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New Area Legislators – Introduction to WMU
John M. Dunn
12/16/08

Good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you. Congratulations on your elections. I am looking forward to working with you and want you to head to Lansing fully armed with details about how Western Michigan University adds value to your districts, your constituents and our state and nation.

- Last weekend, we sent more than 2,000 new graduates into the world to start contributing to the economy--the Michigan economy. This is our second largest of three annual commencement ceremonies. In 2008, the total number of graduates has been 6,100--successful students--many of whom are from families who are among your constituents. Our graduates want to stay in Michigan to begin their careers and raise families, and many of them do--more than 80 percent, according to the last information we gathered on that topic.

The basics

- Who and what is WMU? You know us. We're your home community university. Some of you have deep personal connection to WMU. But again, I want to give you the data you'll need in Lansing. I guarantee your colleagues will challenge you on just how important WMU is to Michigan's future. Let's start with the basics.

- Nearly 25,000 students, 5,000 at the graduate level, including
 - More than 13,000 from the Southwest quadrant of Michigan
 - 5,700 students from Kalamazoo County
 - Another 2,700 students come from the adjacent counties of Allegan, Barry, Calhoun, St Joseph and Van Buren.

- More than 4,000 employees
- More than 113,000 alumni in Michigan--with more than 20,000 alums living right here in Kalamazoo County.
- Some 170,000 alumni in every part of the world.

That's just for starters. I also want you to know some other very important things about the University.

- WMU is one of Michigan's five research universities--we'll get back to that fact in a moment.
- The University has an economic impact in Kalamazoo County alone of more than \$600 million annually.
- The University is laced with programs that are among the top such programs of their kind in the nation and the world. And it will surprise you, I know, that many of those programs have lengthy waiting lists of students who want desperately to enroll but for whom we simply don't have the room.
- WMU's internationally recognized disciplines run broad and deep, ranging from atomic physics and graph theory to creative writing, paper science, engineering management, the fine arts and the health and life sciences. There are places in the world where they know just two things about Michigan--Detroit makes cars and Kalamazoo is home to Western
- WMU is incredibly important to the families you serve. We're at the core of the educational and cultural life of communities in this area, but that's only part of the WMU story.

One of Michigan's research resources

- Until 2007, my time was devoted to Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, which is a research university of similar size and credentials to WMU. As a chancellor in Illinois, I occasionally took

note of the higher education environment in other Midwest states. The one thing I could tell you about Michigan with certainty was that the state is absolutely blessed to have five public research universities. Illinois has just four. Only a handful of states have more than four, and Michigan is one of them.

Who decides what schools are research universities? There's no argument in academic circles. We all adhere to the gold standard--a classification managed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It's the system for describing more than 4,400 colleges and universities in the nation. The Carnegie Foundation says Michigan has five public research universities with high or very high research activity. They are Michigan State, Michigan Tech, U of M--Ann Arbor, Wayne State and Western Michigan University.

That means the Kalamazoo area is the home of a major national research university and stands ready to reap the automatic benefits that come from that fact. And Michigan stands to reap those benefits, as well. Because WMU is a research university, we hold our faculty to a higher standard. Not only must they teach, but they must also generate new knowledge through research and scholarly activity. That means our students are learning from some of the finest minds in the disciplines, and they are they are learning the most recent discoveries. Sometimes, because our faculty members welcome

students into their research labs, that means students are learning how to generate new knowledge themselves.

Research that will impact Michigan

Time is short, so let me just give you a few snapshots of the kind of research being done at WMU.

- **Alternative energy.** Is there any area more important to the future of Michigan? We have major federally funded research initiatives in biofuel--producing fuel from sources ranging from trap grease to algae.
- **Environment.** Our researchers are at the leading edge of carbon sequestration research nationally. Again, with national funding, we're looking at ways to capture and liquefy CO₂ and store it safely underground in places with the proper geologic conditions--Michigan.
- **Vehicle safety and durability.** Our Center for Simulation and Advanced Vehicle Design is where army researchers and automobile parts manufacturers use computer simulation to test changes to vehicle design that will lead to more stable and longer-lasting automotive products.
- **Crop disease.** WMU is leading a multiuniversity research effort to use sophisticated weather forecasting methods to limit the impact of global warming and reduce crop disease--including diseases that strike Michigan's potato crop.
- **Science and math education.** In an area that harkens back to our teacher education roots, our researchers are national leaders in this area. WMU's Core-Plus Mathematics

Program, a new way to engage high school students in math, has been recognized by the National Science Foundation as an exemplary program. Our Mallinson Institution for Science Education is known around the nation and its core group of faculty was recently recognized as the nation's third most productive set of faculty researchers in the discipline.

I hope you recall some of these fact over the next couple of years when, as we all know it will, the issue of carving out a special niche for funding Michigan's research universities rears its head again. One of my surprises after coming to Michigan was learning that parts of our higher education infrastructure were determined to demand changes that would irreparably harm the most valuable resource Michigan has to move into a healthy economic future--our state universities.

I will always be available to answer any questions you have about higher education as Michigan moves forward. Please never hesitate to call. And let me start now by inviting your questions this afternoon.

Thank you.