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In Remembrance of Ken Gros Louis
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President, Indiana University
Ruth N. Halls Theatre
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11:00 AM

1. HONORING KEN GROS LOUIS

This morning we gather to remember the legacy of an exceptional man who was deeply dedicated to the university, to the Bloomington campus, and to helping students succeed—Ken Gros Louis.

His efforts to continually support the core missions of the university helped to define its character, and he is remembered by thousands of IU students, faculty, alumni, and friends around the country and all over the world.

2. “A MAN OF DEEP LEARNING AND HUMAN COMPASSION”

Ken’s remarkable 53 years of service to Indiana University spanned the administrations of seven IU presidents.

He came to IU in 1964, as Provost Robel said, as Assistant Professor of English and Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature. Ken quickly built a reputation as a dedicated scholar, known for his distinguished teaching, research, and his renowned writings on medieval and Renaissance literature and history.

As the longtime chancellor of IU Bloomington, Ken appointed dozens of campus administrators, greatly strengthened Bloomington's academic programs, and helped steward the campus through a number of challenging times.

In the early 1980s, the American economy experienced a deep recession that was, at that time, the most severe since the Great Depression. The recession of the 80s brought double-digit inflation, declining state appropriations, and a climate of uncertainty—all of which threatened higher education.

Fortunately for the Bloomington campus, Ken had just been appointed as chancellor. His broad knowledge of campus fiscal affairs, gained and strengthened through his service as chair of the Bloomington Faculty Council's Budgetary Affairs Committee, and his time as a department chair and dean of the College, helped the campus weather the recession of the '80s, as well as the one that would follow in the early 1990s. Ken was also adept at communicating about fiscal issues with members of the faculty, a talent that would be put to particularly effective use in the late 1980s and early 90s, when the IU became the first public university to implement a comprehensive responsibility-centered management budgeting system, with all the extensive changes that entailed.

As the late IU President Myles Brand said when Ken announced his retirement in 2001, Ken was "a man of deep learning and human compassion and someone who has represented the best values of the academy. As a result, the IU Bloomington campus has made enormous strides ... and our university is a far better place because of him."¹

Ken's 2001 retirement was, of course, short lived. When the university needed him again in 2004, he answered the call, serving as interim vice president and chancellor until, two years later, when I succeeded him, he received the title of University Chancellor, a title which had been previously held only by Herman B Wells.

¹ "Chancellor Gros Louis Plans to Retire in 2001," *The Herald Times*, May 11, 2000.

3. COMMITTED TO STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMMUNITY

Ken was also tirelessly dedicated to helping students succeed.

He believed in the importance of serving a diverse cross-section of the state's population and providing broader access to college, especially for those from under-represented minority groups. He was justifiably proud of the numbers of students who persisted to graduation despite challenging life circumstances.

This was due in large measure to Ken's unwavering support for programs that foster student success and build community.

He was a champion of the Groups Scholars Program, which has provided guidance and support for low-income and first-generation students at IU for 50 years.

His endorsement and advocacy were instrumental in the establishment of IU's GLBT Student Support Services Office, now known as the LGBTQ+ Culture Center. The center and its programs have been instrumental in IU being consistently named one of the nation's top LGBTQ-friendly colleges.

Ken was also a driving force behind the creation of IU's Wells Scholars Program, IU Bloomington's merit-based scholarship program, which ranks among the most competitive and most prestigious awards offered by any American university.

Ken was also a great friend to Indiana University's regional campuses.

Charlie Nelms, IU's former Vice President for Student Development and Diversity and the former chancellor of IU East, who regrets that he could not be here today, sent a message that reads, in part, as follows:

"When I was appointed Chancellor of IU East 31 years ago, Ken was one of our strongest advocates for academic program expansion, resource sharing and the pursuit

of stand-alone accreditation as a comprehensive regional campus. He stood up for IU East and other regional campuses,” Dr. Nelms continues, “at a time when many deans and some trustees viewed these campuses as competition for limited state resources relative to IU Bloomington and IUPUI.”²

Given his commitment to programs that provide support and foster a sense of community, Ken would be pleased to know that the Indiana University Libraries Faculty Council has taken on a volunteer project this year to refresh the Dee Gros Louis Reading Room at Bloomington’s Middle Way House, which is named in honor of his late first wife.

I had the pleasure of having lunch with Ken early last year to congratulate him on his 80th birthday. He expressed his amazement and great pleasure at the amount of building and renovation that was happening on the campus, which was particularly notable coming from someone who served the campus for so many years in senior positions.

4. CONCLUSION

All of us are proud that Ken chose IU as his academic home and we are grateful to have benefitted from his extraordinary accomplishments and service to the university.

He will be deeply missed.

In 2011, Ken spoke at the inaugural Campus Remembrance Event, which honors the memories of students who have lost their lives in the preceding year. He said that over his then-47 years at IU, he was struck time and again by how alive the campus is, as he said: “not only with those here, but with those no longer with us.”³ He evoked the

² Charlie Nelms, personal correspondence, Office of the President.

³ Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, Remembrance Day remarks, delivered March 27, 2011, IU Archives.

memories not only of the well-known names of IU's history—Wells, Bryan, Owen, Wylie, and others—but also the many students, faculty, and staff who are no longer with us.

In Ken's words: "the campus lives through the lives of those who contributed so much to it."⁴

Ken, of course, was himself one who contributed to this place in large measure for a period of time equaled by only a very few.

And Indiana University will be forever grateful.

⁴ Ibid.