Contact: Rachel Boon

REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DEGREE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Committee Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary Doctorate to Mr. Simon Estes at Spring 2027 commencement.

Details of Mr. Estes' Accomplishments: The University of Iowa enthusiastically requests approval to award an honorary Doctor of Musical Arts degree to internationally renowned bass-baritone Simon Estes. An Iowa native and University of Iowa alumnus, Dr. Estes exemplifies the artistic distinction, perseverance, educational commitment and humanitarian service befitting this honor, and he is recommended without reservation.

Born in Centerville, Iowa, Dr. Estes began his studies at the University of Iowa in 1957. His musical gifts were cultivated through the Old Gold Singers and the mentorship of voice professor Charles Kellis, who introduced him to classical music and encouraged him to audition for The Juilliard School. He continued his training there on a full scholarship.

After making his professional operatic debut with the Deutsche Oper in Berlin in 1965, Dr. Estes built an extraordinary international career. He performed at leading institutions including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, the Vienna State Opera, the Paris Opera and the Bayreuth Festival. He appeared with major orchestras and conductors throughout the world and became one of the most distinguished bass-baritones of the twentieth century.

In 1978, Dr. Estes became the first Black male singer to perform a leading role at Bayreuth, singing the title role in The Flying Dutchman. This historic appearance broke a significant racial barrier in one of opera's most revered institutions and expanded visibility for generations of artists of color. His artistry also brought him before presidents, popes, heads of state, and audiences at the Vatican, the Kennedy Center and the United Nations. His performances at the United Nations' 25th, 50th, and 75th anniversaries reflect his enduring role as a cultural ambassador and his belief in music's power to unite people.

Dr. Estes has matched his artistic achievements with a lifelong commitment to education and humanitarian service. Through foundations and initiatives bearing his name, he has supported scholarships, mentorship, youth education, children's health, and global efforts addressing malaria and HIV/AIDS. His educational service has included teaching, residencies, masterclasses, and mentorship at institutions including Iowa State University, Wartburg College, Boston University and Des Moines Area Community College. Through his Roots and Wings tour, he brought world-class performance to communities across Iowa while raising scholarship support for local students.

His honors include the Iowa Award, the state's highest citizen recognition; induction into the Opera Hall of Fame; the University of Iowa Distinguished Alumni Award; humanitarian awards; and honorary doctorates from numerous institutions. Throughout his life, he has remained connected to Iowa through education, philanthropy, performance and public service. His achievements have brought lasting distinction to his alma mater and home state.

Awarding Dr. Estes an honorary Doctor of Musical Arts degree would recognize a pioneering artist whose career expanded opportunity in classical music, an educator who has inspired generations of students, and a humanitarian who uses his international stature in service to others. It would honor the enduring relationship between the University of Iowa and one of its most accomplished alumni, whose life demonstrates how talent nurtured in Iowa can illuminate the world.