



Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy  
President

## President Espy – Investiture Remarks, March 18, 2024

Thank you, Governors Stancato, Barnhill and the entire Board, who have vested me, entrusted me really, with the presidency of this remarkable institution. The responsibility that comes with leadership is great, and I am keenly aware of the collaboration it will take for us to reach our shared goals. I also thank members of our University Leadership Council for your partnership, all fundamental to the success of our university and community.

Please join me in recognizing my predecessors who are here today. President Emeritus M. Roy Wilson, who, together with his wife, Jacqueline, have been so helpful to me and Paul in these early days. And President Emeritus Irvin D. Reid, who welcomed me with a thoughtful “old school” stamped letter filled with characteristic wit and style. You are true Warriors for what you accomplished leading Wayne State to our place of excellence today!

With David’s kind introduction, I am so honored and humbled to be here in this truly iconic Detroit venue, where we stand together at the start of the next chapter for our university. We have the chance to do something we do not do enough: Reflect on the essence that sets us apart. Wayne State truly is a special place, a dynamic force for Detroit and beyond. A nexus of learning and research – of access and community engagement that differentiates us in the higher ed landscape.

Higher education, though, is at a crossroads. On one hand, there isn’t a week that goes by without some headline reflecting a loss of faith in the value of higher education. On the other hand, states underscore the value of a college degree in driving a robust 21st century economy. From our vantage point, it may seem somewhat puzzling how places of higher learning that have served so many and benefitted our society so much would be under such scrutiny.

If we listen to these voices and distill the critiques, there are nuggets of truth from which we can learn. There are talented students who can’t gain admission. There are families who desire higher education and cannot afford it. There are universities that espouse inclusion where students do not feel that they belong or can succeed. And there is important scholarly research that languishes in our laboratories or on our shelves, not translated to new approaches that could benefit us all.

As universities grapple with these critiques, in my mind, Wayne State provides the answer. We stand steadfast as a place of innovation, transformation and connection. For our students, we provide access to an unparalleled learning environment for all. For our remarkable faculty and staff, we provide support for first-class teaching, world-changing scholarly research and impactful leadership. And for our community, we are “Detroit- Powered” — deeply engaged to serve others. I say that Wayne State is in the heart of our community, we work for our community, and we do so with our community. Wayne

State answers the question about the value of higher education, both for our local impact on our community and for our national influence and global import.

There are few universities that provide such a compelling answer. That is why I am so thrilled to be here at Wayne State, here in the Motor City, and that is why I chose higher education as my purpose. What we do, at its heart, is transformation. While it may sound cliché to say we change lives or change the world, simply put, that is what Wayne State does. Full stop.

Let me unpack a bit the path that brought me here — a journey defined by a love of discovery and learning, and commitment to its transformative power. My “story,” like many university faculty, is guided by inspiration, mentorship, scholarly inquiry and perhaps more than anything, a driving curiosity. Now I must admit, the whole “talking about myself thing” is not my forte. I was trained professionally in an era when the personal was often viewed as a distraction or a barrier to the professional. I am much more comfortable highlighting others, and there are far too many remarkable people at Wayne State to recount each of their stories here today.

Like many of our students, my path was not linear. I am fortunate to have had outstanding faculty mentors like David Francis, incredible faculty colleagues like Geri Richmond and study section peers like David Rosenberg, and many others who have challenged, nudged and inspired me, including someone who was alive only in my mind — Nancy Drew.

I loved reading as a girl, and Nancy Drew was my hero of sorts. She served others by asking questions. By working collaboratively with teammates. By taking deliberate action to solve problems. While I have come to recognize the privileged life that Nancy led, her stories underscore the value of inquiry. Of identifying needs, gathering the facts and considering the data. And of “doing” to serve others. I was hooked — not just on the books themselves, more importantly on the value of questioning, critical analysis and elucidating outcomes.

My higher education odyssey continued with a drive to explicate the dynamics of the developing human brain and its behavior, how it gets off track with various medical conditions, and what that means for key life outcomes. This journey to uncover these complexities fueled my commitment to nurturing the student minds that shape our future and to advancing public research universities that spur their transformation. Like Nancy Drew, and like our Wayne State faculty and staff, we devote our lives to understanding and answering complex questions so that others can thrive.

