

Grady 100th Anniversary Dinner

Thank you President Morehead. Great to be with you tonight. Dean Davis and Grady students and alumni, I'm honored to join you for this centennial celebration, and on behalf of the great state of Georgia, I bring greetings and a proclamation, which I will present shortly.

Tonight, Sandra and I are obviously surrounded by Grady people. But what I realized as I prepared for this evening is that I'm surrounded by Grady people every day.

Dick Yarbrough, who I believe is here tonight, is a Grady Fellow and a member of my Education Reform Commission – in fact he was the first person I asked to serve on it. My chief of staff's father, Richard Riley – who was one of my earliest supporters when I first ran for public office -- is a Grady fellow.

My first cousin, Gloria Ricks Taylor, is a Grady Fellow and her son, Chris Dixon, will be inducted into the Grady Fellowship tonight. The family is quite proud that they are the first mother-son duo to enter this distinguished group. Gloria has brought with her some of our mutual relatives – the ones who unlike her actually voted for me! ... Gloria and I find it's best to not discuss politics at family reunions.

I believe Gloria shares some of the same political viewpoints as the Grady grads in the Atlanta media who cover my administration. Do yall teach that here? Outside of my immediate family, I don't think there's anyone in the world who's asked me more questions than Greg Bluestein, who covers the governor's office for the AJC. Greg is a distinguished Grady grad who is also here tonight.

Nevertheless, I do have the strong political support of numerous other Grady grads. Or at least I better. They are on my office payroll. My deputy chief of staff for communications is a Grady grad. Brian Robinson counsels me on how we communicate with the media and with Georgians, so he gave me some advice on what to say to you tonight. The proclamation I will present was handled by another Grady grad, Krystal Drew. My scheduling details were handled by another Grady grad, Courtney Brown, and the young woman taking pictures of me is my photographer, Grady grad Andrea Briscoe.

... So Dean Davis, you're welcome. I'm doing my part to boost your graduate employment rate.

Yes, whether our fellow Georgians realize it or not, they are touched daily by the communications produced by alumni of the Henry W. Grady College.

Tonight, we celebrate an anniversary. A 100th anniversary, no less. An anniversary marks another uninterrupted year of something staying the same.

Yet Grady College got to 100 years by never staying the same. It has survived and indeed thrived because it has constantly changed in the rapidly evolving field of communications. Gloria and I had an uncle, Leo Mallard, a 1929 UGA grad who was the longtime editor of the Covington News. If you had told him that people would one day read the news on their phones on something called Twitter, he would have thought you had lost your mind. Sometimes, I kinda feel that way myself.

But I think that embrace of change and advancement is how Henry W. Grady would have wanted it for a college bearing his name. He was the prophet of the New South. He preached progress and new technology. This college has embraced that legacy.

The current students here are learning well about the challenges facing the alumni in these communications fields. When I grew up, you could count on your fingers the number of media outlets available to you. If you needed to communicate a message or advertise a product or get information, there weren't many options. Now there are literally thousands of choices for both the purveyors and the consumers of communications.

As an elected official, these changes have drastically affected how I communicate with my constituents since I was elected to the state Senate in 1980 and then to Congress in 1992. Back then, if you got your message on the local TV and radio stations and in the newspaper, you pretty much had it covered. If you couldn't get your message in those outlets, you were simply out of luck. Today, there's no way I could go to a few outlets and get a message out to 10 million Georgians. Couldn't come close. Local TV competes against hundreds of other channels, local radio hardly exists and newspapers are fighting to adapt to the new reality.

On the flip side, today there's no group of editors or news directors who can prevent me from communicating with a mass audience.

Nearly 170,000 Georgians follow me on Facebook. Some of my posts reach more than 130,000 viewers. On Thursday after I signed the medical marijuana bill, there was a video of me discussing the new law posted on Facebook. Three hours later the video had more than 85,000 views. I have more than 20,000 Twitter followers. I even have an Instagram account, which you should follow to see Andrea's work. We sometimes livestream our news conferences, and we've had as many as 5,000 people tune in on their computers for a particular event. We talk about the media, but the fact is my communications office is now a medium in its own right.

That is change, and we embrace it, just as Henry Grady before us.

The South eventually adopted his vision, though there was some resistance because there were winners and losers. And in today's changing communications fields, there are winners and losers. It is the creative destruction of capitalism, and at the end of the day there will be more winners than losers.

Just as my Uncle Leo would never have foreseen Twitter or blogs, today's Grady students will one day earn a living using some mass communication tool that we haven't thought of yet.

But Grady's embrace of change hasn't just affected how we consume information. It has the power to change how we view our world. Later tonight Grady will spotlight one of its own, Charlayne Hunter-Gault. I can think of no better symbol of progress in our state. ... Charlayne didn't just experience change and progress; she demanded it. Her courage left the University of Georgia and our beloved state a better place, and it is an honor to be here with her tonight.

Even as we adapt to change, I hope some things will stay the same. I implore Grady to continue to teach our future communicators the importance of objectivity, fairness and accuracy and guarding against sensationalism. With the balkanization of the media, we Americans can choose our own news sources and increasingly we choose our own facts. This endangers our democracy and polarizes our electorate.

I have faith that in this audience tonight there are young students who will accept the responsibility they have to educate and inform

their fellow Americans. As the note above the door heading into the Grady College building says, they are indeed Democracy's Next Generation.

Thank you all for letting Sandra and me be with you tonight. President Morehead and Dean Davis, if you would come forward please. [Hold up proclamation]. As governor of the great state of Georgia, in celebration of this centennial celebration and a legacy of educational excellence in communications, I hereby declare Sunday, April 19, as University of Georgia Grady College Day!