

America's Doctor Receives Honorary Degree

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fsimon@tulane.edu

Dr. Regina M. Benjamin, surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service, made a whirlwind visit to New Orleans to accept an honorary doctor of science degree on Saturday (May 15) at Tulane University Commencement. She was on her way to Geneva, Switzerland, for a World Health Assembly convened by the World Health Organization.



Dr. Regina M. Benjamin, U.S. surgeon general, right, prepares to receive an honorary degree from Tulane President Scott Cowen at the Tulane Commencement Ceremony on Saturday (May 15). (Photo by Sally Asher)

Founder and former CEO of Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic in coastal Alabama, [Benjamin](#) received an MBA in 1991 from the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane. Before she was nominated by President Barack Obama as surgeon general, she served the 2,500 residents of Bayou La Batre, many of whom have no health insurance. The clinic was destroyed twice by hurricanes and once by fire; each time, with the support of the community, she rebuilt.

"I have about 300 million more patients now," she said in an interview on Saturday before the Tulane commencement ceremony.

As America's doctor, she provides citizens with the best scientific information available on how to improve their health and reduce the risk of illness and injury. She oversees 6,500 uniformed health officers who serve in locations around the world to promote, protect and advance the health of the American people.

Benjamin said her focus is on prevention and she is "very concerned" for the people of Bayou La Batre and other coastal communities whose livelihood is threatened because of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

She has put forth a [vision for a healthy and fit nation](#).

"We can be healthy and fit at any size and at any weight," Benjamin said. "I want to change the national conversation from a negative one about illness to a positive conversation about wellness."

Her advice to Americans on how to become fit? She emphasizes enjoying exercise and making healthy food choices.

"Just do it," she said.