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Opening Remarks, delivered at Convocation on August 25, 2000

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

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Opening Convocation

Friday, August 25, 2000

Are you interested to know what a Grand Valley Professor does when he takes a six-year, unpaid leave of absence? I thought you might be so I invited Jon Jellema our State Representative to address us this morning. He is one of us and he is our State Representative in the legislature. When he came to Grand Valley as a 29-year-old instructor I don't believe he thought that the academic track upon which he entered would lead to a political career. He was steeped in the academic tradition. His father was a philosopher of international note, who after teaching careers at Indiana and Calvin, helped to launch Grand Valley, and is the most important architect of our liberal arts tradition. Harry Jellema taught his last course at Grand Valley when he was 81 years of age. The son inherited the mantle.

Jon was Director of the Liberal Studies Program, Chairman of the English Department, Chairman of the General Education Subcommittee and other important committees as well as serving as Vice President and President of the University Senate.

Some have asked how did Jon Jellema, an academic, develop the political skills to run so successfully for office, and serve so successfully his constituents, his University and the State of Michigan. If you knew the complexities of our English Department when Jon was Chair, you would understand that he had to have his political skills to survive. It was an internship in politics under fire.

At the same time he was a member of the Grand Haven School Board, and served as President during a teacher's strike. That event prompted him to write the Michigan Association of School Boards legislation calling for regional support teams to assist school boards facing strikes. He had public visibility. He acted intelligently in the public interest, and as a result was asked to run for the legislature.

He is now completing his third term. Because of his wisdom and intelligence he has distinguished himself as a legislator. I am grateful to him for guiding legislation that will bring Grand Valley a Health Sciences building, and all of us at the University can appreciate how he has represented the district where we now celebrate the academic opening of our University in the first year of the millennium. We can have faith in our political leaders when they are like our own scholar-politician, Jon Jellema.

I present to you the Honorable Jon Jellema, Representative of the 89th District in Michigan.