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Remarks, delivered at the Traverse City Commencement on May 2, 2000

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TRAVERSE CITY COMMENCEMENT MAY 2, 2000

The ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius wrote that character is regulated by ceremony. The ceremonies in which we participate reflect the values most important to us. Ceremonies of worship reach back to prehistoric times. In the United States commencement exercises are the most pervasive secular ceremonies. Nearly every American participates in one as a graduate friend or family member. They symbolize a significant achievement and an immense body of work. They symbolize new opportunities for professional and personal development. They mark the time when people are recognized for reaching a level of proficiency in a field to which they have given themselves. We can understand what Confucius understood 2,500 years ago. Our ceremonies have a lot to do with our character.

Our speaker this evening is known for her high level of integrity and her strong character. We invited her to address you for three reasons. She has the experience and qualifications to address university graduates; she lives in this region of the state where you have done your work at Grand Valley; you have a life in common. We wanted an appropriate venue to demonstrate our universities respect for her unusual contributions to the people of Michigan, and honor her for them.

No one in my memory has used her political office more effectively to achieve goals for people, especially children, than Connie Binsfield.

Holding office for her was not an end; it was a means. People who are committed to the welfare of others express that commitment in different ways. Connie Binsfield decided in the 1970's to do it through elected office and from 1974 through 1998 as a representative, a senator, and Lieutenant Governor she made life in Michigan better. She did it for children, for families and for the environment. Few legislators have received more plaudits for their positive work from organizations and universities. The one I mention is her selection as Michigan "Mother of the Year" in 1992. The title is appropriate for no other person in recent Michigan history she has nurtured the resources of the State both human and those nature has provided, better than the Honorable Connie Binsfield who I present to you as your commencement speaker.