

Bush, Rice Reunite at Southeastern University Leadership Forum

✖ President George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State (2005-2009), teamed up again for several hours on Thursday afternoon, this time in Lakeland as the keynote speakers for Southeastern University's 5th Annual National Leadership Forum. It was President Bush's second visit to the 87-acre campus. He and Mrs. Laura Bush were keynoters for the 2010 Forum.

An enthusiastic audience of ministry and business persons, as well as Southeastern University students, staff and faculty, heard first from Dr. Rice, then from President Bush, as they talked frankly about a wide range of topics from their service in the Executive Branch to current world events.

Then the Bush-Rice team sat for a Q-and-A discussion led by Southeastern's president, Dr. Kent Ingle. This session was historic in that it was the first time President Bush and Dr. Rice had been interviewed together since they left office.

At this year's forum, President Bush and Dr. Rice spoke mostly about international matters, and the Middle East in particular. Dr. Rice drew on her experience as National Security Advisor during President Bush's first term, and then as head of the State Department during the second one. She talked about her close relationship with the president through the years how she gave him her best advice and her unwavering loyalty. She said the president trusted her and knew she would keep their private discussions private. President Bush touched on that relationship as well when the subject turned to leadership: "My advice is to surround yourself with people you trust and empower them."

President Bush, too, spoke about the nobility of “serving something other than yourself” servant leadership, which he said he knew was a key component at Southeastern University.

The two leaders spoke about the decision-making process at the highest level. President Bush said he had to “ignore the Gallup polls” and make the tough choices. He and Dr. Rice also discussed their heritage, their values, their family members, and their faith. Dr. Rice fielded questions about growing up in the segregated South and overcoming gender and race bias. She talked about her “extraordinary, ordinary” parents, and about her experience as Provost of Stanford University in the 1990s.

President Bush made several references to his recently published memoirs, *Decision Points*. He and Dr. Rice entertained with a few brief quips and humorous stories.

When it was over, audience member Sarah Allen, a Newnan, Ga., resident, said, “I loved that President Bush said ‘you can’t live by popularity alone.’” She added that when Dr. Rice and President Bush were asked if they had any regrets from their eight years in Washington, they acknowledged there were some things they wish they had done differently but they didn’t dwell on that. Instead, the pair set their sights on the future and how they may be of service now.

Jonathan Susa of Indianapolis said he was “very impressed with Dr. Rice’s sense of leadership and with her service to the president and this nation.”

The Bush/Rice sessions closed out the three-day forum which also featured leadership luminaries such as evangelist Franklin Graham; Super Bowl-winning quarterback Kurt Warner; David Gergen, former advisor to four U.S. presidents; Chick-fil-A president and COO Dan Cathy; noted leadership authorities Jim Kouzes, Barry Posner, and Mark Sanborn; Court Durkalski, president of Truline Industries, a world leader in the production of precision aircraft parts; Anne Beiler,

founder of Auntie Anne's Hand-Rolled Soft Pretzels; and Forum veterans Erwin McManus and Craig Groeschel.