



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**18th U.S. SURGEON GENERAL (2009-2013) REGINA BENJAMIN NAMED
ENDOWED CHAIR AT XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA**
Xavier to be Positioned as International Center for Public Health

NEW ORLEANS (September 13, 2013) – The 18th Surgeon General of the United States (2009-2013) Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA was announced as the first *NOLA.com/Times Picayune Endowed Chair in Public Health Sciences* at Xavier University of Louisiana during a press conference this morning.

“I am honored to be named the Endowed Chair in Public Health at Xavier University of Louisiana,” said Benjamin. “I look forward to positioning Xavier as an international center for public health with a strong focus on the community.”

Benjamin is a long-time champion of the power of prevention. As Surgeon General, she led the U.S. Public Health Service and chaired President Obama’s National Prevention Council, which released the first-ever *National Prevention Strategy*— a road map for a healthy and fit nation. She oversaw its implementation throughout the federal government.

“In July, I stepped away from my position but not from my mission,” Benjamin stated. “This endowed chair at Xavier provides an ideal platform from which I can broaden my mission of prevention and wellness.”

An alumna of the only Historically Black Catholic University in the nation, Benjamin will have a major role in developing future public health professionals. Former Surgeons General often go to medical schools or large academic health centers, rarely, if ever, to a liberal arts college. Benjamin wants to bring public health to the community and to have students engage early in their careers. Xavier has consistently ranked number one in the nation in awarding bachelor’s degrees to African American students in biology, chemistry, physics, and the physical sciences. The university is also renowned for ranking number one in the nation in the number of African-American students who go to and complete medical school.

“Having the 18th Surgeon General join our family is a milestone achievement for Xavier University, the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and the United States of America,” said Dr. Norman Francis, President of Xavier University. “I am honored to have Dr. Benjamin join our public health program and grow it into a global force for promoting healthy communities.”

The United States ranks low in health outcomes compared to other industrialized nations- with Louisiana and Mississippi tied for 49 out of 50 in the 2012 America’s Health Rankings. Louisiana and the Gulf Coast provide a unique geographic setting with a concentrated mix of public health challenges, e.g., large populations of the medically underserved, obesity rates above the national average, limited access to available health care, and high rates of chronic diseases across the life stages. This offers an excellent “public health laboratory” in which the results from research and training can have a global impact on the requirements needed to make a community more resilient.

“As Health Commissioner, I am thrilled that my friend and colleague Dr. Benjamin has chosen to return to our community to lend her considerable talent, experience, and passion. I look forward to collaborating with her to make New Orleans one of America’s most healthy cities.” said Dr. Karen DeSalvo, New Orleans Health Commissioner.

Dr. Benjamin’s role will include reviewing curriculum and cementing Xavier’s position as an international thought center on public health. Working closely with Xavier’s School of Pharmacy, Arts and Sciences, and Center for Health and Health Disparities Research, Benjamin will help develop the new Department of Public Health Sciences, teach classes, and coordinate national and international conferences in New Orleans.

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The 50th Anniversary of the Surgeon General Warning on the Cigarette package will be in 2014. Plans to leverage the anniversary and host an international conference on tobacco use prevention is being considered as one of Benjamin's first undertakings as Endowed Chair as she continues her Tobacco Free College Campuses focus.

An endowment from NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune helps support the new position that Benjamin will fill.

“Together with Dr. Benjamin and the university board of directors, we would like to express our gratitude to NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune for providing, over the past six years with the Louisiana Board of Regents, the support for the Endowed Chair in Public Health Sciences,” Dr. Francis stated.

“As strong supporters of Xavier University for many years, we are thrilled that *NOLA.com/Times-Picayune Endowed Chair in Public Health Sciences* will be chaired by Regina Benjamin. Her leadership will enhance Xavier's international reputation. This is a great day for Xavier and for the city of New Orleans,” said Ricky Mathews, publisher of NOLA.com/Times-Picayune.

Benjamin will continue to volunteer at the BayouClinic she founded in Bayou La Batre, AL (an hour and 45 minutes away), which she kept in operation despite damage and destruction inflicted by hurricanes Georges (1998) and Katrina (2005) and a devastating fire (2006). This will allow her to maintain her clinical skills and stay close with her patients.

As a Catholic institution, the ultimate mission of Xavier is to create a just and humane society by preparing its students for leadership and service. The university's education and culture prepares graduates for continual spiritual, moral and intellectual development.

“Dr. Benjamin's care not only of her patients, but of the entire American population, embodies the University's mission and is an example of how Xavier educates the whole person,” said Xavier University of Louisiana Provost Loren Blanchard. “Dr. Benjamin's career provides numerous examples that students can use to grow from both personally, spiritually, and professionally. Her example of working under the most adverse circumstances to deliver health care without compromising quality will teach students to use their knowledge in critical and creative ways to better their communities.”

ABOUT XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA

Xavier University of Louisiana is a private, co-educational institution offering a comprehensive liberal arts program and professional programs, including 38 undergraduate majors, five master's degree programs and a doctor of pharmacy program. Xavier is the only historically Black, Catholic university in the United States and draws students from 39 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, the Virgin Islands and 7 foreign countries. For more information contact Xavier University of Louisiana, 1 Drexel Drive, New Orleans LA 70125, Phone: 504-520-7568, Fax 504-520-7933.

More at: <http://www.xula.edu/>

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**Quotes in Support of
18th U.S. Surgeon General
2009-2013
Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA
as
NOLA.com/The Times Picayune Endowed Chair in Public Health Sciences
at
Xavier University of Louisiana**

“I am deeply grateful for Regina’s leadership and service during her tenure as Surgeon General. I want to congratulate her on being named the NOLA.com/The Times Picayune Endowed Chair in Public Health Sciences at Xavier University.”

– U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius

“We are so fortunate that Dr. Benjamin has chosen Xavier University in Louisiana to continue her work to improve public health across the globe. Dr. Benjamin’s skills and expertise will enhance one of our great HBCUs and serve as an inspiration to the many generations of leaders that pass through its halls.”

– U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA)

“This is a great, great honor not just for Xavier University, but for New Orleans and Louisiana. Healthcare is such an important industry in our state, and I know Dr. Benjamin’s leadership will help position Louisiana as an international health care leader.”

– U.S. Senator David Vitter (R-LA)

“I applaud Dr. Benjamin for her many historic accomplishments as our 18th Surgeon General of the United States and now as an Endowed Chair at Xavier University. The city of New Orleans stands to benefit from her legacy and leadership in addressing health disparities that challenge many of our communities. Our city is honored to have her.”

– U.S. Representative Cedric Richmond (D-LA)

“From her work in her rural clinic in Alabama to her role as Surgeon General of the United States, Regina has made great strides in reducing the health disparities in underserved populations. I know Regina will carry on her mission to positively influence public health through her new position at at Xavier University of Louisiana”

– David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D. Director of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute, Director of the Center of Excellence on Health Disparities, and the 16th Surgeon General of the United States

"The United States continues to underperform in health outcomes when compared to other industrialized nations. Dr. Benjamin's leadership and work at Xavier University will help build the capacity to address this by improving the pool of quality public health practitioners. As a former Surgeons General and health care leader, she brings a level of knowledge and community based dedication that is of immeasurable value as Xavier University works to have both a local and national health impact"

– Georges C. Benjamin, MD (*no relation*), Executive Director of the American Public Health Association