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Ladies Library Association Remarks
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(Background on the Ladies Library Association. In 1843, Lucinda Hinsdale Stone took over a fledgling branch of the University of Michigan in Kalamazoo. There she began to teach women through a separate female department until she resigned in 1863 in a controversy over exposing students to literature considered inappropriate for ladies. She continued to teach most of her students out of her own home and eventually escorted women on guided study tours of Europe. As part of her efforts to educate women, she helped found the Ladies Library Association of Kalamazoo. Stone became Michigan's foremost spokespersons for coeducation and equal educational rights for women during the late nineteenth century.

The organization's suggested themes: What's new at WMU; Year 1 of presidency; building on humble beginnings; personal, university updates, LLA,KZO)

• Good afternoon. Thank you so much for the kind invitation to speak with you this afternoon. I am so pleased to meet you and to be invited to this wonderful, historical facility. You may know that I'm a runner, and I start each day with a run through the campus or Kalamazoo neighborhoods. I noticed this wonderful building on one of my very first runs through the community.

• After receiving your invitation, I became quite curious, and I learned a little of the history of your organization. I learned the Ladies Library Association was founded by Lucinda Hinsdale Stone in 1852, and this was the first women's organization in the nation to build a clubhouse for its members. Most important, I learned that you are a group dedicated to education and offering opportunities to celebrate the love of literature and the pursuit of higher education. I was pleased to discover that you offer scholarship assistance to Kalamazoo Country students each year, and even more pleased to learn that of the 13 scholarships you awarded this year, six went to students now enrolled at WMU. Thank you.
I applaud you on the work you do to expand opportunities for young people and for your meticulous dedication to preserving this jewel of a building. Both speak volumes about your commitment to your community and your important role in continuing Kalamazoo's tradition of promoting education and honoring history.

• What I learned about the Ladies Library Association amazed me, but it didn't surprise me. My wife, Linda, and I have been in Kalamazoo now for just over a year, and we've become used to discovering amazing things about this community and its history and its ongoing commitment to education. We quickly came to love this community. (Anniversary card story?)

Humble beginnings
We love Kalamazoo for what it is and what it stands for. I want to start today by speaking about the importance of building on humble beginnings. That can be true of an individual, an organization, a community, a university or a nation. They all require initiative, but they also require support from those who share common goals and belief.

Your support for students is a perfect example. I can speak from personal experience about how important such scholarship support can be. I grew up in a small town in southern Illinois--Pinckneyville. My ability to attend college hinged on a $300 county scholarship I received to attend Northern Illinois University. That scholarship and the opportunities it opened left me with a lifelong commitment to ensuring all qualified students have access to higher education.

I don't know what my life would have been like without that assistance to attend NIU. I do know it literally opened a world of possibilities to me and convinced me that those opportunities need to be enjoyed by students from every walk of life. I got
my first experience of living and working with people from diverse backgrounds--both those from the United States and from nations around the globe. The impact of the lessons learned there are the root of my commitment to ensure the great university I lead has a diverse student population.

I think about that often. As I speak to you today, I am the president of a major national research university. Just two days ago, we held our annual CommUniverCity celebration at which I acted as host to guests from Northern Illinois University--the same university that I was able to attend so many years ago with the help of that all-important first scholarship.

**Access for underserved students**

My own experience tells me that we cannot afford to leave the potential of underserved students untapped. Shortly after my arrival here, an opportunity emerged that I'd like you to know about. It's one that will bring one of the most poorly served student populations to our campus. I think it will be a signature initiative for Western Michigan University and one that will be emulated by universities across the nation.

In January, we announced our Foster Care Initiative in Higher Education, which includes scholarship support and special housing arrangements for qualified young people who have aged out of foster care and who are on their own. Students who are admitted to WMU through this program will be known as Seita Scholars and will receive a scholarship named for Dr. John Seita--I'll tell you more about him in a moment.

Here's why we're doing this.

