

**ADDRESS GIVEN BY NGONDI A. KAMAŦUKA TO THE
37TH ANNUAL MAEOPP CONFERENCE
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THE ABBEY RESORT AND SPA
FONTANA, WISCONSIN**

Good morning! I am delighted to be home as we celebrate our 37th Annual MAEOPP Conference. The conference theme “Charting Our Course, Envisioning our Future – Leading Beyond The Horizon” is pertinent and timely, given the precarious situation in which the movement finds itself, and what is coming out of the White House and the Congress these days.

I have been privileged to serve on the COE Board of Directors with very dedicated colleagues from my MAEOPP region: Mary Moore, Joe Flores, Renee Hampton, Sidney Childs, and Janet Tauer, and I am looking forward to welcoming our President-Elect, Trent Ball on the COE Board. We in MAEOPP have a history of electing good people to serve your interests on the COE Board of Directors.

I have spent three wonderful years serving you on the MAEOPP Board of Directors. You have enriched me in many ways, and I thank you for that.

My purpose this morning, is to give you an update, and the direction of your Council for Opportunity in Education Board of Directors during my tenure of office.

At our last COE Board meeting in Washington, D.C., four founding members of COE, Dr. Jerry Lewis, Dr. Charles Desmond, Hal Payne, and Kathy Felker, honored us by addressing the Board of Directors on the struggles the founding members endured in laying the foundation of establishing COE, thus the genesis of our movement, of which you are an integral part.

Amongst the many issues, they so passionately talked about was, that the torch they lit in the early 1970s must now be carried forward. They implored us to continue to move forward and enhance the movement.

As Dr. Charles Desmond said “they were professionals who understood that this nation is a country of opportunity. They

believed that this abstract idea – must be given life – manifested, and localized and organized in each community and in every state. It was an uplifting session for the Board. I thank them for their tenacity, sacrifice, fortitude, and the vision they had. It is a truism that we will not be here today, partaking in our 37th annual conference, had it not been for them and many other trailblazers, some of whom came from this powerful region of MAEOPP.

Last week, I spoke at the SWASAP conference in Oklahoma City, where I talked about the godfather himself, Walter O. Mason, the giant, who cajoled and persuaded the TRIO community in the Southwest to organize the first regional association, SWASAP, in 1972. Walter O. Mason was the son of the red clay country, that we call Oklahoma.

His forward thinking gave impetus to Arnold Mitchem, Paul Spraggins and many others in our mighty region of MAEOPP to organize. We are gathered on this hallowed ground, here in Fontana, Wisconsin where MAEOPP was conceived and formed in 1974. It is a hallowed ground because this is where it was sunrise

for us, that is, the strengthening of the movement that was started by SWASAP.

The movement has now been entrusted to us. Our investment of 40 years of advocacy is a serious business, and we are expected to grow this important portfolio. The founders have done their job. They have laid a solid foundation for all of us to stand on as we strengthen the movement, the TRIO Nation.

We are in the relay race for our very existence. The challenges facing the movement are numerous. If I may use the French pronunciation, we have been handed the baton. Do we drop the baton? Or do we have the will, fortitude, and the tenacity to finish this important relay? Do we believe in the relay? Do we want to be known as the generation that lacked the vision, authority, leadership and the political acumen, the generation that dropped the baton, and never finished this important race?

What do I mean by lacking authority? I mean that sometimes we are unwilling to use the authority given to us by virtue of being the elected officials. Our unwillingness leads us to defer our

authority to other entities to take the decisions for which we lack the backbone to make tough decisions.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no one in this room, our MAEOPP region, who does not want to strengthen our movement. That much I know. That much is clear. The critical question that we must answer is, how do we do this? Through your dedication, and that spirit of exploring the last frontier, I believe we have the capacity and the will to do it. We just have to find the proper ways to devise the modalities to do it.

In March 2009, President Barack Obama proposed the American Graduation Initiative, which established the goal that by the year 2020 the United States will regain its position as the nation with the highest percentage of its population holding college degrees and credentials.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ranks the United States in the ninth position, in terms of the percentage of individuals holding college degrees and credentials. South Korea, Canada, and the United Kingdom

are ranked above the United States, to name just a few. I believe that TRIO and GEAR UP, and other EOP programs are best positioned to help the nation achieve the President's goal.

Ladies and gentleman, our allies in the political arena have deserted us. The challenge that we face today is for us to take a hard look at our modus operandi, and readjust our game plan. Adjusting the game plan is a must, if we are to strengthen the advocacy we do for the voiceless, our students. All of the 10 states in MAEOPP have the responsibility to undertake this critical mission of revamping and cultivating strong state leadership structures.

For a starter, we must re-evaluate the culture in which we function. We must strengthen and change the culture of regional associations for the betterment of access opportunities for our students.

As former speaker of the United States Congress, Tip O'Neal once observed, "all politics is local". Your chamber of commerce must be aware of the impact of your program in your community.

