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Grand Valley Colleges Foundation Remarks, delivered at the Kickoff Luncheon on November 17, 1981

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

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As I prepare remarks for almost any occasion at which I am invited to speak, expected to speak, or choose to speak, my mind becomes a "time funnel," and I always think about what happened before that can be related to what is and predictably will be. I feel comfortable with historical context, though I'm afraid I often conjure up in my audience horrible memories of unbelievably dull history classes taught by physical education teachers, who didn't want to teach them in the first place.

Congressman, later President James A. Garfield, in an address in 1867, said that in an examination of the catalog of Harvard College four-sevenths of a student's time was devoted to Greece and Rome, and "in the whole program of study no mention is made of physical geography, or anatomy, physiology or the general history of the United States."

This was what Harvard President Charles W. Elliot was about to reform. How much reform was needed is reflected in his writings, A Late Harvest. He states, "When I asked the medical faculty if it would be possible to substitute an hour's written examination for the five minutes' oral examination, the answer comes: 'Written examinations are impossible in the Medical School.
A majority of students cannot write well enough.'"

Garfield's address and Elliot's comments came at a time when there was a great stirring on the education front in America. It was a time when the people of the nation were awakening to their need for an education beyond the classics. The great national movement for the establishment of state universities was underway, the sciences were struggling for a place in the curriculum of educational institutions, improved agriculture and medicine were a concern, and the literature and history of our nation were finding their way into college courses. The Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin were on the way to setting the standards for public higher education in America.

The most important catalytic action for education in the 19th century was the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, named for a Vermont Congressman. The legislation provided federal lands for the development of universities to provide learning and research in science, technology and agriculture, and Michigan State was in the first group to receive these lands to convert into funds. For
this to happen in a nation rent by civil war is encouraging, and
a piece of history worth our observation in difficult times.

Americans were becoming conscious of their vast needs for
knowledge in many fields. A knowledge that would build the nation
and develop the frontier. The Historian, Allen Nevins says, “For
most land grant institutions the critical hour fell between
Appomattox and the centennial year of 1876.” Spiritually it stands
in our history as a bad decade, stained with reconstruction hatreds,
corruption, an uneven economic boom, and finally panic and
depression. But America was participating in the knowledge explosion,
and its new universities and colleges were beginning to harness
its power for new understanding, and a way of life unknown before.
We have been following in that train ever since.

After the second world war the new burst of knowledge, and
the desire of people to participate in it led to broadening of
the curriculum in existing colleges and universities.

Then something else happened. Joseph Chamberlain, one of
Birmingham, England’s leading citizens, said around the turn of
the century, “To place a university in the middle of a great
industrial and manufacturing population is to do something to leaven the whole mass with higher aims and intellectual ambition." In the 1960s large population areas without some of the educational opportunities afforded other population centers, established colleges with the help of the state. That is how Grand Valley State Colleges came into existence.

I don't know whether or not this area of western Michigan fits Chamberlain's definition of a great industrial and manufacturing population or Grand Valley of a University. I know, however, this is a significant population area and we fulfill many of the functions of a university as we relate to the area. Enough so that I believe his thesis holds for all of us.
Surely and with growing significance our graduates are staffing the hospitals, caring for the sick, managing in business, practicing law, staffing social agencies, analyzing and keeping the books and records of innumerable businesses and organizations from the best undergraduate computer service program in the state. The faculty and staff, many of whom are here today, are worthy of your support. They are doing the job.

Just as the land grant colleges forged ahead in the 1870s during a depression, forged ahead because they were needed, so will new regional institutions in Michigan serving the state and their own areas continue to help people develop talents for the new era. In these difficult times, still offering opportunities for improvement, we turn once again to you - the people who have been a part of us or supported us. We decided to expand our Foundation to build and oversee our fund raising from private sources. The major emphasis of the Foundation is to increase the endowment. We want gifts to invest so the earnings from those gifts can provide a margin of excellence in good times and survival in bad. We are not going for the "quick fix." You may say to
move from $3,000,000 to $10,000,000 in endowment is an ambitious goal when Foundation memberships begin at $25.00, with additional categories of $100, $200 and $1,000. Of course it is, but we want a lot of shareholders who buy in each year. We are beginning. We do have $3,000,000 towards our goal, and in the future who knows, someone may buy a $1,000,000 ticket to lunch.

The 18th century philosopher Rousseau said, "Education comes from nature, men, and things." Since he made that statement, there have been a lot of people probing and learning from nature and discovering and making many things. It just doesn't stop. There will be more and more people continuing the process beyond our imagination to perceive what their discoveries will be.

The knowledge explosion continues, boom or depression. We must not panic because we don't have as much as previously. We must tighten our belts, and be about our business. Michigan needs us, and will need us. We need you to strengthen us.
I'm optimistic about the future. I am also appreciative -- to you who have already contributed -- to you who have come to listen -- and to Governor Milliken who has come today to support this drive for private funds for one of his institutions.

The Governor assumed his present job about two months before I embarked upon mine. For nearly thirteen years I have placed my single interest before him as he attempts to deal with the myriad interests that are thrust upon the Governor of Michigan. I have come away from encounters with and observations of the Governor with respect and admiration for him.

Let me mention a few of the qualities that impress me. He loves the State of Michigan more than most citizens do, and I think more than most Governors love their states. He just has the capacity for it. Because of that capacity, he cares about people and their condition more than most are able to do. People react through feelings to their political leaders. Most citizens can invest with trust if they sense there is genuine caring. That, I believe, is why Bill Milliken has been Governor of Michigan longer than anyone else. Combined with his personal sensitivity is an astuteness that
any survivor holding his office must demonstrate. He fits his office well and manages the many conflicting interests and demands with political skill, yet always searching for the decisions that are not only possible, but the best possible for Michigan.

Now faced with an economic recession, the Governor is moving to chart a new course for our state. He does so with realistic optimism. After thirteen years of good leadership, he may, in these difficult times, achieve his finest hour. I present to you the Honorable William G. Milliken, Governor of the State of Michigan.