

## ACCEPTANCE REMARKS

Richard C. Sutton, Executive Director-Designate  
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education  
Columbia, South Carolina  
4 April 2013

Thank you for that warm welcome. You make me feel very much at home.

I am proud and humbled to accept your invitation to become the Commission's next Executive Director. South Carolina has enormous potential to become a premier laboratory for growth and innovation in the rapidly changing environment of higher education. I am excited about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Forty years ago I was fresh out of college and a new teaching assistant at Chimborozo Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia. Sort of a Pat Conroy figure in the inner city instead of a barrier island, but the process was the same—teaching dirt poor kids that knowin' stuff is better than not knowin' stuff.

I never imagined then that I would someday be asked to lead the higher education system of a state that produced this nation's finest Secretary of Education, Governor Richard Riley.

I come from a family that valued education. Let me tell you two quick stories that might help you understand my background and beliefs.

On my mother's side, my grandfather was a school principal, and my grandmother was a kindergarten teacher. Their four daughters all went to college, even in the midst of the Great Depression and World War II. Those women went on to pursue successful careers, raise healthy families, and live full lives.

On my father's side, neither grandparent finished high school, much less went to college. But that did not stop them from sending both of their sons to university on a trainman's salary, and then on to law and graduate school. They set up college savings accounts for their grandchildren long before there were such things as 529 plans.

All of these people told me, in their words and deeds, that education was the key to success. Their message was reinforced by scores of my teachers, professors, mentors, and role models. You can make something of yourself, but you need the tools to do it, and education provides those tools.

And they were right. I'm here today not because I'm better or more naturally talented than anybody else (as my wife frequently reminds me). I'm here because I took advantage of this nation's shared investment in higher education.

And that, really, is the purpose of this Commission--to ensure that post-secondary education is within the reach of every student, with strong academic programs in accessible places at

affordable costs. This is how we will fuel the engine of economic development in every corner of the state.

Without making this sound like an Oscar acceptance, I would like to express my thanks...

- ◆ First, to the Commissioners. I am deeply honored by your confidence in my ability to lead South Carolina's higher education enterprise.
- ◆ Next, to the Search Committee. Your thorough (and exhaustive!) process was a credit to the Commission's integrity and fairness.
- ◆ Finally, to the Commission staff. You have carried many burdens during this lengthy transition, but you have done so with grace and professionalism. Today we launch a new era, and I will count on those skills as we move forward to conquer the challenges ahead.

I am looking forward to working with all of you, with our outstanding group of presidents, and with our partners in the General Assembly. Together we will build a strong network of educational opportunities to serve every student who aspires to a brighter future.

We are, all of us, entering into a new relationship, a compact not unlike a marriage. We will have our ups and downs, our good times and bad. But we will get through them all. We will be the grown-up parents who put the interests of our children first. The students of South Carolina deserve no less.

Which reminds me of that famous exchange between Nancy Astor and Winston Churchill, those two leading protagonists in modern British history.

Lady Astor said to Churchill, "If you were my husband, I would put poison in your coffee."

To which Churchill replied, "And if you were my wife, I would drink it."

On that note, let's grab a cup of coffee and get to work. Thanks for your support.