I first met Tony Welters in early 2002, when he was one of the Law School trustees on the dean search committee and I was being interviewed for the job. Embarrassingly, I don’t remember what he asked me or what answers I gave, though I assume that the conversation must have gone reasonably well.

I remember virtually everything about my subsequent interactions with Tony. During my 11 years as dean, I worked very closely with him in his capacity first as a law school trustee and the chair of our campaign that ended in 2010, and then as the chair of the Law School’s board. And, since 2013, I think of Tony exclusively in a way that is even more meaningful, which is as a very good friend. And, throughout these 17 years, I have always thought of Tony and Bea—Ambassador Beatrice Welters—with enormous admiration as the joint architects of the spectacular AnBryce Scholarship Program.

Tony is both an exceptional leader and an extraordinary visionary, two traits that are very seldom found in a single person. I will talk today about Tony as the
visionary and focus on the AnBryce Program, which is Tony’s joint venture with Bea. When we started talking about the program in 2002, there was one full-tuition yearly scholarship. Over the next few years, the program grew to ten scholars per year. How and why did that happen? An important part of it was Tony and Bea’s exceptional financial generosity. But another part was that they were able to articulate a vision for the program that was attractive to corporations, foundations, and law firms. How could it not be? What Tony and Bea sought to do was to place talented students with leadership potential from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds on a footing in which they could compete successfully at the upper reaches of American higher education. The scholarship money was important, of course. But it was only the tip of the iceberg. Tony and Bea’s own direct involvement was hugely important as well.

As many of you know, Tony is a U.S. Open fan. While Tony was negotiating the sale of his healthcare company and needed to get the approvals of state regulators throughout the country, he invited some of the AnBryce students to join him for one of the weekday evening sessions at the U.S. Open. It turns out that the regulatory proceedings in Minnesota were moving slowly and Tony had flown from Minneapolis to get together with the students and had then flown back late that evening, after the matches ended. When I learned about this sometime later, I told Tony how admirable that had been but said that I was sorry about the
inevitable wear and tear that this kind of travel would undoubtedly entail. He told me: “These students come from backgrounds in which many people broke promises to them all the time. I wasn’t going to break a promise.” And that was even if the broken promise would still result in the students enjoying an evening of great tennis. Many top universities have scholarship programs for socio-economically disadvantaged students, particularly now that diversity and inclusion have become central to the lexicon of higher education. But I am convinced that none of them have coupled the financial help with the personal commitment that Tony and Bea have brought to this endeavor.

In fact, adding the financial assistance and Tony and Bea’s personal involvement only gets us part of the way down the iceberg. To join the AnBryce Program is to join one of the most influential networks in the United States, which, in addition to Tony and Bea includes Supreme Court justices, prominent federal judges, corporate CEOs and general counsels, cabinet members, members of Congress, and law firm leaders. Because of the power of the idea and because of their own personal involvement, Tony and Bea have succeeded at getting all of these really busy people engaged in the program and serving as mentors to AnBryce Scholars and alumni.
The AnBryce program, which started with NYU law students, has now expanded to include both NYU and Notre Dame college students. And it is far from the only philanthropic venture that Tony and Bea do, with the same mix of extraordinary financial support and personal involvement, and inspiring others to support the venture. At a time when our government is not coming close to paying sufficient attention to issues concerning the distribution of opportunity, Tony and Bea remind us of the type of society we could have and do so much to bring us closer to that ideal. The problem, though, is that despite his outsize skills, Tony hasn’t yet figure out how to clone himself. That’s why other leading academic institutions, which clearly have the resources and the know-how to establish programs modeled on AnBryce, have come up with only inadequate imitations. What they don’t have is the unique mix of inspiration and leadership that Tony brings to the table.

Let me end by saying that it has been such a personal joy to be a friend of Tony’s over the years, sharing many happy occasions and some sad ones as well, and getting to know not only Bea but also Andrew and Bryant, the “An” and “Br” of AnBryce Program. For Tony, it all comes down to family and we—Vicki and me and everyone in this room—are so lucky that Tony is so generous not only in his philanthropy and commitment, but also in the way in which he defines family.