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Weekly Message, 1/21/2009

David Schmidly

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Good morning.

Today, as we begin UNM's spring semester, our nation begins a grand and hopeful new adventure with the swearing in of Barack Obama as our 44th president.

I remember in 1963 watching the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King deliver the inspiring words that have come to be known as his "I have a dream" speech - doubtless one of the most profound and moving pieces of

oratory in American history. I suppose it is a measure of our progress that few people, back then, could have imagined that in our own lifetimes, we would see our nation elect an African American to the highest office in the land. Let's be mindful, however, that we have a long way to go before King's dream is fulfilled and every American is judged by the content of his or her character, not skin color, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, age or beliefs.

Regardless of your politics, I know that all of you join me in hoping for a successful term for President Obama, and I'm proud that several of our UNM students took up his call to participate in a national day of service to commemorate both King's vision and his own Inauguration. In a time of enormous challenge to our nation, both at home and abroad, it was the most appropriate way to honor King's legacy and the hope and optimism that surrounds President Obama's swearing in.

Five of our UNM students are helping produce a marathon of talk radio, live and direct from the center of everything happening on Capitol Hill. The "Radio Row" features more than 30 radio show hosts of all political stripes, and at least 100 celebrity guests. The students, from UNM's Communication & Journalism and Political Science departments, are taking part in a new internship with the Talk Radio News Service this semester. We look forward to hearing their great work.

Some of our faculty and students have a front row seat to history, side by side with the millions of Americans who have ventured to Washington, D.C. for the Inauguration and the events surrounding it. I look forward to hearing their stories of this momentous day upon their return to Albuquerque. For those not able to travel to Washington, you can join your friends at the SUB Theatre to watch inaugural events live from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. or so. As might be expected, even if you can't get to the Theatre, every television in the SUB will be tuned to the Inauguration.

Today also marks the beginning of the 2009 legislative session in Santa Fe. Lawmakers should hammer out a solvency package for the current budget in the next week or so. At this time, the cuts for higher education are around 2.5%, but could go deeper depending on the collection of revenues and decisions on capital outlay. The Legislature is also working on next year's budget, which is even more challenging. I want to thank the entire University community for cooperating in a diligent and good faith way to plan ahead. Because of your efforts, we are far better prepared to meet whatever challenges lie ahead without impairing our core missions of education and research.

The semester begins today, but courses will be starting throughout the semester. With the revised and improved education benefits you've heard about, staff members should take a look at the class schedule and consider the challenges and rewards of life-long learning. Anyone working around schedule or location limitations might also consider UNM's online course offerings.

It's a day for new beginnings. Let's take advantage of them.

Have a good week.

David J. Schmidly