

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on September 19, 2021

Location: Carrier Dome

Remarks: Class of 2020 Commencement

Welcome and welcome back to all our graduates, and families, and friends. This is a happy day for all the alumni, and staff, and faculty and trustees, and families and friends of Syracuse University and SUNY ESF. We are finally and properly honoring the Class of 2020.

This ceremony is 16 months later than normal. So much of what we normally say at Commencement is out of date. Normally, we predict what you will experience after finishing at Syracuse – out in the workplace, or in other states or countries, or in new pursuits. Normally, we urge you to do wonderful things as Syracuse and ESF alumni. We ask you to come back to your University, and to remain Orange or Green. But you, the Class of 2020 are way above normal, you have already done those things. And you’ve done them under the most challenging of circumstances. And you are back, and we are proud and grateful that you are back.

You are the most resilient and tenacious class in this century at Syracuse. Despite the challenges of travel and masks and testing, 2,000 of you, roughly. Two thousand members of the Class of 2020 have returned to this place this weekend.

You will be celebrated today not just by family and friends and faculty, but by a Syracuse alumnus who has become, under the most challenging of circumstances, the first female governor in the history of the New York state. To put it mildly, she is a little busy these days dealing with viruses and transitions and a million challenges. And yet she wanted to be here today for this class in particular. So I thank Kathy Hochul for making this day special.

With Kathy Hochul’s elevation to her new office, I believe it marks the first time in American history that any School in the United States has graduated people who are simultaneously our local mayor, our member of Congress, our state governor, and our nation’s President. And, all of them, like you graduated from this school on this spot.

After I speak today, you will be greeted by the President of State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Joanie Mahoney. President Mahoney is also a graduate of Syracuse University. I thank her and I thank our colleagues and the graduates of SUNY-ESF for joining once again in the tradition of shared Syracuse University-ESF commencement exercises. Our two schools are symbiotic institutions that are each better every day because of their partnership.

If there is any blessing to come out of the last two years of the pandemic, I hope that for each of you it will be the blessing of resilience. You have been through so much, and you lost so much in your final year at Syracuse. The challenges continued after graduation for you and your loved ones.

And yet you carried on, including to this joyful day. You have been resilient in the face of real challenges, and that has been inspiring. There will be other challenges ahead in this uncertain and rapidly changing world. There are experiences that challenge resiliency even more than a pandemic, and some of you here today have endured them. The challenge of serving your country in the longest war in our history, during a time when most Americans forgot that service was even going on and remain unaware of the costs endured by those who served. The challenge of missing out on college entirely because of a wrongful conviction and a five and a half year wait for exoneration. Most of you will never experience those tough circumstances, but you have learned through the pandemic your own methods of bouncing back, adjusting, and carrying on. May you carry that skill, and that blessing, with you, through all the years ahead.

And may you pause just for a moment today and treasure all the people who helped you through both college and a pandemic.

You know very well now, far better than most graduating classes, who you can count on when the world is turned upside down. Many of those supporters are here today, sitting next to you or in the decks behind or around you or watching this ceremony as it is broadcast. Many of them are with you only in spirit. I give thanks today for each of them as well as for each of you.

Class of 2020, I say this sixteen months late, but with more passion than for any previous class. We are proud of you, we wish you well. Congratulations, Go Orange!

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