

Joseph D. Kearney

Celebrating a Colleague Who Hit the Right Notes

This past fall, Marquette University’s vice president for inclusive excellence, William Welburn, and the dean of Raynor Memorial Libraries, Janice Welburn, retired from their positions at Marquette University. Both were friends and champions of the Law School during their long tenures, and the provost, Kimo Ah Yun, invited Dean Joseph D. Kearney to be one of the speakers at the event celebrating William Welburn. The following were Dean Kearney’s remarks, delivered August 31, 2021, in the Henke Lounge of the Alumni Memorial Union.

It’s a privilege for me to say a few words celebrating William Welburn. As a certain singer once said, if we don’t know him by now—with all the things that we’ve been through . . . We’ll come back to that.

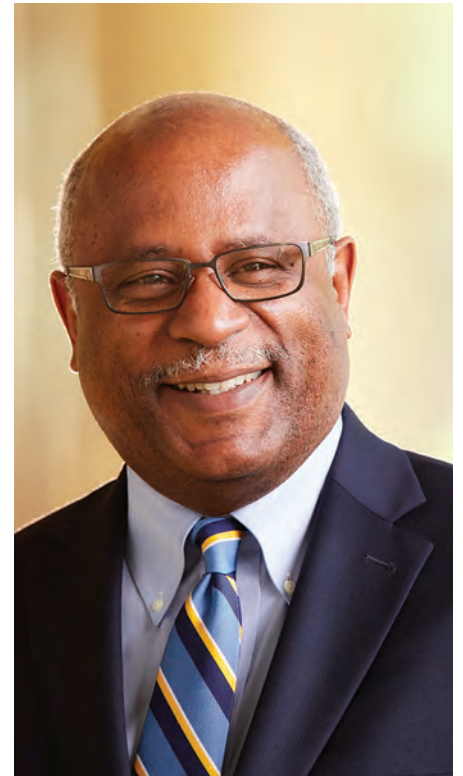
I wish to emphasize just how hard Dr. Welburn has worked to be a *collaborator*. The Law School can provide a representative example. At times, we have provided him a forum for university-wide activities: Just last week, though about to retire, Dr. Welburn was planning an event in the Law School’s Lubar Center for next spring, as with some of the university’s past Ralph H. Metcalfe Lectures. At other times, the Law School has led, such as in the events involving Professor Paul Butler two years ago, about prison abolition, or our annual diversity receptions—and Dr. Welburn (together with Dean Janice Welburn) always supported us. We needn’t use the past tense, as both of them will be with us, along with Provost Ah Yun, once again for the diversity reception, in two weeks. And still other times, the Welburns’ work collaborating with the colleges and schools has been extensive on both sides, such as with

the university’s Freedom Project.

Let me distill the point: Dr. Welburn has much influenced us, far more than would have been the case if he had (mis)conceived his role as vice president as being to tell the deans precisely what they (we) are to do. His approach has been consistent with the presidents whom he has served, including Dr. Michael Lovell. This is not a command-and-control administration, in my grateful experience, except where clear university interests have required uniformity.

All this seems worth mentioning today and remembering hereafter. For example, Dr. Welburn’s suggestion to the campus community in the wake of George Floyd’s death last summer much affected me: Among other things, he wrote us all that “we need conversation now more than ever.” This was powerful and effective, far more than if his message had been a set of specific prescriptions that as dean I was expected to administer.

On diversity and inclusion, we must keep conversing, even though Dr. Welburn’s run here is coming to an end and my own brief time today at the podium is just about up. To return to the



William Welburn, retired vice president for inclusive excellence.

music, you “gave [your] heart and soul to [us], now didn’t [you]?” And for those of you who did not get the musical allusions, at the beginning or just now, they were, respectively, to Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes and to the Delfonics. (For the second allusion, I so wanted to say, “Didn’t I blow your mind this time?”) The allusions were, that is, to the “Philadelphia sound” of the 1970s. If the Law School ever did anything that impressed Dr. Welburn, at the top of the list was in 2014 when we hosted Kenny Gamble—activist, educator, and, most famously, contributor to the Philadelphia sound. Dr. Welburn has a hometown claim to that music.

William, thank you for sharing your own smooth “Philadelphia sound” with Marquette University. Without suggesting that we, your colleagues, never have hit a discordant note, we have made much better music because we have been with you. We are most grateful. ■