

**Comments to the North Dakota Senate Appropriations Committee
Senator Ray Holmberg, Chair**

**Submitted by DeAnna Carlson Zink, CEO of the University of North Dakota
Alumni Association and Foundation**

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Chairman Holmberg and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony regarding the North Dakota Challenge Fund. It has been a profoundly successful program and I ask that the Legislature continue funding the program at the highest level possible and providing flexibility as to how those funds are used.

I want to thank each member of the North Dakota Legislature for supporting this initiative in the past. The benefits have been far-reaching—every college and university has been able to directly impact students earning degrees that set them up for lifelong success.

The North Dakota Higher Education Challenge Fund is an investment in the future of North Dakota and the nation. With this public/private partnership, our donors are teaming with the state to inspire a world of change. Because many of the gifts are put into endowments, the Challenge Fund is not only benefiting current students, but will continue to shape public higher education in the state into the future.

Since the inception of the challenge fund in 2013, we at the UND Alumni Association and Foundation have utilized our entire \$19 million allocation from the state with \$38 million in gifts and commitments. Two out of every three gifts to the program came from donors outside the state who wanted to invest in higher education in the great state of North Dakota.

Since the North Dakota Challenge Fund began, 467 gifts to UND have funded 230 total projects including 183 endowed scholarship funds. That is an incredible impact on thousands of UND students; leaders in action who are making a difference in the state, country, and world.

At the University of North Dakota, we have benefited by focusing on the University's strategic priorities and college-based initiatives—especially scholarships and academic programs. We have leveraged the challenge grant with our donors from all over the country. The incentive of an immediate 50 percent return on their investment has been very appealing and motivating. We have multiple examples of donors who have given thanks to this program and, in some cases, have given more than they originally intended once they learned of this public/private partnership. Our development officers have donors now asking us about the program because they want to “time” their gift to take advantage of this fantastic partnership. Ask any fundraiser; it's not often you get donors offering to give you money before you've even asked them to give!

You all should be applauded for the success this initiative has been on all fronts. It has helped motivate donors and been a tipping point for them to give back. I thank you for that.

As you know, Gov. Burgum recommended \$20 million for this program, while SB2020 has the funding at \$9.65 million. I urge you to fund the program at the highest level possible and provide flexibility. I strongly believe if we don't receive full funding, we will leave philanthropic dollars on the table. As the University of North Dakota strives to build its reputation as a leader in innovative education, private giving is more important than ever – especially when state revenues are more challenged. It is vitally important to have initiatives like this that support academic programs, endowed faculty positions, and scholarships to make colleges and universities accessible to students from every walk of life.

Thank you again for allowing me to express my views. Thank you also for your continued support of this valuable program.

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