10-15-2009

Northside Business Association Remarks

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn
Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/244

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President John Dunn by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
• Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me here to talk about my favorite topic--Western Michigan University. I could--and sometimes do--talk for hours about the great university I lead. But I understand you have some fairly specific items you'd like to hear about. Not coincidentally, they are topics I'm asked about frequently these days.

• I'll share some general updates about WMU and talk about those very topical items, but I want to make sure you have an opportunity to pose additional questions, so I'll close in plenty of time to allow for that.

• Let me start by telling you a bit about what's been happening on campus. We're nearly midway through our fall semester already and the pace on campus is remarkable.

• **Enrollment**--We're fairly steady--at 24,576--despite the economic pressures on student families. Our fall census shows us down about 1 percent. But the real story comes from examining some of the details that go into our fall total.
  - An increase in graduate enrollment--1.3 percent
  - A significant increase--18.2 percent--in the number of nonresident undergraduates coming to us from places like Chicago.
  - An uptick in international enrollment.

  - An uptick in our minority student enrollment, which is always important because we want to make sure we serve our communities
across the state. Minority enrollment now stands at nearly 13 percent--up more than half a percent from a year ago.

-An increase in the academic quality of our entering students. This is incredibly important because we know the better qualified our students are, the more likely they are to stay with us and earn a degree.

- **Sustainability** and environmentally sensitive initiatives are becoming hallmarks of campus life at Western Michigan University. Over the past several months, we've been recognized by organizations ranging from Princeton Review and the Sustainable Endowments Institute to West Michigan's own Business Review for our outstanding work in preserving and protecting the environment and reducing our carbon footprint.

- **New initiatives** We have a number of initiatives on campus that are new or enhanced by new funding. These include:
  - our Seita Scholars outreach to foster care youth,
  - our work with the auto industry to boost the use of computer simulation to build better products, and
  - our work on using Michigan's unique geology to capture and store CO2 through carbon sequestration. I’d like to tell you about two that I am very proud of.

**Seita Scholars.** We're beginning our second year of welcoming young people who have aged out of foster care to our campus. We call them Seita Scholars-after a three-time WMU alum who made it through the foster care system and is now a professor and national advocate for foster care youth.
It's a simple idea really. We decided Western Michigan University could become the support system for a group of students who did not have one. We would develop an academic home and a campus network for students who had aged out of foster care and who had the desire to attend and succeed in college. We could start to level the playing field for them. We provide them with tuition, campus coaches and guidance counselors. We find work study jobs for them and require that they live in campus residence halls--because we know they'll be successful if they do.

We started with 51 students last year, and just over 50 percent of them are still with us--despite the predictions that we'd be doing well to retain only about 20 percent. We're not satisfied with the 50 percent rate. We want every one of these students to succeed and we'll keep chipping away at the hurdles they face as we learn from them about what we need to do. This fall we have 47 new Seita Scholars from 19 Michigan counties. And we're beginning the year with $500,000 in support from the Kellogg Foundation as well as funds from a number of other organizations around the state.

**Confucius Institute.** There is one very new initiative I want to call your attention to, in particular, because of the impact it will have on our area schools, our business community and on the international direction of Western Michigan University.

Over the summer I traveled to China with a small group of campus colleagues to finalize negotiations that will bring a Confucius Institute to the WMU campus. This development makes WMU a member of an international network of top universities with strengths in Chinese studies and will allow us to provide new Chinese language and cultural studies options for WMU
students and faculty. We'll also be able to dramatically expand international opportunities for area K-12 schools and their students, as well as local businesses and corporations. We are one of only 61 schools in the nation to become part of this network.

Our partner institution in China is the Beijing Language and Culture University, China's premier international institution for language instruction. This month, six scholars from BLCU will be joining us on campus to begin the process of enhancing our instructional capabilities. And on Nov. 23, we will have a grand opening of the Western Michigan University Confucius Institute. For that event, we expect to be joined by the president of BLCU and the directors of the Office of Chinese Language Council International of China's Ministry of Education.

• Now let's discuss what I call the "Gazette Letters to the Editor" issues in front of us.

