Robert Jones Memorial Service

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Good afternoon and welcome to Western Michigan University. While the occasion is a sad one, I can think of no more appropriate place for this community to gather to honor the legacy of Robert B. Jones. He was an advocate for this University and was deeply committed to it.

If you happened to visit this University's news website this week, you would have seen a wonderful photo of Bob Jones wearing green, marching in the Kalamazoo St. Patrick's Day Parade and exuding the very essence of Irish charm. And believe me, I know Irish charm when I see it.

As I looked at that photo, I was reminded of one of my first glimpses of Rep. Robert Jones in action in Lansing. The year was 2007, and there he was--smiling, of course, and hurrying across a busy street at the Capitol with his eyes dancing above that impeccably groomed and curled handlebar mustache that was his trademark.

He was the real deal, I remembered thinking then and many times afterward. He was energetic, engaged and completely enthralled with his community. He knew that he could make this a better place, and he worked to that end for some 40 years--as a husband and father, citizen/scientist, a mayor and a state representative.

It's fitting that we gather here today. As a campus, as a community and as a state, we have lost a treasure. On a more personal level, many of us, and I include myself here, have lost an individual we considered a true friend and role model.

He fought injustice and he advocated fiercely for education and economic growth. It was that advocacy that put him so closely in touch with this University. He was not
a Bronco by education. Another university claims him as an alumnus. But he was a Bronco by choice. We counted him among our most loyal and devoted supporters, and I will be forever proud that he came to love this university as his own.

Bob Jones will always be remembered on this campus for the critical role he played in the late 1990s in helping us establish our Business Technology and Research Park. As a scientist, he knew the incredible potential of the expertise that is part of this community's DNA. As a mayor, he recognized and correctly predicted the impact that new jobs in the “knowledge economy” would have on this city.

Last year, as a legislator, Bob worked hard again on behalf of the BTR Park, when he fought to pass legislation that will ease future expansion of that park. WMU experienced the power of his commitment, and I know that public and private organizations throughout our community can recount the same kind of advocacy and commitment.

Our stay on earth is time-sensitive. Bob knew that and was certainly reminded of it during the past 18 months. But the relative shortness of the time we have is, in a few rare individuals like Bob, mitigated by the enormity of their accomplishments. Bob Jones lived and worked large. He spent his energies in the areas that mattered most--family, community and building a better world.

What he did will have a lasting impact. HOW he did it will perhaps be remembered even longer. I know I won't be the last person today to remark on the essential Bob Jones qualities that we will long remember--kindness, compassion, commitment, integrity and civility. It is a rare thing in these partisan times to ascribe those qualities to a political leader, but that is the way colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in every walk of life will remember Bob Jones.
Poet Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

We're not likely to forget what Bob Jones said or what Bob Jones did. We will certainly never forget how he made us feel. Today is both a celebration of Bob Jones's legacy and an opportunity for all of us to resolve to emulate those essential Bob Jones qualities. If we do, this community will be the better for our efforts.

Thank you.