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Opening Remarks, delivered at Commencement on April 30, 1994

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COMMENCEMENT - APRIL 30, 1994

Opening Remarks by President Lubbers

We are in a political year, the stakes are high in Michigan. A Governor running for reelection in a year like this, wherever he goes, is caught in the swirl of political passions that accompany an impending election. Yet in the United States and in each of the states, the chief executive officer elected through a partisan, political process, is invested with the functions and responsibilities of head of state as well, similar to hereditary or appointed office holders in other countries, or those selected by a representative body. Here we ask those who are elected to govern to also preside, and speak for and to all the people on occasion. We give each United States President and all Governors two hats when they are elected.....one to wear when they are being partisan and one to wear when they are not. The nonpartisan hats were on at Richard Nixon's funeral when President Clinton addressed the assembled, among them four former Presidents, three Republicans and one Democrat. It is vintage American that Richard Nixon, as partisan and controversial as

politicians come when running for and holding public office, planned his funeral knowing that there was a good chance a Democratic President would hold center stage at the event. It's a great system even if a little confusing for some people, especially for those whose political passions may be momentarily or continually hot.

A Commencement is when the nonpartisan hats are on, and our Governor comes to us today as head of state in Michigan to address the graduates who are graduating from a state university, their families and the citizens of the state if he chooses this platform to do so. We must have in our society occasions when our elected Governor speaks to us above the fray, when he addresses those who voted for him and those who did not, as our constitutionally empowered leader.

Before Governor Engler comes to the lectern, I want to comment briefly about what I have observed these last few years. When he was running for Governor he made promises just as every Gubernatorial candidate in the history of American politics makes. But without questioning the sincerity of other elected governors, he has been able, I believe, to keep more promises than most of them. He promised

property tax cuts, a large majority of the people voted for Proposal A, and we have property tax reduction." He promised school initiatives, and we have an opportunity to establish charter schools where new approaches to education can be tried in cooperation with the existing system. He promised welfare reform, and our system in Michigan looks more like workfare now than it did prior to his coming to office. He promised a tighter state budget, and instead of a \$1.8 billion dollar deficit he faced when elected Governor, the state has a \$312 million dollar surplus, and reduced taxes at the same time. This was the reason cited by U.S. News and World Report for Michigan's economic recovery, the strongest among the industrial states, adding 350,000 jobs since 1991. He also promised to visit all 83 Michigan counties each year in that old Oldsmobile. I think I read somewhere that he finally had to acquire a new Oldsmobile. I don't blame the old one for giving up. No car can keep pace with John Engler as he determinedly cruises through each county each year.

He promised to keep the universities stable while most state budgets were reduced - some drastically. And he promised to build

facilities on campuses where they were needed. Now that some new dollars are available, he is ready to provide the universities with some of them and as a first priority, he has recommended equity in funding for universities as he did for K-12 education. For our university, this is not only of utmost, but ultimate importance. For our rapid growth has outdistanced the state appropriation per student. We appreciate the Governor's recommendation and if enacted by the Legislature, a significant step toward equity will be taken. Our new science center too bears the stamp of Engler, and for the future we agree with the Governor that state universities can raise some private money to match state dollars for future building projects. We are ready, but I will resist my inclination to lobby and do that another time.

So, I am pleased to present to you the Honorable John Engler, Governor of the State of Michigan, a man who keeps his word.