1)"The Event Center--what many call the Arena Project," which is more correctly a downtown events center proposed for the nine-acre parcel that includes the former Cole-Gilmore property.

The project is part of something much larger than an events center. It is part of an overall downtown development project, Arcadia West, designed to breathe new life into that section of our downtown district and build an attractive bridge between the WMU and Kalamazoo College campuses and our existing downtown business community.

For WMU, the position is simple. If it is good for the community, it is good for the University. We are part of this community, and if this project becomes
a reality, we need to be supportive and part of the initiative. The only two caveats are that for University teams to be part of the mix, it has to be revenue neutral and it has to be clearly identifiable as affiliated with Western Michigan University—it has to have a WMU look and feel.

This is not a WMU decision. It is a decision up to the Kalamazoo County voters. But again, for me the bottom line is that if this is good for our community, and I think it will be, then WMU has an obligation to embrace it and make it a success.

In the meantime, we've removed buildings from the part of the property the University owns. That improves the appearance of the property. We're also working to make that property available for parking for students at KVCC's nearby Arcadia Commons campus to lessen the downtown parking pressures that exist.

2) **The Colony Orchard Property**—a 53-acre strip of land between US-131 and Drake Road. There are currently legislative restrictions on the land that we have asked the legislature to lift so that sometime in the future, when we have run out of room and need an expansion for the adjacent Business Technology and Research Park, we'll have room to work with. We hope to see the Senate vote positively on our request soon so it can go to the Governor's desk for a signature.

This one is also about what is good for the community. And here are some critical points to consider.

- We have established a track record for environmentally sensitive development with our very successful Business Technology and
Research Park. We'll continue that if and when we are able to develop the Colony Orchard Property.

• We have pledged to permanently preserve the nearby 264-acre Asylum Lake property. We stand by that pledge now and in the future.

• The Orchard Property is not green space currently enjoyed by the community, but a restricted piece of property with some need for remediation and attention.

• And finally, if developed that property can expand on what the BTR Park is all about--creating synergy between the private sector and the University and creating jobs. More than 1,300 direct and indirect jobs have been created in this community over the past decade because of the BTR Park.

It makes sense to plan to make room for more corporate partners and more jobs in our community. It makes sense to focus expansion plans on an adjacent piece of land already in University hands and within walking distance to our College of Engineering. A development like this is the most effective way we can promote the Kalamazoo business community--by providing businesses the opportunity to develop new products with University researchers and providing internships that can lead to permanent jobs for our students.

I've just talked about two property development initiatives. I should point out that as a University, we are not normally in the real estate development business. I think our impact on the community has to remain all about our core mission--educating
students. But in these rare instances when our ownership of property and the community's economic development goals align, we certainly want to do our part to help improve and build our community's future.

**Medical School**

• And finally, let's take a look at what our community's future could be. I'd like to talk about the transformational idea of a Kalamazoo Medical School--or more properly, a Kalamazoo Academic Health Center.

We began looking at this because of the urgent need for new physicians in the nation--now estimated at between 125,000 and 150,000 by 2020. But you know, the more we look at the possibilities, the better an idea this appears. We already have in place an infrastructure that is the envy of other areas considering this initiative:

- World-class teaching hospitals, Bronson and Borgess
- Experience and a 35-year history in providing two of the four years of medical school instruction
- Strong, nationally renowned allied health programs in WMU's College of Health and Human Services.
- A 100-year history and legacy in the life sciences.

Combining those assets, working with other assets and partners in the region, and following a working model that has proved successful elsewhere, we are looking at integrating expertise and existing strengths available in the community into an Academic Health Center.

This is bigger than Western Michigan University. It is about this entire region and its future. I must remind you that the impact of medical schools on the local economy is staggering--there is no other way to describe it.
Conclusion
I promised time for your questions. Let me just conclude by reminding you that this weekend is one of those signature college football weekends. Think brisk fall weather, intense rivalry, a fabulous band and a 3:30 p.m. kickoff.

It's the Western Michigan University Broncos vs. their archrivals, the CMU Chippewas this Saturday at Waldo Stadium. This is your invitation to be there.

Go Broncos!