



March 4, 2024

The message I'm sending you today isn't just a quick recognition of the fact that it is now Women's History Month. What I want to talk about is how deeply important female leadership is in our world, and at the University of South Carolina Upstate, and how this leadership is shaping higher education and our institution for the future.

When I think about this topic, I'm reminded of these words from the late Rosalynn Carter, former first lady of the United States: "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be."

This sentiment resonates deeply with my experience at USC Upstate, where we are charting a course toward unexplored territories of academic excellence — and we are doing so with strong female leadership.

Upon my arrival at USC Upstate, Dr. Shirleatha Dunlap and her faculty at the Mary Black College of Nursing presented me with an ambitious proposal: the creation of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. This endeavor was not just about launching a new program. It was about transforming USC Upstate into a doctoral-granting institution, a significant leap forward.

It was, as Mrs. Carter said, taking USC Upstate to a new place, a place it ought to be.

As we delved into the complexities of nursing workforce challenges, policies, COVID-19 influences, burnout, political conversations, and salary limitations, it became evident that we were not just part of the national conversation — we were leading it. We recognized the need for more teachers with doctoral degree credentials to fill the void across the state. Dr. Dunlap and her faculty were already spearheading these solutions.

She is just one of the many strong female leaders we have at USC Upstate whose impact goes beyond individual accomplishments; it extends to the very core of our institution. Female leaders bring unique perspectives, innovative approaches, and a wealth of experiences that enrich the educational environment for students, faculty, staff, and the community.

These leaders were instrumental in the creation of our soon-to-be-released Greater 2030 Strategic Plan, the product of an intense year of engagements, conversations, debates, and examinations among USC Upstate faculty, staff, students, and the community. We would not have been able to create such a great blueprint for our future without leaders of all genders and identities, including women.

As we recognize these kinds of achievements, we must also acknowledge the resilience and determination displayed by those who have encountered obstacles and worked to pave the way for future generations. Such trailblazers have inspired countless individuals to pursue their aspirations without limitations.

To the younger, newer female leaders here, I encourage you to pursue your passions and break more barriers. Your contributions are instrumental in creating a vibrant and dynamic academic community that reflects the diverse perspectives of the world we serve.

Today, at the start of Women's History Month, I salute you, and the many other great women leaders at USC Upstate. Thank you for your service and your commitment to excellence. You inspire everyone around you to Reach Greater Heights—and you're helping to take USC Upstate where it ought to go.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris

Chancellor