Wilkes University
Commencement, January 14, 1999
Citation for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

PAUL E. KANJORSKI, MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Paul E. Kanjorski, son of the Wyoming Valley and of your native Nanticoke, you focused early in your life on the larger public questions which led you as a teenager to Washington, D.C. as a page in the House of Representatives. Your young imagination thrilled early to the nation's public space. After attending Wyoming Seminary, Wilkes College, and Temple University, you enrolled in the Dickinson School of Law. From these institutions, but also from your life experiences, you developed a razor sharp mind, a trial lawyer's focus and combativeness and a deepening sense of the need for change to bring the Wyoming Valley into the second half of the 20th Century before it enters the 21st. City Solicitor for Nanticoke and an administrative law judge as well as a trial lawyer, you did not run for public office until you asked the voters of the 11th Congressional District in 1984 to send you to Congress as their representative. You have now served this district for fourteen years and been reelected seven times.

The list of your committee assignments reflect your consuming interest in economic development and in our economic institutions, particularly how we as a nation are responding to the transformative technological forces that are reshaping the world: Banking and Financial Services, Capital Markets, Securities and Government Sponsored Enterprises Subcommittee (where you are the ranking Democrat), Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit Subcommittee, Subcommittee on National Economic Growth, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs. You also have been interested in the performance and effectiveness of the government itself as reflected in your membership on the Government Reform Committee, as well as on the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology. You have introduced legislation to modernize the Federal Home Loan Board system and to guarantee consumers' access to credit union membership, for which you were recently inducted into the Credit Union Executives Society Hall of Fame. You have worked to increase accountability in the Federal Government in such areas as federal travel just as you have worked zealously for campaign finance reform. Creative and constructive during Republican administrations, you have been an insider and an influential voice in the Clinton/Gore Administration.

But it is for your leadership role here in your district that we particularly honor you today. You have been the visionary for a region still wounded by the loss of its industrial economy. You have brought federal dollars to invest in economic development and infrastructure improvements in the renovation and naming of the Max Rosenn Federal Court House, the transformation of the Stegmaier Brewery into a first class federal office building, and the construction of a new Social Security Administration Building. In addition, you have secured $147 million to raise the levees along the banks of the Susquehanna providing increased protection against major floods such as that from Hurricane Agnes in 1972 which did such damage to the Wyoming Valley, including Wilkes College. More important, you have brought ideas to accompany these dollars, stimulating new thinking among the Valley's citizens as they enter the new century. Frustrated by the failure of both the Federal Government and the Commonwealth to invest in Northeastern Pennsylvania in a way proportionate to its population and in recognition of its long-term contribution to the nation, both in peacetime and wartime, you have singlehandedly developed strategies for transforming our deficits into assets and linking our people with the opportunities of a global economy. Wilkes University and King's College have been partners in some of these ventures and look to be so again in the future. The Earth Conservancy is an example of one of your ideas. With the help of federal dollars, this not-for-profit organization has addressed the environmental and developmental problems of nearly 17,000 acres of land, much of it mine-scarred. The Earth Conservancy has made this land a laboratory for new approaches to land reclamation, recycling, land use planning, economic development and new technologies responsive to the legacies of the
anthracite coal industry. Your efforts have now been augmented by the President's designation, in response to your relentless prodding, of the Upper Susquehanna and Lackawanna Rivers as one of fourteen Heritage River systems in America which will receive special attention from the Federal Government. The Geographical Information System, funded at Wilkes by the Earth Conservancy, will be a major factor in the analysis of the entire watershed of the river. This system at Wilkes contributed to the designation of this region by Vice President Gore as one of six areas in which to demonstrate the power of the GIS methodology in improving our environment. These and other efforts on your part, to make Northeastern Pennsylvania the 21st century Silicon Mountain, have stirred our minds and spurred our efforts, if not always our sense of harmony and comfort, to fulfill our potential. Through your restless and brilliant insights into what our future can be if we but seize it, and your indefatigable efforts to mobilize resources and encourage others to invest in our region, you are helping to give this area the tools it needs to regain its central place in the nation's economic life.

It is with pride that I, by the power vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Wilkes University and by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, bestow upon you, Paul E. Kanjorski, the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa, with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereto.