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Town Hall--Keeping Kalamazoo a Welcoming Community

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Town Hall--Keeping Kalamazoo a
Welcoming Community
Opening Remarks
John M. Dunn
Feb. 23, 2017

Good evening. Welcome to an important discussion--one of several we've had in recent weeks as we, as a community, work to take control of our own message about who we are at a troubling time in our nation. I know some of you are from the communities that surround the campus. That's important. Our common humanity and the need to treat every person with respect and dignity doesn't stop at any political boundary or city limit.

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. We've worked hard over the years and seen some wonderful successes. We are and must continue to be a resource for other organizations and their inclusive efforts.

More important, we need to continually reaffirm our commitment to those who come here to share their cultures and become part of our community. We may not be able to control the dialogue at the national level right now, but we have the ability to think carefully about what we say and what we do to affirm our commitment to being a welcoming and diverse community.

I've noted several times recently, that there may not be any evidence of leadership coming from the top down, so it is our responsibility to make sure that leadership comes from the bottom up. We need to start and continue our commitment in our own community and offer up the lessons learned and the accomplishments achieved as examples of what a welcoming society should and must look like.

On a practical level, that is going to mean each of us needs to be able to reach out on a personal level to those in our community who are fearful or feeling threatened. In the final analysis, what makes us a welcoming community is our ability to recognize and respond to the needs of our fellow humans.

This evening, let's affirm our goal and work through the barriers that may impede progress. 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.

This may be a difficult time, but it is one in which the values we hold and the human relationships we treasure will ultimately prevail--with your help.

Thank you for making this time commitment and lending your moral presence. Your ideas and positive feedback are what we need as we brainstorm for ways to hang onto and express our values at this time of challenge.

Enjoy the dialogue, and my best wishes for a thought-provoking and productive discussion. Thank you.