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Thomas Friedman Introduction
World Affairs Council of West Michigan Dinner
John M. Dunn
Oct. 7, 2009

- Good evening. Let me first add my congratulations to the Council for World Affairs of Western Michigan for its 60 years of service to our region. I am honored to lead a great university that has long embraced international education as one of the most important and life-altering opportunities we can offer our students. The Council for World Affairs has for many years been our valued partner in that effort.

- As a matter of fact, there is on our campus in Kalamazoo a centennial time capsule sealed and buried six years ago. Included in the collection of significant items intended for the future is a brochure outlining the WMU Centennial Lecture Series on Globalization, which was developed in partnership with the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan.

- I was delighted to be asked to introduce this evening's speaker. There is an extensive biography included in your program, so I will count on each of you to remind yourself of our guest's impressive credentials. Those of us who have followed Thomas Friedman's writings for many years, had to chuckle in the post-2005 years when he became an "overnight sensation." Thomas "The World is Flat" Friedman was suddenly a household name and had become part of the national conversation popular culture in a way that very few economic correspondents and even New York Times columnists rarely do.

- For those of us in higher education, publication of Thomas Friedman's books has had a wide-ranging impact. "The World is Flat" and now, "Hot, Flat and Crowded" have become required reading assignments in our economics and political science

classes, of course, but are also being read by young engineers, marketers, linguists, computer scientists, historians and physicians.

- And, I confess, college presidents read and use them as well. Inside Higher Ed--one of my profession's daily must reads--recently noted that "Reports about flagging U.S. competitiveness are about as common as college presidents quoting The World Is Flat..." They're right. We do quote Thomas Friedman--I've done it--because he has eloquently and urgently given voice to the messages we care so deeply about:

- international education

- global competitiveness

- the urgent need for a population well educated in science, technology, engineering and math, and

- the value of a liberal arts education that allows people to make connections and innovate.

- Just a year ago, Newsweek reviewed "Hot, Flat and Crowded," and the reviewer said:

"The author comes across as a blend of Will Rogers, Jack Welch and Norman Vincent Peale—a plain-spoken citizen outraged at the bullheadedness of U.S. politicians, yet optimistic about the power of ingenuity and finely crafted policy to avert disaster."

It's that optimism and belief in the power of ingenuity I find most engaging. Not only has he challenged us by concisely laying out the problems, but in his much-anticipated "Chapter 18" project coming next month, he has challenged us to find the solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen please welcome journalist, commentator, author, pundit and recent presidential golfing partner, Thomas L. Friedman.

