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9/11 Remembrance, Bronson Park

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9/11 Remembrance, Bronson Park
Dr. John M. Dunn
Sept. 11, 2013

Good evening. Thank you for being here and taking this important opportunity to mark the 12th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks on our nation.

- That was an event of such import that each of us here today remembers exactly where we were at the moment we first heard the news. And it was an event that unified us as a nation. Once we had processed and shared first the horror, then the grief and anger of that day, there was a common sense of resolve.

- I think it remains important to reflect on those personal experiences Let me share with you, briefly, where I was that day and what happened in the community that I was part of at that time. Dunn recalls his personal 9/11 memories...

WMU on Sept. 11

- The campus community of Western Michigan University had its own set of unique experiences that have left it forever changed. Just before I left my office to come here, our Army and Air Force ROTC cadets ended their 8-hour vigil at the flagpole in front of our administration building. They began this morning by playing Taps and lowering the flag to half-staff at 8:46 a.m. That is the time the first plane hit the World Trade Center. Cadet teams then took 30-minute shifts as silent honor guards at their posts. They do that each year--some years using a flag that has flown over a U.S. encampment in Iraq or Afghanistan. Our cadets' presence at the flagpole on Sept. 11 has become an important campus tradition and one ceremonial way we have of marking each anniversary.

- Sept. 11, 2001, and the immediate aftermath touched Western Michigan University deeply. That day, our training planes from the College of Aviation were in the air around the state and were forced to land at the nearest airport when the FAA ordered all planes out of the sky. Classes and public activities were canceled, but our campus community remained largely on campus and came together for a candlelight vigil in Kanley Chapel.

- The immediate shock of the events was compounded in the ensuing days when the campus community learned that one of its alumni was on the plane that hit the Pentagon. We then learned the 22-year-old brother of one of our students perished at his new job as a trader on the 93rd floor of Tower I. Another alumnus told a harrowing tale of his descent from the 70th floor of Tower II. Those became our personal connections to the people who perished as they were going about their daily lives. And those were our connections to the hundreds of rescue workers who gave their lives trying to rescue them and others like them.

- As one of the nation's top pilot training centers and home to an international pilot training center, WMU's College of Aviation was visited by the FBI and was briefly the focus of national media coverage two days later as the nation learned that the terrorists had trained at U.S. flight schools. Our program, of course, was just as quickly removed from the limelight, but we were left needing to wrap our arms around and protect a group of frightened and confused young pilot trainees from the United Arab Emirates. They were processing the tragedy from their own perspective and feeling very far from home.

- Those were troubling days that live on in our memory--as they should. Like all of you, our campus learned in the days and months that followed to be sensitive to the

needs of a diverse community and to allow others to process the events and grieve in their own time and way.

- The lasting lessons of those tragic days--the silver lining if you will to a very dark cloud--are many. Among those important lessons, in my estimation, are these.

1) **Ceremony is important.** Ceremony helps a community get through tragedy as well as honor and remember those who have been lost. From our candlelight vigils and services on Sept. 11, 2001, to this 9/11 memorial ceremony in Bronson Park 12 years later, ceremony helps us make good on our vow to remember and honor those lost--2,996 individuals, including more than 400 emergency responders.

Ceremony also helps us channel our emotions in thoughtful and positive directions. From a very personal perspective, I want to offer my thanks to those who organized this evening's event and allowing us the place and time for reflection.

2) **We are a global community.** This was an American tragedy, an attack on our nation. But no nation was immune from the horror of that day. Among the victims of Sept. 11 were 372 citizens from 90 other nations. A full 12 percent of those killed were foreign nationals. Other nations that lost many citizens in those attacks included the United Kingdom, the Dominican Republic and India. Families in 90 nations were overcome with grief. As the president of a university that embraces students from those same 90 nations, that fact resonates with me, and informs my role as an educator. I have to believe that what we do as educators and citizens to bring that global community together through education will be our nation's major tool in preventing future tragedies.

3) Finally, ours is a nation that despite partisan divide still can come together with steely resolve and a commitment to our values. While 12 years may seem like a lifetime ago, it is but a second in the march of history. As a nation we can and will, in an instant, summon the common resolve and commitment to rise to the occasion and do whatever we are called to do to preserve the values we hold close. That is a healthy thing to keep in mind as we deal with a daily dose in the news of political bickering and strife.

Today, through quiet ceremony, we honor those suddenly lost from a global community. And we honor as well, those who responded to the call to serve, from those emergency responders who gave their lives on Sept. 11 to those men and women who work every day to preserve our way of life.

Thank you for being here and for honoring our pledge 12 years ago to always remember. We will take those memories forward with us.