Your school board must be aware of your excellent retention and graduation rates data. Your chancellor or college president must be aware on how positive your program complements the overall mission of your campus. Your Congressional Delegation must know of the impact your TRIO and GEAR UP have in your district and your state.

To this end, the major underpinning of your COE Board of Directors this year, will be to strengthen the state leadership capacity. Simply put, COE is not in a position to exist without strong state leadership in every state of the union and the territories. There is no COE without a strong state and regional leadership structures. We have no other option, but to strengthen these structures.

I will ask the Board of Directors at our winter meeting, to devise the modalities that will serve as the conduit for the new mindset.

We must win our friends and allies back. The investment in TRIO and GEAR UP is a win-win situation for the American

taxpayer, and it is a huge, huge reservoir for tapping the human capital, a *sine qua non* for this nation to compete globally.

I encourage every state in our MAEOPP region to apply for the Paul T. Spraggins State Initiative Awards, heretofore known as State Leadership grants, to COE. Call or email Heath Alexander, COE Director of Public and Private Partnerships about the grant application process. He is always available, and he likes his job.

I want Heath to inform me that he is completely overwhelmed by the huge number of applications he has received, from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio & Wisconsin for the Paul T. Spraggins State Initiative Awards. Let me at this point express my appreciation to the Minnesota TRIO Chapter for having received the state leadership award.

As Dr. Mitchem has said “we have seen the very worst of U.S. politics in recent months”. Let me go out on the limb here and state that perhaps we all have become too lackadaisical, too comfortable, in the sense that we have been letting our guard down.

Now, we have gotten a cold shower, and we have been given a reality check. We have fallen – And now we must get up -- Dust ourselves off, and fight the fight on behalf of our students. The alternative is not a viable option, and should not be a part of our *lingua franca*.

The new game plan requires that the COE Board of Directors, and regional and state associations be proactive, and not be afraid to think outside the box. It requires that all of us, from the beautiful shores of Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and Marshall Islands, to the beautiful shores of the U.S. Virgin Island and Puerto Rico, that we make our programs relevant in our communities. Our programs must be known widely, and the value and the mission of TRIO and GEAR UP must be understood.

Your COE Board of Directors will be active throughout the year, and will have monthly conference calls to stay on top of the game, and adjust accordingly, if need be. We already have had our first conference call. The various Board committees have already started implementing committee goals, so that by the time when

we meet in December, they would already have devised and have implemented action plans.

The Board will work closely with Dr. Arnold Mitchem and his team at the Council for Opportunity in Education office in Washington, D.C., in devising the new game plan. One of the many functions of your COE Board of Directors is to be supportive of your COE office, and your COE Board will not be derelict in that regard. We will continue to work cooperatively with the COE office, and provide the COE Team the support it needs to continue working on behalf of our students.

Financial Support for COE: You all have heard that COE has received a \$20 million dollars for the i3 grant, and also that COE has several training grants. You all know about that, right? That's a lot of money, isn't? But guess what? The advocacy work that COE does on behalf of our students cannot be paid out of these grants. The work that Dr. Arnold Mitchem, Maureen Hoyler, Heather Valentine, and Kim Jones, and others, by law their salaries cannot be paid for out of these grants. Their salaries must be paid

out of unrestricted funds. This is where Fair Share comes into play. I am sure you have heard about fair share undertaking to support your COE's office operations. This region, my region, the mighty MAEOP, has done well in meeting its fair share contribution to COE over the years, and we need to continue rising to the occasion.

I suggest that you all read "The Higher-Education Battle the White House Should Be Waging" article written by Kevin Carey in the Chronicle of Higher Education of September 25, 2011. In that article he pretty much discredits TRIO. However, there is one cardinal issue on which I agree with him, and that is when he acknowledges "the powerful TRIO lobby got Congress to pass a law banning randomized-control trials to measure TRIO program effectiveness".

As you know, our vociferous disagreement with the randomized-control trials was its immoral requirement, that we turn away a student who needed the services of an Upward Bound program. Dr. Mitchem's rebuttal Letter to the Editor appears in the Chronicle of Higher Education dated October 30, 2011. In his

letter, Dr. Mitchem, does an excellent job in debunking Kevin's misplaced and unfounded conclusions.

It is clear how powerful TRIO advocacy is working on behalf of our students. This is made possible by your institutional membership fees, and your personal contributions. We have to keep it up, if we are to be in the game for our students in Washington, D.C. This is the nature of the game.

Before I conclude, let me let me thank your conference chair, Kaye Monk Morgan, and the various committee members for putting together an excellent conference. Kaye, I appreciate all the arrangements you made for my transportation to and from the airport in Milwaukee and my hotel accommodation. I am really home!

So, in the words of the region's native son Garrison Keillor, from Minnesota, let me say "Be Well" "Do Good Work" and "Keep in Touch".

Thank you!