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Faculty Retirement Dinner Remarks

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• Good evening. As always, I am honored to be here to celebrate your retirement from Western Michigan University.

• This is the last time I will offer such comments to retiring faculty members, and I feel like I've come full circle. Ten years ago, just after I was named president, Linda and I had the opportunity to attend the 2007 dinner with then-president Diether Haenicke. It was the most profound affirmation of the power of this university that I could have hoped to experience.

• I am reminded of that impression again this evening as I talk with you and read your individual profiles in the program. But the feeling is much more personal this time. I'm reading about my friends--people I respect and rely upon every day. And as an aside, I have to say "retiring" is never a word I would use to describe you.

• You know over the years when I've attended these events, I've wondered, occasionally, how it feels to retire. Rest assured, tonight, I'm right there with you.

• There are 38 of you being honored this evening, and you represent all seven of our degree-granting colleges and our University libraries. You have been the heart of this University, and when you leave us, you collectively take with you 908 years of service and institutional memory. This year's faculty retirees have an average of more than 23 years of service to WMU. The range of individual years of service runs from 10 to 44 years.
• The first thing I want to do is to 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 to be productive. I know many are here with you tonight, and I know this milestone is theirs as much as yours. Let's take a moment to acknowledge their role in making tonight's celebration possible. (pause and lead applause)

• In your average 23 years of service, you have witnessed countless physical changes to the campus--too many to mention. Even more important, you've seen this University grow into the national, inclusive, sustainable, vital research university it is today. No, let me correct that. You didn't just see that evolution. Your work--your teaching, research and creative work--fueled that growth and made this University the renowned institution it is today.

• You will be missed. When I first began attending these events, a typical group of retirement honorees would number 15-16. Tonight, at 38 strong, you represent fundamental change.

• Two years ago at this dinner, I noted the generational shift underway by reminding those attending that their retirement celebration was happening at the same time David Letterman was retiring. Last year, I was able to provide an update. After a year of quiet life as a retiree and growing a beard, David Letterman weighed in on what he had learned. He recalled a recent moment during a White House state dinner when a diplomat seated at the same table asked him who he was and why he'd been invited to the event.

“I tell you, if you want to have something affect your self-esteem, retire,” Letterman told an audience to whom he told the story.
• That may be the experience of an entertainer, but I guarantee your self-esteem will never be in that kind of jeopardy. The knowledge, commitment and inspiration you have shared with decades of Bronco students will reverberate through the halls of WMU, and around the world, for semesters to come. The passion you hold for your discipline is now firmly planted in the hearts of the learners you touched throughout your career. Your voice is a permanent part of their dreams and the sense of direction they summon to meet every challenge. They are your legacy.

• I know some of you are making plans to move from this city, but I want you--us--all to remember 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 here. We want you to remain part of our community.

• I look forward to seeing you on campus enjoying yourselves in the coming months. You've earned it. Congratulations, and may you stop to reflect occasionally on the fact that it's a great day to be a Bronco. I know I will.