

University Tribute to President Robben Fleming

11:00 Men's Glee Club

(On stage, Glee Club leaving afterwards to sit in audience)

11:05 JJD Welcome (Approach lectern as Glee Club departs)

President Coleman, Regents, members of the Fleming family, faculty, staff, students, and friends of the University of Michigan...

Let me welcome you this morning to this very special event in the life of the University when we both remember and pay tribute to Michigan's ninth president, Robben Wright Fleming, who passed away peacefully last week.

While we all mourn the loss of President Fleming as a Michigan leader of great integrity, distinction, and compassion, this morning is a time to recognize and celebrate his immense contributions to the University and to higher education.

During the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and 1970s, it was President Fleming's remarkable wisdom, skill, and patience that enabled Michigan to avoid the destructive confrontations that struck many other campuses.

At a time when Michigan students and faculty served as the conscience of the nation on major issues such as the war in Viet Nam and racial justice, President Fleming spoke out courageously to provide national leadership in support of the concerns of students and the faculty.

His calm, reassuring approach to contentious issues, tempered at times with a disarming sense of humor, served him well in providing leadership during difficult times and established him not only as one of Michigan's greatest presidents, but, indeed, one of the most courageous and effective university leaders of his generation.

Introductions

To recognize his remarkable role in leading the university during this challenging era, it is appropriate to begin with several different perspectives of President Fleming and his years as president, from individuals who knew him well as members of the faculty, student body, administration, and Board of Regents during his tenure:

11:07 Regent Emeritus Nellie Varner

Regent Emeritus Nellie M. Varner, who served with President Fleming as a faculty member and associate graduate dean in the 1970s and later as a two term Regent of the University in the 1980s and 1990s when President Fleming returned for a second time as president of the University.

(JJD turns to welcome Nellie Varner to podium offstage)

11:10: Laura Berman

Well-known Detroit News columnist Laura Berman, who was a student and editor of the Michigan Daily in 1975 during the Fleming years.

(JJD returns to welcome Laura Berman)

11:12: Vice President Henry Johnson

Finally, let me introduce Henry Johnson, who served first in the School of Education and then as the Vice President for Student Services in the Fleming administration.

(After Henry Johnson, JJD escorts all three down stairs to audience seats)

11:15 Kyle Stegall, Sololist "Danny Boy)

11: 19 JJD Introduction of President Coleman

JJD returns to podium first to explain "Danny Boy" as RWF's favorite song.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the President of the University of Michigan, President Mary Sue Coleman.

(Return to seat in audience)

11:20 President Mary Sue Coleman

11:29 JJD Introduction of Fleming Family

JJD returns to podium to welcome Fleming family (then move off stage)

Let me now invite members of President Fleming's family to offer some remarks:

His daughters Nancy Reckord and Betsy Dimaggio, and his son Jim Fleming.

11:30 Robben Fleming Family (Nancy Reckord, Jim Fleming, Betsy Dimaggio)

JJD returns to podium for final remarks

11:35 JJD Final Remarks

Finally let me add a few personal remarks to today's tribute. Anne and I arrived in Ann Arbor in 1968, only a few months after the inauguration of President Fleming. Over the past four decades, in

many ways Robben Fleming has always been not only our president, but Bob and Sally have been our role models.

This actually began during our early years in Ann Arbor, when Sally Fleming worked with Anne in leadership roles in the Faculty Women's Club and I chaired the faculty advisory committee to the provost (Frank Rhodes and Harold Shapiro). Later, when President Fleming returned to serve as interim president in 1988 while I was provost, he took me under his wing for several badly needed lessons on university leadership.

Both Flemings and the Duderstadts come from small, Midwestern farm towns. President Fleming's Illinois small town background gave his leadership a truly Lincolnesque character—wise, courageous, and patient—which not only served the University well, but helped during our days together to smooth out the rough edges of my small town Missouri background—more akin to another U.S. president from the neighboring community of Independence, Missouri!!!

At my own inauguration, as I sat enduring one of my own moments of civil disobedience (a graduate student on the platform holding up a large sign proclaiming that "Duderstadt is illegal", because of a controversy over the state's Open Meetings Act), President Fleming leaned over to whisper that a public university president should never regard the slings and arrows launched by others as personal attacks. Rather most critics were simply angry at the institution, not the president. But he also acknowledged that university presidents made a most convenient target for taking out their frustrations,

which he characterized as “the price of a society in which we place so high a value on freedom of expression”

Both Bob and Sally Fleming were a source of encouragement and great wisdom during our own presidency. We developed a close friendship in during our “emeritus” presidential years as we shared old war stories and experienced together “the thrill of victory and agony of defeat” at Michigan Stadium on football weekends.

Anne and I will both miss Bob and Sally very, very much. But we will always remember and appreciate their extraordinary impact on us personally and upon the University of Michigan. They were a very important part of our lives, and their contributions to and impact upon the University will always be remembered and revered.

In looking back over these 40 years, I think what we most admired about President Fleming was what might be termed his strong “Midwestern” character—wise, modest, and patient, with a fundamental faith in the basic goodness of people, a courageous commitment to the higher calling of the University (and higher education more broadly), exceptionally strong values and integrity, and a small-town sense of humor able to rapidly disperse the tensions swirling about controversy. In many ways, Robben Fleming came to personify to us all that is good—indeed, GREAT—about this University. To modify a famous saying by another Michigan president, it takes a very uncommon leader to protect and sustain the University of Michigan’s commitment to providing an uncommon education for the common man. And we must always be grateful that

during this challenging period in the University's history, we had just such a President in Robben Fleming.

President Fleming will be greatly missed, fondly remembered, and always honored for his extraordinary leadership of the University of Michigan.

It is most appropriate that we end this tribute by inviting the Men's Glee Club to lead us in a rousing rendition of the University's Alma Mater, "The Yellow and Blue"—printed as always on the back of your program.

Afterwards, we invite you to join President Coleman and the Fleming family in the Vandenberg room, just down the hall.

11:40 Men's Glee Club

At last note, JJD escorts Fleming family, MSC, and Guests out of theatre