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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
BY
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U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
AT
CHEYNEY UNIVERSITY
CHEYNEY, PENNSYLVANIA
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Good morning, President Mullet, Distinguished Guests, Graduates, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted and deeply honored to join you today to deliver the Commencement address for the 1996 Commencement exercises of Cheyney University. Like you who are graduating today, I am finding this morning's ceremony a moving experience. In part, this is because, as I look out upon you, the Cheyney University Class of 1996, I am reminded how, nearly thirty years ago, I, too, sat patiently waiting for all of the preliminaries to be completed, so that I could receive and hold the tangible evidence of my academic accomplishments in my hand, and finally believe that the degree that I had so earnestly sought was really mine at last.

I obviously did receive my degree and went on to devote my life to scientific pursuits. As you may know, I was educated and began my career in Physics as a particle theorist, and later became a condensed matter theorist. Last year, in the space of a few weeks, I went from being a Professor of Physics at Rutgers University to a member of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in May 1995, and to the Chairmanship of the agency since last July. My rapid transition from the laboratory and the campus to providing policy guidance and management direction for one of the government's major science and technology-based regulatory bodies has provided me a unique vantage point for assessing the value and promise of the educational enterprise.

But my thoughts today are not only invoked by memories of a personal past. It is quite impossible for me, given who I am, to be on the campus of the nation's oldest Historically Black educational institution, without experiencing pride in the positive impact that the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCU's, have had on the African-American community and, indeed, on American society as a whole. Moreover, although I am here today representing the Clinton Administration

as Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I was, in what I like to call my "other life," a member of the faculty of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Rutgers University, in New Jersey. As such, I share the professoriate's passion for the pursuit of knowledge, and I personally understand the significant accomplishment that is your graduation today. For all of these reasons, I feel privileged to participate with you in this ceremony.

Your commencement today, as important a milestone as it is, should be looked upon as only the beginning of many accomplishments to come. Some of you will go on to further studies. Others will enter the job market or change careers. It is an exciting time for you and I am excited for you. With all of the technological advancements that are forthcoming, your future holds much promise, even as it is challenging. In your pursuit of your future, you should remember the accomplishments of those who have come before you and use that knowledge as inspiration in the years to come. Historically Black Colleges and Universities such as Cheyney University have produced some of our nation's finest citizens. Almost half of the African-American members of the U.S. Congress and many of the nation's past and present big-city mayors including Maynard Jackson, Andrew Young and David Dinkins hailed from HBCUs. Award winning literary graduates include Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, and Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison. Successful entrepreneurs include Earl G. Graves, Jr., Publisher, Black Enterprise Magazine. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson, John Lewis and almost all of our nation's Civil Rights leaders have come from Black colleges. Let us not forget that the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, graduated from Lincoln University, just down the road. There are many others. Keep these individuals in mind as you move from this supportive University environment into the future of the "real world." You have been fortunate to have attended this institution and to have reaped the benefits of an HBCU education.

As so aptly stated by Dr. Kenneth Tollet, a distinguished professor of law at Howard University, "In these more congenial academic settings, African-American students know they will not have to contend with any forms of institutional racism. They know they can devote their energies to learning and not have to be concerned with defending themselves from the racial attacks that have been occurring more and more frequently on majority campuses all over the nation." But perhaps more important is the fact that African-American students know that they will be taught and advised by instructors and administrators who believe in them and in their ability to learn, and who will hold high expectations for their academic success.

As articulated so eloquently recently (Ebony Magazine, May 1996) by Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook, President of Dillard University, in reflecting on his experiences at Morehouse College, your

professors are your mentors and inspirers, who challenge you, elevate your sights, reveal the possibilities of what your own hard work, decency, integrity and character can allow you to achieve. I know that the families, friends and faculty who are here today have high expectations for you, and have provided you with the support you needed to succeed.

Nevertheless, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, in spite of their record of accomplishment, have faced a number of challenges, particularly as the costs of operating an educational institution and obtaining an education continue to rise. In these circumstances, the penalty for being wrong about choices made to keep pace with developments on other college campuses may fall particularly hard on HBCU's, which generally do not have the resources available to large state and privately funded institutions to experiment with change. Fortunately, national support also has been forthcoming for both you and the future students of HBCUs such as Cheyney University. I am personally proud to be associated with the Clinton Administration, which has had the insight to recognize the value of Historically Black educational institutions as national assets, and the foresight to support HBCU's by committing Federal resources at record levels. On November 1, 1993, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12876, considered to be the strongest Executive Order issued on Historically Black Colleges and Universities since the inception of the Federal program in 1980. Although much of the Federal funding ensuing from this Executive Order is in the form of facilities and equipment grants, faculty fellowships, grants for centers of excellence in science and mathematics, and major research projects, nearly \$310 million in fiscal year 1994 went to student financial assistance. As a result, nearly every one of you receiving a degree today from Cheyney University probably shared in the benefits of this expanded Federal support either directly or indirectly.

With this national, institutional and personal support, you are well prepared to enter the nation's work force, to continue your journey in the pursuit of knowledge and to put your education to work serving the African-American community and society at large. It will not always be easy and not always as supportive as your experience here at Cheyney.

Your graduation today is a beginning -- a commencement. The world is not static -- it is ever evolving. You must change and grow as new challenges confront you -- you must continue learning. If you do not believe in yourselves, stand up, and participate in society at all levels you will be lost. Moreover, if you have the talent that your graduation today indicates, if you have your health and if you have opportunity, you have a responsibility to use these gifts. And opportunity still exists in spite of where the country seems to be going in race

relations. Besides, the only way to keep the clock from turning back is for you to keep pushing the edge of the envelope.

But I note that your song, The Alma Mater, references that "Thou light can never fail." It is that personal "light" or drive that has kept me moving forward when times have been tough, and it is that personal drive that will inspire you if at times you feel a lack of support from those around you. Therefore, I encourage you to remember those who have succeeded before you, who have created a bridge for you to cross the rivers of life, and those who have supported you throughout your times here at Cheyney. You can and will succeed if you believe in yourselves.

In a few short minutes, you will be invited to come forward to receive the degrees which you have worked so hard to earn and which holds the promise of a very bright personal future. My hope is that you share this moment of pride and accomplishment with your family and friends who are here today to celebrate this important event in your lives. I am immensely proud of each one of you and extend to you my best wishes for a rewarding future. Thank you.