

Barry D. Batcheller

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Members of the Committee
Senate Appropriations
Education and Environment Division

RE: House Bill 1003 - NDSU Engineering Building

Members,

In 1999, Phoenix International Corporation, a company that I founded in 1987, built the first private sector commercial building in the North Dakota State University Research and Technology Park. Shortly thereafter the company was purchased by John Deere and I was appointed Deere's Director of Technology Growth, a position that I held until I retired from the company in 2005. Over the past 20 years, Deere has substantially expanded its technology development presence in the state from this base in the NDSU RTP.

In 2009, I built the second private sector commercial building in the NDSU RTP to accommodate the growth of Appareo Systems, a company I founded after retirement from John Deere. Then, in 2014, I purchased the commercial building in the research park previously owned by Alien Technologies. In 2021, Appareo was purchased by AGCO corporation, another world leader in the design and production of advanced agricultural equipment. Since the acquisition, AGCO has added more than 60 new employees, and like Deere, has intentions to continue to grow and expand in North Dakota.

Two of the world's largest and most advanced producers of agricultural equipment have now established technology centers in proximity to North Dakota State University, and have expressed interest in expanding these capabilities further. It is now clear that we are creating a nexus in our state for the development of the high technology building blocks required for tomorrow's advanced farming applications. The opportunity this presents for the state cannot be overstated. What is needed to support the continued growth and expansion of these preeminent agricultural companies, as well as other organizations who will be drawn to the state by their presence here, is an uninterrupted and growing supply of well educated, hardworking STEM graduates.

Over the course of my career, I have had the opportunity to interact on a professional level with world-class technical leaders in production agriculture, and by so doing obtain an appreciation for their expectations as regards of the capabilities of their technology partners. The knowledge I have gained during the creation and expansion of businesses in North Dakota, and the experiences gained through interactions with Fortune 500 companies, have impressed upon me the importance of establishing and expanding appreciable science and technology capabilities within the state. North Dakota is competing with significant research universities like the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Georgia Tech and the University of Illinois at Champaign. We cannot compete on this stage with outdated equipment and facilities. We need to make the requisite investments if we are to capitalize on the opportunities now before us.

For the reasons stated, I ask that you consider favorably the request by NDSU to update their capabilities by constructing a modern engineering center, and by so doing enable the university to attract and educate the young men and women of our state, and others who may wish to come to our state and remain here to help us grow. If you do this, NDSU will be positioned to provide the resources so keenly sought after by world technology leaders such as those now present at the NDSU Research Park, and other similar technology leaders throughout the state. I can assure you that the future value of this investment for North Dakota will be substantial.

Respectfully,

Barry Batcheller