

The Rudder Association Questions Statements from Interim President Mark A Welsh III

COLLEGE STATION, Texas, November 3rd , 2023 - The Rudder Association (TRA), a group of dedicated Aggies committed to preserving and perpetuating the Core Values and unique spirit of Texas A&M commends General Mark A Welsh III for once again answering the call of duty. When former President M Katherine Banks abruptly resigned following the ill-considered attempt to hire a controversial figure to lead Texas A&M's revived journalism program, Dean Welsh stepped in to steady the ship.

But his brief stint as interim-president has produced more questions than answers as to the direction he might lead Texas A&M. A pattern of troubling public statements have emerged that beg several questions:

Will he fully respect the views of the citizens of Texas? The citizens of our state have spoken clearly through their representatives and have assessed that DEI ideologies were causing more problems than they were solving. Surveys of Aggie students of all races corroborated the public's conclusion. Yet Interim-President Welsh opposed ending DEI stating that "*I don't believe it's beneficial to where we are trying to go long-range as a society.*" TRA sides with the citizens of Texas and the principle of equality of opportunity. Will President Welsh respect not just the letter but the spirit of the law of our state?

Will race or gender count against white, male, or Asian candidates? As Air Force Chief of Staff, then General Welsh pushed for strict gender quotas in Air Force Academy admissions. As Dean of the Bush School and even since, he has advocated for discriminating against similarly qualified candidates by using diversity as a "tie-breaker". TRA believes this practice is inconsistent with our egalitarian tradition, state and federal laws, and the Texas A&M University System's position that only merit should be used for admission and hiring,

Does he fully recognize that Texas A&M is a public serving institution? Last month's Gallup survey showed that trust in journalism has reached historic lows. TRA believes that Texas A&M should play a leadership role in producing ethical, objective journalists rather than advocates who have contributed to our political and racial divisions. Instead, Welsh dismissed such concerns stating that only the views of faculty experts should be considered in such decisions—not the citizens or even their regents. TRA believes that all Texas citizens and all members of the Aggie family are legitimate stakeholders and that believing otherwise is disqualifying for an administrator of any public university and Texas A&M in particular.

What is his definition of "shared governance"? The American Association of University Professors advocates for administrators to "share" governance only with faculty organizations. Such bodies are important and academic freedom is a foundational principle of higher education. In fact, TRA was the first to object to compelled "diversity statements" for faculty hires, such as were in place at the Bush School last year. But the Texas Education Code is clear on governance. In recognition of the duty to its citizens, it invests the organization, control, and management of the state's university system in regents appointed by the highest statewide office holder and confirmed by the senate. While regents should consider the views and needs of all university stakeholders, they alone are the ultimate governing authority.

Will he modify our Core Values? In his initial address as interim-president, Welsh seemed to conflate our Core Values with DEI ideology and advocate for the pre-eminence of Respect over other Core Values. The US Air Force has been well served with just three core values: Integrity,

Excellence and Service. In addition to Respect, Aggies also include Loyalty and Leadership in keeping with our unique culture and noble heritage. We don't believe any of our values should be subordinated or arbitrarily modified.

Will he defend Texas A&M against its critics? If Texas A&M is to lead rather than follow the rest of higher education, it will be attacked by much of the state and national news media. Texas A&M's president will be under intense pressure to conform to their expectations and thus complete the capture of higher education under a singular ideology. Given the competing interests, who will he consider legitimate stakeholders and who will he consider to be an "outside influence"?

Legacy institutions are now grappling with the consequences of the ideologies they have fostered on their campuses. Texas A&M stands poised to be the beneficiary of the course correction which may have already started. Choosing the wrong leader at this time would be an unforced error which could seriously degrade the unsurpassed loyalty and affinity of its constituency. Texas A&M deserves to be led by a president who is an accomplished leader and who also understands our unique values and culture and is respectful to and inclusive of all stakeholders and members of the Aggie family. The Rudder Association supports a process to identify such a leader. If our Board of Regents believes that Interim President Welsh is such a candidate, then we look forward to him clarifying his views on a number of important questions.

President and Board of Directors
The Rudder Association