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## Elson S. Floyd Hall Remarks

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John M. Dunn  
Elson S. Floyd Hall Remarks  
Oct. 16, 2015

Good afternoon. First let me thank all of our colleagues and friends in the community and beyond who shared their remembrances with us today. No one can tell the boots story quite like Jeff Breneman. And I wish I'd been there to see Elson Floyd sledding down that hill with the Green family.

I know many of you here in the audience have your own favorite Elson Floyd story. I hope you'll allow yourself the time to reflect and to smile at your personal memories--because today is a celebration of those memories and the time Dr. Floyd spent with us.

*(If you have an Elson story, this is the place to tell it.)*

As you saw at the end of the video, just a bit earlier this afternoon, we unveiled a portrait and plaque in Elson S. Floyd Hall--just before those taking part in the dedication ceremony walked out the main entrance under the signage that proudly bears the Floyd name. I invite you to drive by and walk through the building and the development that is so central to the legacy of the Floyd years at WMU.

While I first met Elson Floyd several years ago, it is really over the past few years that we developed a friendship and explored a shared bond. Over the past two years, we met several times in Washington, D.C., when we were both attending Board of Directors meetings for the American Council on Education. He always expressed his love for this University and this community, and he would pepper me with questions about campus personalities and initiatives as well as new

developments in Kalamazoo. More than a dozen years after leaving WMU for an academic career that included two additional university presidencies, Elson and Carmento remained genuinely committed to WMU and Kalamazoo.

Elson Floyd was the sixth president of Western Michigan University. The strongest bond we shared, of course, was that we were both members of an elite group. In the 112-year-history of Western Michigan University, there have only been eight presidents. When Elson and I sat together at those Washington meetings, we could say a quarter of the University's leadership was represented in that single room.

I'm told that the University of Missouri Board of Regents extended an offer to Elson, there was one facet of the University of Missouri system presidency that caused him to raise an eyebrow and gave him pause, it was the knowledge that in Missouri, he wouldn't be the sixth, the 10th or even the 15th president in that school's history--but the 21st president!

I understand then City Commissioner Al Heilman detected a bit of an opening there and made his pitch on behalf of Kalamazoo. The owner of the famed local confectioner's shop offered Elson two pounds of macadamia nuts per month for as long as the Floyds would stay in our community.

Still, the presidency in Missouri won out. It was a wonderful opportunity for Elson and recognition of how effective he had been at WMU. Five years later, he was tapped by Washington State University for his final presidency--and one that was spectacularly successful.

Several of us traveled to Pullman, Washington, in August for a celebration something like this. We could not have been more proud to hear the accolades that day and know that the person loved so much by that university community was a Bronco as well. Late last month we learned the WSU board approved what is that school's most fitting tribute when it named its new medical school in Spokane the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine.

He wholeheartedly became a Bronco, a Tiger and then a Cougar--three presidencies in very different communities but each a resounding success--that was the Elson Floyd career path. On a deep and very personal level he never lost site of the critical lesson in his own life. The value of education he learned from his parents as a child was his guide. It was what he wanted for every student, and what he modeled for everyone whose life he touched.

Seattle Times columnist Jon Toltan put it best in June when he said:  
"Elson Floyd's life was a master class in the benefits of a university education."

That is the most concise and accurate description I could imagine--and one I will use going forward when I describe my friend.

And now, I want to invite to the podium, our former first lady--the woman who shared the journey and left her mark on our community as well. Please welcome Carmento Floyd--Mrs. Elson S. Floyd.