

As Prepared

REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN
DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT

May 19, 2013

President Williams; Senator Tom Carper; Chairman Claibourne Smith, and the Delaware State Board of Trustees; faculty members, distinguished honorees and guests, and most importantly, Delaware State University Class of 2013 – thank you all for the honor of sharing this important moment with you.

Before I go any further, I want to join you in gratitude for a very special part of the Delaware State family -- the parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, spouses, children, and friends who have stood by you during the years of this journey. Many of them have traveled near and far to share in the joy of this moment. Let's give them all a round of applause.

Scripture beckons us: “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are...for all the land that you see I will give to you.” [Genesis 13:14-15]. I want to speak briefly this morning about the opportunities and the challenges you will face when you leave here today and begin to claim your place in this world.

Our vision at NASA is to reach for new heights and reveal the unknown so that what we do and learn will benefit all humankind.

That is a vision that challenges all of us.

In my travels across the country and around the world, I find that students everywhere are excited about exploring the unknown and creating a better world. They are fired up about what lies ahead, for the chance to develop capabilities that don't exist today. They want to be a part of something larger than themselves and they want to leave this world better than they found it.

For 112 years, that has been the mission of Delaware State and all of you have embraced it with a passion. Before Delaware's first black lawyer, Louis R. Redding of Wilmington, fought alongside Thurgood Marshall to end separate but equal; before the doors of the University of Delaware and other major colleges around the country were opened to blacks, this University served as an oasis of opportunity and learning...and over the years has become one of the leading HBCU's in this nation.

Class of 2013, you are graduating at a pivotal moment in American history. In 1960, your own Associate Professor of Social Work, Dolores Finger Wright, who was then a student at Bennett College, was arrested while protesting in support of the "Greensboro Four," the four young men from North Carolina A & T who waged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth lunch counter – a seminal moment in civil rights history.

This year also marks the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King so eloquently reminded us that his Dream of equal opportunity was inextricably woven into the fabric of the American Dream. Fifty years later, this year, we witnessed the second inauguration of America's first Black President. Even though challenges remain, Dr. King's Dream is still on the march and there are more ways than ever for you to contribute to the life of this country and to the global community.

Delaware State has prepared you well. In this audience sits some of the future leaders of America.

I am especially proud of the role that Delaware State is playing in preparing the next generation of scientists, engineers, and explorers who will be crucial to maintaining America's technological leadership and boosting the nation's economy in the coming years.

This University's increased emphasis on STEM is already making a difference. With the help of a NASA grant, you have expanded your Optics Sciences program. The head of that College, Dr. Nouredine Melikechi [NOR-A-DEAN MALEE-CHEE], has been named Delaware's "Ambassador to Mars" for his work on the ChemCam laser that is part of our *Curiosity* rover and is being used for the first time to help determine the composition of Martian rock and soil.

These are the kind of skills we need at NASA as we enter a new era of space exploration that will take us farther into the solar system than we have ever been before.

Yes, our economy is still struggling to recover. Yes, the world has conflicts and challenges that threaten us on a global scale. But, I ask you to put those thoughts aside and focus on today.

At NASA alone, there are opportunities for you. For those of you with STEM backgrounds, our nation's space program needs you. America's technology industries need you. And thanks to the education you have received here, many of you are fully prepared for those jobs,

A new world is yours today! The programs and missions over which I preside at NASA today would have been science fiction when I was growing up.

The International Space Station, an orbiting outpost the size of a football field that has been occupied by humans 24/7 for more than 12 years now, would have been unthinkable. Two years ago, the ISS added the nation's first robotic crew member -- Robonaut 2, or R-2, as we like to call him.

Our missions to the moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, and Mars are rewriting science textbooks. We are discovering new planets in other solar systems. We are working with the Federal Aviation Administration and others to transform America's commercial air transportation system to make it safer, faster, cleaner, and more energy efficient.

President Obama has asked us to start planning missions with humans to an asteroid by the 2020s and to Mars by the 2030s. We recently announced a new effort to identify, capture, and relocate an asteroid.

Last year, SpaceX became the first commercial company to send an unmanned spacecraft to the International Space Station, and earlier this year, a second private company, Orbital Sciences, successfully tested its *Antares* rocket in preparation for a similar cargo mission to the ISS later this year.

This launch will take place not far from Delaware State at the Wallops Flight Facility on the Virginia Eastern shore.

For those of you interested in jobs in the aerospace industry, you should know we plan to resume launching American astronauts and their cargo from U.S. soil, on spacecraft built by American companies within the next four years. We want to end the outsourcing of this work to the Russians and bring these jobs back home. Transitioning transport to the International Space Station to U.S. commercial industry partners will allow NASA to do what we do best – make it possible for our astronauts to go deeper into space than anyone has ever gone before.

Aside from these amazing technological possibilities, you are entering a far different world than the one that existed when Delaware State was founded 112 years ago.

As I mentioned earlier, there have been many hard-won gains for African Americans and others who were disenfranchised.

One of our most important victories was ignited on March 7, 1965 on a bridge entering Selma, Alabama. On that day, 600 civil rights marchers were attacked and brutally beaten simply because they were marching for their own basic human rights. At the head of that march across the Edmund-Pettus Bridge was John Lewis, today a member of the Georgia congressional delegation. Eight days after the attack, President Lyndon B. Johnson came before a joint session of Congress to propose the historic *Voting Rights Act*.

Today, Congressman Lewis likes to say that on the end of the bridge, opposite from the police who attacked the marchers, on that other end is President Barack Obama. I understand his view, but I have another.

I believe that you are on the other side of that bridge. It is your generation that will have the chance – and the responsibility – to take the freedom movement to the next level. Embodied in you are the hopes and dreams and aspirations of a truly united America. It is only as one nation that we will be able to face and conquer the challenges that the global economy as well as science and technology have in store for us.

So I ask that you think boldly about how you want to apply the skills you've acquired here at Delaware State.

My daughter is a plastic surgeon and my son a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps.

My wife and I have always given them this advice: *dream big dreams; do what you want to do; don't listen to anyone who tells you can't do something or you don't belong; do your job and do it very well; and don't let the opportunity to make a difference in your world pass you by.*

I am reminded of the words of Nkosi Johnson...a young African child born in a place called Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa...

“Do all that you can...

With what you have...

In the time that you have...

In the place that you are!”

Class of 2013, I can't tell you with certainty how the social landscape of America or the geopolitical landscape of the world will look in ten years, but I expect that many of you will help lead us to a better world.

Not just more prosperous...but filled with more fairness,
opportunity, freedom, creativity and love. It's been said, "The best
way to predict the future is to invent it." That is our mission and
this is your moment. Go Hornets!

Congratulations! Good luck and Godspeed!