resist the urge to talk a little "smack" when it was my turn to address the congregation.

Our esteemed Shreveport Chapter President, Jean Ware, was in charge of planning the Southern University portion of the joint program, and she did a fantastic job. President-Chancellor Belton gave the keynote address on behalf of Southern, and, as expected, he did a great job and made us proud. However, I was blown away during the program when one of the scheduled soloists failed to show up. Without flinching, Rev. Gant stood up, surveyed the crowd, and said, "no problem." He called SUSLA's Faculty Senate President, Professor Sonya Hester, to the front of the church. What happened next, Jags and Knights, just blew me away. Professor Hester walked up, took the microphone and just started singing. She sang about how "thankful" she was. It was beautiful and powerful. The song put all of 2015 into perspective for me. It summed up all of my feelings for this past year, and I simply accepted the anointing of her gift of song. Yes, Southernites, I am thankful for the many blessings we have collectively experienced last year, and I am so excited about the possibilities for 2016.

Tonight, I look forward to attending the installation service of SU Alum, Dr. Rene F. Brown, as President of the 4th District Missionary Baptist Association. Dr. Brown is the pastor of the historic Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church here in Baton Rouge. He is the 15th president of the 4th district, which has 200 churches, and succeeds Pastor Jesse Bilberry. Pastor Brown has giant footsteps to fill, but I know he will do a fantastic job.

On Monday, Marian and I look forward to attending the Inauguration of Governor John Bel Edwards on the steps of the Capitol. She is bringing her 5th grade students, and it will be an exciting moment in Louisiana history. We also plan to attend the Governor's Inaugural Ball later that night at Celtic Studios. It will be a huge celebration. But, then Tuesday morning, the really hard work begins. The new administration will have its work cut out for it as it attempts to solve the state's huge budget deficit, strengthen higher education and simply make Louisiana a better state. However, I'm so excited about the possibilities of making Southern stronger and helping it return to its rightful place of prominence. 2016 will be the best year ever for the Jaguar Nation. I can feel it!!

Happy New Year!

Preston

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Making a Great University Greater!

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