Clinton delivers fiery message at Dillard commencement
Senator takes government to task for neglecting New Orleans, Gulf Coast

(New Orleans – May 22, 2007) – Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) said that rebuilding New Orleans is an “American obligation,” as part of her address to 182 graduates and their families at Dillard University’s 138th Commencement Exercises on Saturday, May 19. Commencement took place on the lush Rosa Freeman Keller Avenue of the Oaks, Dillard’s most recognized site on campus.

Sen. Clinton, who received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, told the audience, “If talk, bureaucracy and promises were enough, we would’ve rebuilt New Orleans three times over by now.” The remark received thunderous applause.

Clinton also praised university administrators and graduates for their efforts post-Katrina.

“I hope that one day, years from now, you will bring your children and your grandchildren here, to this city and this campus. You will tell them about what you did in facing the great flood and you will tell them that you loved this school too much to leave it behind.”

Dillard awarded 182 undergraduate degrees during the ceremony. All of graduates marched with flags bearing the names of colleges that took in Dillard students in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This year’s valedictorian was April M. Leonard, a Public Health/Health Science major from Atlanta, Georgia. The salutatorian was Lachelle Y. White, a Psychology major from Memphis, Tennessee.

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“I commend all the graduates for their dedication and achievement during their time at Dillard,” said Dr. Marvalene Hughes, president of Dillard University. “This class has exemplified greatness and fortitude in an unprecedented manner. This class was fearless in their scholastic pursuits and unwavering in their commitment to education.”

Dillard’s Division of Nursing honored 13 graduating students during its Annual Pinning Ceremony in Lawless Memorial Chapel on May 17, 2007. The service included a ceremonial candle lighting and recitation of the Nightingale Pledge. With a nursing shortage affecting New Orleans and the nation, Dillard’s graduates will help fill the void. The American Hospital Association reports that U.S. hospitals need approximately 118,000 RNs to fill vacant positions, a national vacancy rate of 8.5 percent. Statewide before Katrina, Louisiana had more than 46,000 RNs, according to the Louisiana State Board of Nursing. After the March 31 license renewal date, the total dropped to 45,335 — a decrease of about 800 RNs. All students have received multiple offers for employment, according to Betty Dennis, Ph.D., dean and professor of Nursing at Dillard.

Dillard graduates have accepted positions at some of the country’s top corporations, including Boeing, Price Waterhouse Cooper, The Coca Cola Company, Kraft Foods, Deloitte & Touche, Hewlett Packard, T. Rowe Price, the MD Anderson Cancer Center, Ernst & Young, and Wells Fargo. Several graduates that majored in Japanese Studies will become a part of the JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) Program. Many of the graduates have been accepted into graduate and professional schools. The Class of 2007 also logged a total of 22,380 community service hours.

The university honored its Golden Graduates – 36 members of the Class of 1957 received golden diplomas commemorating the 50th anniversary of their graduation.

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Also receiving an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters degree were Grammy Award-winning pianist and vocalist Roberta Flack ("The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face," "Killing Me Softly With His Song," "Where Is the Love," and "You've Got A Friend," the latter being one of her many renowned duets with the late R&B singer Donny Hathaway) who graduated from Howard University at age 19; and Frank J. Mason, a member of the McDonald's Corporation Metro Cooperative in the New York Metro Region and a former vice president at Citibank, serves on Dillard's Board of Trustees. He graduated from Dillard in 1971 with Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Business Administration, and earned a Master's of Business Administration, Banking and Finance from Rutgers University.

Dillard University, with a 55-acre campus on Gentilly Boulevard, was inundated with six to 10 feet of water in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina due to breaches at the London Avenue and 17th Street canals, resulting in $400 million in damage. Three dormitory buildings were destroyed by fire as the campus sat underwater.

Dillard University, a historically black college and university (HBCU), has been a cornerstone of educational excellence and a critical part of the New Orleans community since 1869. The university offers a quality, four-year, comprehensive undergraduate program to students who represent 29 states and three foreign countries. Dillard offers 36 degree programs through its six divisions: Business, Educational and Psychological Studies, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Public Health, Nursing, and Social Sciences.

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