Now here in Detroit, standing before you as the first woman president in the distinguished history of our university and as a female clinician scientist who relished learning and discovery, I am proud to knit my journey with Wayne State’s path forward. Each of us has our own story, and yet we share a drive for opportunity and hard work. Grit, really. Together, we can compose Wayne State’s next chapter.

### Prosperity Agenda

After months of reading, listening and engaging with our faculty, students, staff, alumni, community leaders and so many university friends, I see a cornerstone for our collective aspirations: an agenda to drive prosperity for our community. This agenda is not a set of goals or ideas that live on paper; rather, it is a living promise, a commitment to action, for all who Wayne State touches. A focused purpose for our collaborative work to further a prosperous future for our students, our graduates and our community. Our Prosperity Agenda is not a new strategic plan — “Our Moment in Time” ably serves that function. It is not a new tagline or brand campaign, though I do hope it can be both memorable and inspiring to our

efforts ahead. Think of the Prosperity Agenda as an organizing framework that bridges directly to our community, supporting our progress toward achieving our strategic plan goals. As directed actions to fulfill our shared promise to better the lives of our students, to support our faculty in pushing the boundaries of knowledge further, and to strengthen the bonds that interconnect Wayne State and our community. If the strategic plan is our compass, the Prosperity Agenda is our purpose that propels our work forward each and every day.

There are three pillars that comprise Wayne State's Prosperity Agenda.

The first, centered on our students, is Accelerating Mobility. It deepens our purpose as a "university of opportunity," fundamental to generations since our founding and reflected in so many in this room. I must say, we know what mobility is here in Detroit. Mobility takes you to a different place than where you started. With a Wayne State degree, mobility means generational change, an education that changes the life trajectory of our students and spawns a legacy of future impact and benefit for generations to come. With unity in purpose and actions, we can lift this legacy to even greater heights, accelerating mobility for every student, from all backgrounds, to achieve their life dreams.

While many talk about mobility, few universities move mobility at scale like we do. The renowned public policy think tank Third Way ranked Wayne State University a Tier 1 institution in its 2023 Economic Mobility Index — the only Michigan research institution to achieve this mark.

How do we lead? First, our driven students are pluralistic, from so many diverse backgrounds, and have overcome countless challenges to seize the opportunity for high-quality education. Wayne State has opened our doors ever wider for students who have been underserved or marginalized — with many programs that knock down barriers to access and that enable degree success at rates on par with national benchmarks.

Second, our top-tier, Carnegie R1 faculty are second to none. Wayne State students are taught by notable faculty who are on the cutting edge of scholarly discovery. Faculty who use innovative, engaging methods in their teaching that connect to Detroit's rich resources. Who bring the context of business, nonprofits, government and health care directly into the academic environment in a tangible way that enables true assimilation. Like Dr. Jaime Goodrich, Joe Torok and their Department of English colleagues, who bring together students in writing, design, production and, through engagement with community experts, develop the professional skills needed to create our Rushton Journal in Humanities. Guided by our faculty like these, Wayne State students apply their strong classroom didactics in real-world contexts and develop marketable competencies — creative thinking, empirical analysis, teamwork and effective communication — which prepare them for thriving careers and meaningful lives.

I know we can do even more for our students. Together, we can be the best top-tier research university for mobility. The absolute best.

For our university and community to prosper together, we can rise to our opportunity and turbocharge Detroit's talent pipeline. A degree alone is not enough. All of our Warriors should have this edge, the added advantage of Detroit-powered "learning by doing" academic experiences that foster the competencies employers in all sectors seek. We must better highlight and expand these rich partnerships of our academic faculty with the tremendous city assets that surround us. That's what Our College to Career initiative, launched in November, is all about — accelerating mobility for all!

What better way to erase the doubt and show the value of a Wayne State education than by preparing our graduates for a lifetime of prosperity and civic leadership? With roughly 8 in 10 of Wayne State graduates choosing to work in Michigan, what better message to our state than we are electrifying our future with graduates like Fatima, ready to make their mark here. That's Accelerating Mobility for Our Students, and it means driving prosperity for our community!

