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## Kalamazoo Region Conversation on Respecting Diversity

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Kalamazoo Region Conversation on  
Respecting Diversity  
Welcome  
John M. Dunn  
Feb. 18, 2017

Good morning. Welcome to Western Michigan University. We're glad you're here and we're happy to be included in this important regional discussion. The fact that so many of you are here at 8:30 a.m. on a Saturday reinforces in my mind just how important it is to you that we have this conversation--and that we continue to have this conversation.

Many of you may know that respecting diversity is a basic tenet of the WMU identity. As an institution and dating back to our founding, this University has taken stances that were far ahead of the times. I've recently been looking at founding President Dwight Waldo's record on building not only a diverse campus but also a diverse society. It is inspiring.

We've worked hard over the years and seen some wonderful successes, but this University remains in learning and continuous improvement mode. Like every large organization, we sometimes struggle and don't get it quite right. But we never take our eyes off the goal.

My sense of today is that we need to affirm our goal and work through the barriers that may impede our progress. I have to thank the city of Portage and Mayor Strazdas for coordinating this initiative and realizing that our common humanity and the need to treat every person with respect and dignity doesn't stop at any political boundary or city limit.

We're in a tenuous time right now, as some within our communities seem to feel empowered to speak and act on stereotypes and prejudices we thought we had left long in the past. Yesterday, the WMU community came together to celebrate individuals on our campus who are champions of diversity and global engagement. I told the gathering then, that celebrations like that and discussions like this one are more important than ever. Sometime a nation's most important leadership qualities rise from the bottom up. This seems to be one of those times.

Again, thank you for making this time commitment. I will disappear for a bit to welcome some prospective students to campus to compete for a special multicultural scholarship we offer. I will be back and am looking forward to a conversation with my colleagues on the education panel.

Enjoy the dialogue, and my best wishes for a thought-provoking and productive day.

Thank you.

(Three minutes)

Education panel--per Pete Strazdas:

"For the group panel, each participant will be asked to share thoughts about a **civil society and that person's role to support respecting diversity**. Audience participants will have questions on cards that I will read to the panel."