- More than 500 young people age out of foster care in Michigan every year.
Unceremoniously left on their own to make their way in the world with no adult role models, no money, no job and most important, no home.

-70 percent aspire to go to college, but only about 20 percent actually are able to enroll and only a quarter of those students go on to earn a degree. That compares to a national college attendance figure for college-age youth of about 67 percent.

-Let's put those numbers in human terms. For every 100 foster care youth, 70 want to go to college, 14 actually get there and only three or four ultimately earn a degree. In a society like ours, this is unacceptable. Many of these young people are good students. School, for some, has been a refuge--the one constant in their lives. We cannot afford to lose the potential of those young people.

-Now let me describe that potential by telling you the personal story of John Seita, the man for whom we've named our scholarship.

-John Seita is a three-time WMU alumnus who grew up in foster care and has become one of the nation's foremost experts on and advocates for foster youth.

-More than a dozen foster home placements between the time he was 8 years old and when he aged out of the system.

-Received a scholarship to attend a small liberal arts college. When Christmas break came around and the school shut down, he had
nowhere to go--spent those weeks sneaking in to a closed residence hall and scrambling for food.

-Eventually came to WMU and excelled. Today he is a faculty member at MSU. He has published extensively on the topics of foster care and youth development and has worked with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He was honored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as the Foster Care Alumni of the Year for the United States.

-John Seita has helped us design our program, which includes:
- A home--a spot in our residence halls that will not close over the holidays or between semesters.

-Adult assistance to young people who need help and encouragement with admissions and financial aid forms--someone to give these students the basic information most of our students have simply by being part of an intact and caring family.

-A partnership with Kalamazoo Valley Community College to facilitate the transfer of foster youth to WMU; and

A work-study component to provide additional life skills and campus connections for students in the program.

We weren't sure how quickly this program would take off. Our first nine Seita Scholars arrived on campus in July for our second summer session. Another 40 began this fall. I could not be prouder of what my University is doing. I think we are
literally raising the bar when it comes to taking responsibility for community. And let me tell you there have been some very moving moments along the way.

One member of our administrative family reports being on hand when one young woman was dropped off at school. A state car rolled up, and she got out carrying all of her worldly possessions in one cardboard box. Our administrator, the father of two college-aged daughters, found himself choking back tears as he thought about the loaded U-haul and packed minivans that carried his daughters and their friends to campus.

These young people have no network of support, no parents to turn to when times get tough, no one to bolster them or talk from experience. Our campus community has risen to the occasion to help in ways that make me incredibly proud. Late this summer, individuals, office cohorts and employee groups began collecting basic supplies for our foster care students--bedding for their dorm rooms, flash drives to transport computer files, personal grooming materials and even alarm clocks were collected to get these students off on the right foot.

Our community has embraced them and we're determined that they will have the same shot at success that all of our students have. You'll be hearing much more about this in the future.

Foster care students make up just one group of students we think need better opportunities. Another group is made up of returning veterans. We've made a concerted effort over the past few years to welcome veterans to our campus. We now have the largest number of veterans of any of Michigan's public universities, and we expect that number to continue to grow. Veterans have some unique issues and
adjustment challenges, so we've established an advocacy office to help them make a transition to college life.

1st year recap and WMU quality
There's so much more happening at Western Michigan University. I could go on for quite a while, but I'd like to make sure to share with you some of the qualities of this wonderful University. As someone in higher education, I have known about the quality of WMU for many years. In my year here, I've discovered much that I didn't know. I've also discovered that many neighbors and friends right here in Kalamazoo assume they know WMU because they've known of it all their lives. 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 community and our state. So I've developed a habit of making sure my audience has a firm grasp of 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 many more.

I am enormously proud to be the president of Western Michigan University and enormously proud to be part of Kalamazoo. Thank you for your support and opportunities you provide the young people from our community and from around the globe.

And, thank you for the opportunity to visit with you today, to see this beautiful and historic building and to talk about all the things we have to celebrate together.