Faculty Retirement Dinner Remarks

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Good evening. I am honored to be here this evening to celebrate your retirement from Western Michigan University. You are retiring, and Bob Dylan just turned 70 on Tuesday. I'm seeing a generational sea change marked here.

There are 18 of you being honored this evening, and you represent five of our seven degree-granting colleges. You have been the heart of this University, and when you leave us, you collectively take with you more than 533 years of service and institutional memory. This year's faculty retirees have individual years of service that range from 10 to 51 years, for an average of more than 29 years.

The first thing I want to do is to simply thank you for your commitment and contributions. I also want to thank those who have been part of your life here--your loved ones who have supported you in so many ways and helped you be productive. I know many are here with you tonight, and I know this milestone is theirs as much as yours.

In that average 29 years of service, you have witnessed countless physical changes--spectacular new homes for our colleges of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Haworth College of Business, and Health and Human Services. You've also seen the completion of an arts village for our College of Fine Arts and the beautiful new Richmond Center for Visual Arts. You've also seen dramatic shifts--in student attitudes and expectations, in technology and its role in instruction, and in the demands on higher education to bring economic vitality to our state and nation.
• Even more important, you've seen this University grow from a regional institution to the national research university it is today. No, let me correct that. You didn't just see that evolution. Your work--your teaching, your research and your creative work--fueled that growth and made this University the renowned institution it is today.

• You are retiring from the faculty and a lifetime of commitment to higher education, but I don't believe for a minute that you're done with the intellectually rich and challenging life of an academic. University life has a certain magic about it. Historian Richard Hofstadter put it this way.

"The delicate thing about the university is that it has a mixed character, that it is suspended between its position in the eternal world, with all its corruption and evils and cruelties, and the splendid world of our imagination."

• Your imagination tells you what a splendid world this can be. Your determination to prepare young people to build that world has and will continue to have a profound impact.

• When I think about retirement and the fact that faculty retirements take great teachers from our midst, I am reminded and always like to share the words of Louis Armstrong when he talked about the possibility of retiring.

"Musicians don't retire," he said. "They stop when there's no more music in them."

• I think the same is true for those who have spent their lives in the classroom. Teachers don't retire. They stop when there's no more love of education in them. As I look at all of you and all you've accomplished, and as I listen to your stories of life as faculty members at this university, I know none of you will truly retire.
• You'll just change your focus a bit. You're not retiring "from" something, as some people do. More likely, you're retiring "to" a life of new discovery and intellectual inquiry. Those ideas and dreams that have been dancing in the background can now take center stage.

• I know some of you are making plans to move from this city, but I want you all to know that no matter where you are--here in Kalamazoo or on the other side of the globe--you will remain part of this university community. You are responsible in large measure for the rich academic life we've developed as a community. We want you to remain part of our community.

• I look forward to seeing you on campus enjoying yourselves in the coming months and years. You've earned it.