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## Jackson Rotary Remarks

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Jackson Rotary Remarks  
John M. Dunn  
Aug. 18, 2008

- Good morning, and thank you for the very kind introduction and the invitation to speak with you today.

**WMU quality**

- I've been asked to speak with many community groups around the state over the past year. When I speak, I always like to set the stage by telling the audience about WMU. Even though many have known "of" WMU for all their lives, I find that knowing "of" a resource does not always translate to really knowing "about" that resource. And that's exactly what Western Michigan University is--an enormous resource for our state. So, I've developed a habit of beginning every talk by making sure my audience has a firm grasp of the caliber of our University.

-First of all, I need to remind you that Western Michigan University is one of fewer than 200 comprehensive national research universities. That assessment of WMU comes from the Carnegie Foundation and its classification system for U.S. Higher Education--literally the nation's "gold standard" for categorizing our education resources. Only 139 of those national research universities are public universities. Michigan is fortunate to have five of them--Michigan State, Michigan Tech, UofM--Ann Arbor, Wayne State and Western Michigan University.

-Our university is also home to one of the nation's oldest collegiate honors programs--the Lee Honors College--and students in that college have credentials that equal or surpass those of students from the nation's most elite private colleges. Our Lee Honors College is the academic home to more than 1,000 of the brightest students in this state and nation.

-WMU has international stature in fields that range from aviation and medieval studies to atomic physics, engineering management, graph theory, geophysics, jazz studies and paper science--and more.

-Our international renown is illustrated in some tangible ways. At any point throughout the year, we can take a snapshot in time that shows how WMU is on the cutting edge of international events and issues. Here's are just a few examples from the past month.

- 1) The world's eyes were on China and the Olympics. The opening ceremonies at one Olympic venue--the equestrian site in Shaghai--featured the World Youth Choir under the direction of WMU's internationally renowned vocal coach Dr. Steve Zegree. The choir also included the voices of four current WMU students and recent grads as well as four WMU student musicians who were part of the choir's backup group. (I asked Steve to make sure he got a photo of the WMU group in Bronco garb in some Olympic settings. He complied. I got photos of WMU students in front of the Olympic rings, at the entry to the equestrian venue, and even a shot of a Bronco shirt with Steve Zegree inside of it on the giant screen monitor during the opening ceremony rehearsals.)
- 2) As China prepared for the Olympics, it enlisted the aid of the International Federation of Translators to help it standardize its public translation and signage practices. That organization has been led for the past three years by Dr. Peter Krawutschke (kwah-ROOCH-kah), WMU professor of German. The organization concluded its work with China by holding an international

conference in Beijing just days before the Olympics opened. If you happened to be watching China's version of CNN, you would have seen an in-depth interview with Dr. Krawutschke as he described the role he thought China was ready to play on the world stage.

- 3) Closer to home, WMU is at the forefront of energy research that has caught the attention of Congress. When the Legislature returns to Washington this month, it will consider bills to fund carbon sequestration research in which WMU is leading the way. The legislative effort was unveiled by Congressman Fred Upton in August and will focus on work being done to capture carbon dioxide and store it underground in Michigan and other geologically compatible states. Doing so, would allow us to use our coal resources for electricity in a way that would not continue to degrade the environment.

### **The stage is set**

- So now that I've set the stage a bit about the quality of our resources, I want to tell you about our commitment to student success. I can sum it up in a few words that start with "A"—access, affordability, achievement and accountability. Not coincidentally, I regard these qualities--access, affordability, achievement and accountability--as among the most important issues in higher education today. As I talk about some of these, I ask that you think about how important these issues are to our state. We're in a position in which we have a dire need to increase the number of Michigan residents with college degrees and the ability to meet the academic needs of a student population that comes from very diverse backgrounds, ages, cultures, economic circumstances and levels of classroom preparedness.

- **ACCESS**--The depth and breadth of academic quality at WMU comes with a distinct advantage for our students. Student success--both at the graduate and undergraduate levels--is the focus of our campus community. We're large enough to showcase the resources of the great research university we are, but still small enough, even at 25,000, for motivated students to have routine access and one-on-one contact with world-class researchers. We've made our campus culture one that is completely focused on the success of our students. Ask anyone on our campus--from our landscaping crew and food service staff to our most honored scholars--what we are about and I think you'll hear the same answer, student success. When we admit a student to WMU, we've told that student we think he or she has what it takes to be successful, and we are honor-bound to do everything in our power to help that student realize his or her potential.

We have worked hard to extend access to populations that have not been served well in the past. We've put veterans on notice that we're ready to meet their needs with special residency programs and an advocacy office devoted to their needs. As a result, we have the largest population of student vets of any public university in Michigan. We've just launched a foster care initiative to provide a higher education home for qualified students who have aged out of foster care, who are without homes or adult mentors to help them apply for and be successful in college. We weren't sure how many students might take advantage of this opportunity when we announced it last winter. Nine such students started during our second summer session. Nearly 40 more began three days ago.

- **AFFORDABILITY**--You'll recognize this as a big issue for families. We've worked hard to keep our tuition and fees as low as we can without jeopardizing our academic quality. That's been hard to do as public funding has decreased dramatically over the past five years. But among Michigan's 15 public universities, the cost to attend WMU ranks 11. Universities that are far less complex and offer far

fewer resources for students are charging more. Across Michigan's public universities, the average annual cost of tuition and fees for an incoming Michigan student is \$8,554. At WMU, it's \$7,928.

- **ACHIEVEMENT**--If I get started here, I may have a hard time stopping. Here are just a few items to pique your interest.

- We are one of only 97 public universities in the nation authorized to have its own chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

- There are places in the world where residents know only two things about Michigan--1st) that it's where automobiles are made and 2nd) It's where Western Michigan University plays host each year to the world's leading scholars attending our annual Medieval Congress.

- Our faculty includes world-class scholars who lead national laboratory research teams, win MacArthur Foundation "genius awards" and lead the nation's discipline-specific professional organizations. And they are devoted to teaching.

- **ACCOUNTABILITY**--This is an important area in which I think WMU is way ahead of the curve. If you go on our Web site, you'll find a prominent link that says "Voluntary System of Accountability." We're the first university in Michigan and one of the first among all of the nation's top universities to be an early adapter to an initiative that is providing students and their families with a common set of data they can use to compare and contrast colleges and universities as they complete their college search. We want to be out in front of this trend and be totally transparent about sharing detailed information. We've got a great story to tell, but there's also some data there that I'm not happy about. That data will stay until we've earned the right to post better numbers by improving our performance in certain areas. We're working hard on other fronts as well to be transparent about how we do business. I think the taxpayers of Michigan and the tuition-paying students and families we serve deserve nothing less.

## **Closing**

I hope you take full advantage of the national research university in your back yard. We're always happy to have you visit our campus. Many of you here today have alumni allegiance to other colleges or universities, but please don't let that hold you back from enjoying resources you can find close to home.

- Take a stroll around our beautiful main campus,
- Ride your bike to our engineering campus and Business Technology and Research Park.
- Attend a show at Miller Auditorium or a football game at Waldo Stadium,
- Consider hiring a WMU student as an intern or co-op student. You will not be disappointed.

If you're looking for a first step to get acquainted or reacquainted with WMU, let me suggest this Saturday's football game in Waldo Stadium. The Broncos will take on Northern Illinois University in our annual CommUniverCity celebration. People from around the area pack the stands to celebrate the start of the school year and the first home football game of the season. There's tailgating, half-time fireworks and one of the best marching band performances in collegiate athletics. It's family friendly and a great way to be a Bronco for an evening. I hope you'll join us.

Thank you.