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ADDRESS given on WGVC-TV
by President A. D. Lubbers
January 7, 1981

Good Evening! In November Governor Milliken told the people of Michigan that the state economy had continued its downward slide, and that severe cuts in the 1980-81 budget were required. Since that speech, scarcely a day goes by without some state institution or agency announcing layoffs or discontinuation of programs.

Throughout our country there has been a cry for less taxation, for "cutting the fat" out of government. Many citizens of Michigan support that cause, and take satisfaction in the fact that the state must reduce its services. There can be little satisfaction, however, when Michigan's weak economy forces these reductions.

It is said, "When the American economy catches a cold, Michigan comes down with pneumonia." Today Michigan has the worst case of economic pneumonia it has experienced in nearly 50 years.

Those who provide the citizens' education, police protection, good roads, health care, and many other services are capable of doing that well only if the private sector is healthy. Businesses and industry must provide most of the jobs, pay fair wages, and make profits that can be reinvested in the economy. Fairly paid individuals and profitable businesses pay the taxes that give us the education, the care, the protection and the mobility that we all want. In our state we are very close to the point where most of the "fat" is out of the budget and where programs and services the people want and need are threatened. Economists' predictions, as well as our own common sense,
tell us that Michigan's economic recovery may be slow.

In this context of financial recession, I want to speak to you tonight about higher education. An editorial in *The Detroit Free Press* addresses the plight of higher education and concludes, "The universities can and must step out with new boldness to assert both their needs and their potential contribution to the welfare of the state." That is good advice and a fair request.

First, I want to talk about contributions and then about needs. Some of the potential contributions are past contributions as well.

A democratic society will survive and make progress if its citizens know their heritage, and are aware of the mistakes and successes of their history. They must know also the language of their society, and understand at least partially the language of science and mathematics.

To read, to write, and to calculate is to stimulate the mind to thought. Thought breeds intelligence and intelligence, thought. The quality of our thought and our intelligence will to a great degree determine our destiny. This is what higher education is about. Does this sound too abstract, too impractical? Let me try to make my point in practical terms.

We want doctors and nurses who are able to provide outstanding care for the health of the people -- that takes thought and intelligence.

We want engineers to construct systems and structures that are technically sound, and free us from unnecessary labor.

We want teachers who know, enjoy, and successfully communicate the subject they teach.

We want businessmen and industrialists who have the knowledge and instinct to make sound decisions so that there will be jobs,
profits and useful products.

We want scientists to invent, to open the way for a sane use of our resources, and to continually discover and explain the wonders of our planet and the universe.

We want spiritual leaders, philosophers, and psychologists whose insight and knowledge help us to a better understanding of ourselves and others.

We want artists who express without words beauty and truth that are necessary to the human experience, and writers and playwrights who do the same with words.

We want people who intelligently and fairly make our laws, administer justice, represent legal positions, organize and direct both public and private interest groups, disseminate information and opinion, and manage our public affairs.

Colleges and universities perform a major role in preparing people to use their talents in the ways I have described. You, the people of Michigan, have a right to expect your colleges and universities to do just that.

You have a right to expect that the knowledge gained through study and research on college and university campuses is available to government and private enterprise to improve cities, agriculture, health, communication, personal understanding, and other noble human endeavors.

You have a right to expect that educators will stress issues of value and questions of ethics even as they deal with the hard facts of knowledge.
You have a right to expect that there will be equitable access to higher education for all qualified people who want to stretch their minds, expand their spirits, and improve their capabilities in the world of work.

You have a right to expect the colleges and universities to provide the kinds of public services that enhance life -- such as the television station you are watching and assistance to the teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

You have a right to expect that all of this be done with good quality, and at a cost that can be justified. I believe the colleges and universities both public and private have been worthy of the dollars invested in them by the people of Michigan. There are over 986,000 living graduates of our public institutions alone, most of whom live and work in Michigan. Can you imagine the state without them? Last year 514,488 students were enrolled in state public and private senior and junior colleges. The number is expected to be higher this year. Here at Grand Valley State, one of the smaller state institutions, over 10,000 people were enrolled last year.

Judging by the number and diversity of people involved in education, the number of public agencies and private enterprises that seek assistance from faculty specialists, and judging by the people who appreciate public television and other services, it seems clear that the people of Michigan want strong colleges and universities. What then, must be done to meet their needs, and how hard hit are they by the present recession in Michigan? Let me address these questions.

Higher education was hurt by the recent cutbacks announced by the Governor. It was hurt but not devastated. It can absorb this blow
without being altered drastically for the worse, but I doubt if it can sustain many more of the same severity. The layoffs run to the thousands. At Grand Valley we laid off 44 people, and reduced the salaries and positions of 36 others. In doing that we eliminated only one local program, and dropped only one country from our international studies. On January 14th our classes will open as usual, and the academic program for most of our students is unaffected. That does not mean our services remain untouched and that we do not hurt for the people who are gone and the work they did. I believe the situation is similar in all of Michigan's senior public colleges and universities.

You have read and heard much about the present financial crisis and how it affects higher education. Let me put the present situation in the context of funding for our colleges and universities over the last decade. In the 1960s Michigan was one of the nation's leaders in appropriating tax dollars for higher education. In the last two years Michigan dropped to 49th out of 50 states in per capita appropriations for higher education. With the recent reduction we may now be 50th. During the 1970s the share of Michigan's budget that went for higher education decreased by 33 percent. These are startling facts, and reveal that higher education has lost its place in Michigan's list of priorities. The people should know this. Such a decision should not be made by default.

We in higher education will share our portion of the state's economic misery without unreasonable complaint. We will tell you, however, what we think we need to make it through this difficult period.

First: We need you, the citizens, to observe what we do well. Michigan does not have a weak public college or university. You hear
about the disagreements and the real or alleged weaknesses. But if you look carefully you will find a large number of able faculty and administrators serving you with a fine quality of work. That isn't news, it's expected, and you have to look for it. If you do, you will have a new appreciation for what is happening, and give support to the people at your institutions who need it in this time of financial stringency.

Second: Higher education cannot afford to fall any lower in Michigan's priority list. We can make the argument that higher education is already far too low on the list.

The needs of higher education in Michigan will be met effectively when the economy of the state is strong. For the economy to become strong and escape the fluctuations of the recent past the state's economy must become more diversified. The automobile industry should be encouraged, but at the same time Michigan has to find ways to be less dependent upon it.

I suggest that the Governor and the legislative leaders present to the citizens of the state as soon as possible a plan for executive and legislative action to encourage and develop new industry and business in Michigan. The first step was the reform in workmen's compensation and unemployment compensation laws. There is much more to be done.

I suggest that under the Governor's leadership, representatives of government, labor, business and education be called together to ascertain what role each can play in building a stronger economy for our state.

I suggest that there be public discussion on the feasibility of funding the state's senior colleges and universities by a designated
higher education tax, a proposal made by several university presidents. This could provide more stable funding levels and fix the priority of funding at a level acceptable to the citizens.

There is no miraculous financial recovery. There can be a slow, steady movement to a healthier, more stable economy if business, labor, and education working with government have the will to make Michigan strong again. Let's have a plan for the "New Michigan." Michigan is a beautiful state, with great human and natural resources. Our challenge is to work together toward the realization of our most optimistic potential.