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Introduction of Gaylen Byker, delivered on October 30, 1995

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INTRODUCTION OF GAYLEN BYKER ON 10/30/95 - 7:30 a.m.

When I read Gaylen Byker’s resume, I concluded that he was the only serious candidate for the Presidency of Calvin College. Perhaps I should say that there could be no other candidate that the committee could recommend when comparing his experience and success with others. The first qualification sought by the Faculty of any college or university is academic. I am sure there are some who actually would be more comfortable if their new President had spent his career distinguishing himself in academic pursuits. They must be reassured, however, by his cum laude J.D. degree from the University of Michigan Law School where he was an award winner in foreign and comparative law. And from the same University he earned magna cum laude, an MA degree in World Politics. But that is not all. He received the Ph.D., the ultimate qualifier in academia, from the University of Pennsylvania in International Relations with a concentration in International Business at the Wharton School of that University.

There was a time when the President of a liberal arts college, or a University for that matter, presided over an academic community and communicated from time to time with the constituency. That time has passed, and I am sure the committee at Calvin was attracted by Gaylen Byker’s extended experience in business and international law. When they learned he traveled, worked, and spoke in 30 different countries, they saw that this could be good for Calvin. When they probed into the financial, legal, and even entrepreneurial work that he has done at Phibro Energy, a subsidiary of Solomon Inc. at Banque Paribas, at Chase Manhattan, and at Morgan, Lewis and Bockius, they saw that this could be good for Calvin. When they realized that the extent of his legal experience led to memberships of the Bars of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and the Supreme Court of the United States, they saw that this could be good for Calvin. They were looking for a President who had passed the academic tests and whose experience would help him
lead the modern college with all of its complexities. When you read Gaylen Byker's resume, the choice is made for you.

I knew Gaylen Byker was the right choice before I read his resume. I knew it because he is the son of Gary and Henrietta Byker. If you know them, you know what he is made of. Gary Byker was a State Senator from Ottawa County when I came to west Michigan nearly 27 years ago. He was the first politician I knew, and there are no better. Over years of working with him I became acquainted with Henrietta too. I experienced their friendship, their loyalty, their energy, their intelligence, and their determination. That's why I was sure when I heard of Gaylen's appointment that the committee had done its job well. When I subsequently read about him and then had a long conversation with him, my first impression was reinforced. If I was a betting person, I would give odds that Calvin has selected the right President for these times.

I say that because he loves Calvin College as so many of its alumni do. I say that because he has proven success in every venture he has undertaken. I say that because he knows his heritage, he knows the Christian Reformed Church, and he also has lived beyond it. He can keep the faith and he can expand the faith. I say that because at 19 years of age he became a commissioned officer in Viet Nam, supervising 90 men. He has been tested by fire and knows what danger feels like. He has both the macro and micro experiences Calvin College needs in 1995. I say that because I noticed in his resume that he took more than a dozen courses at Grand Valley, earning a minor in Russian at the same time he was attending Calvin. What could be better for a Calvin President than a Calvin degree enhanced by many hours of learning at Grand Valley.

I am happy to present to you the new kid on the higher education block, one very smart guy, President Gaylen J. Byker.