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MLK Higher Education Open House Welcome

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• Good Morning and welcome to Western Michigan University. We are so pleased
to have you here with us today.

• We've been a partner in the Kalamazoo community's Martin Luther King Jr.
celebration for many years--since the start of this communitywide event. And
we've been hosting this college information event for several years now as well.
This year's celebration is very special to us here at WMU. This year, we're
celebrating the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's visit to our campus to deliver a
major address.

• He came here just months after his signature "I Have a Dream" speech--and just
weeks after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

• Dr. King's message to the Kalamazoo community that day was one that reflected
the pain and discord but also the hope for a better tomorrow that filled the nation in
1963. He decried violence and urged people to live together in harmony. We still
live in a world in which those messages need to be repeated every day.

• So much remains to be done--but so much has been accomplished since then.
This is an amazing weekend to reflect on those facts. On Monday, 50 years after
the Rev. King spoke directly to us here in Kalamazoo and 150 years after the
Emancipation Proclamation, we will celebrate the second inauguration of our first
African American president.
• On Monday, bibles that once belonged to both Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln will be used to administer the oath of office to President Barack Obama. That event will serve to remind us how far we've come and how much we still are capable of achieving. I count myself fortunate to be among the people who will be there to watch that historic moment.

• I am convinced that much of the progress we have made is closely tied to broad educational opportunity--what today is all about. When Dr. King accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, this is what he said.

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."

• Those words, spoken just a year after his last visit to Kalamazoo and Western Michigan University, revealed his deep respect for knowledge and its power. He fought for the right of all children to be well educated and to have the opportunity to realize their potential. Because of the Kalamazoo Promise, we have the gift, as a community, to ensure that we can provide that opportunity to every one of our children.

• The promise and events like today's are not about where children choose to attend college--although I'll be honest and say I hope they choose their hometown university. This is more about making sure our children fully understand the wealth of opportunity that is available to them with a college degree, no matter what school they choose to attend. We want them to begin working on the particulars--deciding exactly how they are going to realize the Promise and fulfill their dreams.
• Enjoy the open house and the opportunity to learn the kind of information that's important for your family to know, as you take advantage of what higher education offers. And please, as you're browsing and taking part in some of the activities, stop and chat with me and introduce me to your family. I'm eager to get to know you.

Thank you.