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Comments before the Higher Education Subcommittee, delivered for the Senate Appropriations Committee on April 16, 1999

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Comments of Arend D. Lubbers
President
Grand Valley State University
before the Higher Education Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
April 16, 1999

Senator Schwarz and members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for bringing your hearing to my alma mater. Lubbers Hall, around the corner, is named for my father, who was President of Hope College. We value our long-standing relationship with Hope. Many of its alumni attend GVSU for graduate school. Holland is the hometown of the chair of Grand Valley's Board of Control, Donna Brooks, who is here today. Holland is also home to Grand Valley's newest regional center, the Meijer Campus, which opened last fall and has already enrolled a thousand students.

Among the questions you have asked of me is to describe the mission and future plans of our campus. I am a historian, so I hope you will let me answer the question about the future by making a point about the past.

Grand Valley State University was born forty years ago of need: Holland, Muskegon and Grand Rapids - the state's second largest metropolitan area - did not have a locally based public college. By responding to regional demand with convenience, high quality degree programs and value for the student, Grand Valley has become the state's fastest growing public university. 240 students comprised the first class, admitted in 1963. Today, GVSU has nearly 17,000 students, studying in Allendale and Grand Rapids; or, at one of our regional centers in Holland, Muskegon and Traverse City.

GVSU is selective about the students we admit. Our freshman profile is one of the best in the Midwest. In Michigan, only Michigan State, Michigan Tech and the University of Michigan have students with higher average test scores.

Yet, despite - or perhaps, because of - selective admission, GVSU has continued to grow.

In the past ten years, enrollment is up by more than 75%. As we begin the new millennium, GVSU has students from every county in Michigan and from a dozen states and foreign countries as well.

Clearly, GVSU is doing just what its founders intended by providing well trained graduates, such as nurses, engineers, accountants and teachers for the job providers of our region. This partnership has fueled economic expansion and helped to turn west Michigan into Michigan's fastest growing region.

This presents both an opportunity and a problem. The problem for us, as you have probably guessed by now, is money. That's because state funding, despite some recent generous annual increases, has not kept pace with our enrollment growth.

Twelve years ago, GVSU enrolled approximately 3% of all the students in state universities and received around 2% of the total higher education appropriation. Today, we enroll nearly 6% of all the students, and receive 3.5% of the state's higher ed funding. Shown another way, we get around \$3,800 per full time student, the lowest in the state while other comparable institutions receive much more state aid per student.

This widening gap has put great pressure on Grand Valley and on our students. Just over 10 years ago, nearly 2/3 of our budget came from the state while just over 1/3 came from tuition and fees. Today, more than half our revenue comes from tuition, with the state's share falling to 48%.

This is not good news to our students, who have been asked to shoulder more of the burden every year. Even so, GVSU remains designated as one of the nation's 100 Best College Buys – a distinction we have earned by consistently enrolling better than average students and charging them less than average rates.

I'm pleased to tell you that we're also on another Best 100 List – GVSU has just been named one of the country's *100 Most Wired Campuses* by Yahoo's Internet Life Magazine. The designation goes to campuses that are rich in student computers, information technology infrastructure and have especially useful WEB-sites. Only two other Michigan schools made the list – UofM and MSU. Senator Schwarz, I think you should join us in taking a bow on our Most Wired designation, because the extra technology money you put in last year's supplemental appropriation has helped us to keep current in this rapidly changing, and expensive, area.

Grand Valley's history of meeting demand with access, quality and value is a tradition to which we are committed. But it will not be easy to maintain. That's because high school graduation rates, which had been going down, are now going up. Between now and 2008, national high school graduation rates will increase by at least 1% a year. And in some fast-growing west Michigan districts, growth rates are double or triple the national figures. In this part of west Michigan, Grand Valley enrolls 44.5% of all the students attending state universities.

Among all colleges, public institutions are growing more rapidly than private ones. And women are going to college at higher rates than in past years. This places increasing pressure on schools like Grand Valley that are public and that offer programs which typically attract more women than men: such as nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy and education.

have to support them with is tuition. Yet we know that more students than ever before will seek to be admitted to the public universities in the coming decade. This is not a problem that will solve itself. As the state's senior university president, I stand ready to help you find the answer: I can think of nothing that is more important.

Thank you.