The second pillar of our prosperity agenda affirms our commitment to Empower Health for Urban Neighborhoods. Wayne State is so much more than a set of buildings. We are intertwined in the well-being and progress of our city since our founding as a medical college in 1868. Today in some ways, Wayne State is Michigan's "health, sciences and professions" university, with roughly one-third of our students studying in health-related programs. Our responsibility, though, extends well beyond our academics. As a top-tier public research university in the heart of our vibrant city, we must confront the real health challenges of our urban families who we live next to, and work with, every day.

What distinguishes Wayne State? You know that we teach, work and deliver care in every one of our major health care systems. We also do so in churches, recreation centers, grocery stores and other hubs throughout our community to tackle diseases overwhelmingly over-represented in our neighborhoods. Take Dr. Hayley Thompson's community-built CHECK-UP program, an effort in our Karmanos Cancer Institute with McLaren Healthcare. Joining with 16 active church partners in the Faith Community Research Network, CHECK-UP is empowering Detroit's community members to actively participate in research design and implementation, to access to clinical trials and other health research, and to share key findings with each other. Or Dr. Phil Levy and team, who, in contrast, use population-level surveillance methods in their Wayne Health Mobile Unit. Equipped vans are dispersed to meet folks where they gather to deliver life-saving preventive screenings. With over 90,000 visits to date and the help of "big data" clinical informatics, the average blood pressure of entire neighborhoods has been reduced. What a phenomenal impact of these two different, and yet complementary, programs! These are but a few among the thousands of examples day in and day out that empower health in our urban neighborhoods — all grounded in the rigorous research inquiry that defines top-tier research universities. There are very few universities that put research into action like Wayne State does — not just for the sake of knowledge; for the purpose of driving prosperity for our community.

There remains, however, so much unmet need in Metro-Detroit, and in so many other urban centers throughout Michigan. Health disparities are stubborn, and the dents we have made can seem small in comparison. Our opportunity — our responsibility — is to put our foot on the gas and move more research further into action. In my own research with infants and their mothers who used drugs during pregnancy, I met families in their homes, learned their stories, and engaged them directly in the research and treatment process and improved outcomes. I worked to move the research insights gained from these women into action to change the trajectory of the lives of others for the better — a microcosm of what we can and should do.

With collective action, Wayne State can rise to our responsibility to urban neighborhoods. Our university-wide planning effort to establish a community-focused school of public health is one important initiative already underway. By unleashing our outstanding faculty and collaborating with our many valued partners, we can tackle these unacceptable health inequities.

What better way to demonstrate our value than using our R1 research university prowess to empower health for our urban neighborhoods, today and long into the future? Some people say higher education is out of touch — to me, WSU is very much in touch and "on the case," as Nancy would say.

Finally, let's embrace the third pillar, Fueling Innovation for our Competitiveness – a fitting purpose in a city that has defined invention for the past century. In an ever-evolving world, and particularly in our region, the motor of progress is the spirit of creation. Wayne State can nourish this spirit by fostering an environment where ideas bear fruit, where entrepreneurship flourishes and where our region thrives as an innovation hub for 21st century commerce. The next generation will have their turn to lead, and it is our duty to arm them with the tools and, as importantly, the creative spirit of innovation they will need. These leaders have and will come from Wayne State.

Through industry, intelligence, and integrity — all in Wayne State's seal — we are among the most productive institutions, in the top 120 of the nearly 4,000 in higher ed. Our research culture supports the discovery of new, unexpected advances and the development of solutions targeted to human challenges, many endemic to urban life. Improving clean air and water. Creating new mobility methods. Or gaining deeper understanding of ourselves as social creatures through the arts, social sciences and humanities. One of the most rewarding "results" from my own research is the development of a commercial test used to diagnose developmental disorders around the globe. Ideas from all types of creative scholarship can lead to new products, practices and companies, which ignite new sparks of our future prosperity.

TechTown, Wayne State's research and technology park, is a hub of entrepreneurship and small-business support. It has nurtured more than 6,000 businesses in our region, created more than 2,200 jobs and raised more than \$400 million in capital. Dr. Patrick Hines, driven by his work in the clinic and research laboratory, founded Functional Fluidics LLC, a biotech company creating new red blood cell biomarkers key in sickle cell disease. Supported by TechTown, the company now has more than 30 employees, three testing labs, and is expanding to Nigeria. It started with a person, a Wayne State faculty member, with a great idea. Which, buttressed with TechTown's programs, now helps people all over the world. That's how Wayne State fuels innovation.

To compete as a top-ten state, as Lt. Governor Gilchrist stated, we need to move more of our research insights further into innovative new technologies, new medicines and new practices. We need to include all those with talent and drive in our innovation ecosystem. We need to nurture their great ideas into going concerns. We need to build on Michigan's legacy of remarkable makers to fuel a sustainable 21st century future.

Imagine a Wayne State campus that is "open for business," where Detroit's industry, nonprofit, health care and government employers can easily engage our talented faculty and students. Where their ideas are fully supported from beginning to end, to reality. A campus seamlessly intertwined with our city, where artists, entrepreneurs and social innovators mix with university colleagues to change our world. Wayne State is fortunate to have so many alumni and community leaders, like Gary Torgow and Eva Garza Dewaelsche, who, as you heard today, stand ready to help. Wayne State has begun the reorganization of our tech commercialization approach, an initial step, with many more to come. With the collaboration of our city and county – thank you, Mayor Duggan and County Executive Evans, for your support today — we can spawn many more Functional Fluidics, together.

What better way to silence higher ed critics than to demonstrate Wayne State's role as an engine of innovation for our 21st century commerce? Detroit is, and always has been, a city of doers that move our world; at Wayne State, we can move more research into innovation to create value, to bend Michigan's competitiveness trajectory and to drive prosperity for our community.

## The Ask: Let's Lift Up our University to Higher Ground

The Prosperity Agenda is not my vision; it is our shared commitment as a university to our community. It is a call to action for each one of us — our students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends — to stand shoulder to shoulder with unprecedented purpose and enthusiasm to further Wayne State as an engine of opportunity to drive prosperity for all.

How do we accomplish this? My answer is simple: We can rise to this opportunity because of our notable faculty, our remarkable students and our dedicated staff — leaders, pathfinders and innovators who inspire us every day. When we unite, there is nothing we cannot accomplish.

Wayne State truly transforms lives, and we need to invest in ourselves to support our purpose. We can lift up this treasured university by telling our story — all of us should do so with pride and confidence, and with volume. No more of the “hidden” gem! Gems are created to sparkle brightly, and we need to burnish our place and invest in our infrastructure to support our great people. We owe it to ourselves, our community, our history and our future to create an environment that is both beautiful and welcoming externally and effective internally. Let's work to have Wayne State shine for the world to see! The excitement I have to lead this university is immense, and I can rise to this opportunity because of my family. My children have travelled from every corner of the U.S. to be here. You make me smile or laugh every day — you are my true joy. I am so proud of the unique individuals that each of you has become. Nothing would have been possible though, without my spouse, Paul. You are my partner who has been at my side at every triumph and every turbulence, and everything in between — all while you pursued your own work. You bring out the best in me, and you are my greatest fan. My family's love and support fuels me to lead Wayne State's next chapter — can you please stand again so that I can thank you? I know it hasn't always been easy — you mean more to me than I sometimes show. You enable me to stand tall for the journey ahead!

Today, though, is really not about me, it's about us — and it's about every single person who has made a mark on this special place — past, present and future. You are here today because you care deeply about Wayne State and will work for our boundless future.

This is “Our Moment in Time.” And every second counts towards rising to our opportunity ahead. Let's write Wayne State's next chapter together. Let's transform more lives. Our future rests on the many generations to come. Let's do our part to accelerate mobility for our students, to empower health for our urban neighborhoods, and to fuel innovation for our competitiveness. Let's drive prosperity for our community — because together, we are Warrior Strong! Thank you.