

Christian Walth – NDSU Student Body President

Good morning chair Sorvaag and members of the committee, thank you for letting me speak today. My name is Christian Walth and I have the privilege of serving as NDSU's Student Body President where I bring the voice of over 12,000 students.

I would like to start with talking about the excitement that is growing on campus. This year, our student success programs completely revamped how we imagine Summer Orientation and Welcome Week. Rather than having new students go through the motions and simply learn about our campus, we have them engaged from the get-go. We show them how to get involved, how to succeed in college, and how to make NDSU not just their university but their home. I got to hand them shirts after they left at the end of the day, and the smiles and excitement the families had were contagious! This has led to an incredible spike in student involvement with 28 new organizations popping up this year and increased participation campus-wide. Needless to say, NDSU is bustling with energy.

In addition, during the last year, we have been working on and completing amazing projects. We have established a student led food pantry for students facing food insecurity. We have hosted Higher Education Day where we invited local legislators to come and speak about their priorities and hear from our student leaders, which chair Sorvaag graciously attended. And right now, we are currently planning a one-day thrift store to promote sustainability and reusability on campus. As the Student Body President, it has been rewarding to see how our students are not only engaging with the community, but to see the community want to work with us and hire our students, retaining them in this awesome state, and joining the North Dakota workforce.

When it comes to NDSU Student Government priorities this legislative session, our largest priority is increasing mental health services on campus. We are in full support of the 3.6-million-dollar allocation that is currently proposed to add counselors to our state. In addition, like Faith said, the UND student body president, we have also implemented, and were the first in the state, the Green Bandana Project, a mental health and suicide prevention student led program. To date, 1,285 students, faculty, and staff have been through training and are wearing bandanas. In a campus-wide survey, we learned that 99% of students believe this program is making an impact. We are incredibly thankful for the consideration of the legislature to support behavioral health, but we created this program to show the state that we are also taking an active role in caring for our students.

Finally, I would like to end with a challenge NDSU is currently facing and how our Student Government is addressing it. We have a great amount of new and transfer students that come every year, but our challenge has been retaining them, making sure they stay at NDSU. This is an uphill battle because according to our enrollment office, the number one reason why students leave NDSU is because of financial problems. However, the students that leave for other reasons are the students we are targeting as a Student Government. We are facing this challenge head on by prioritizing the student experience from week 3 to week 10. This is because the first 2 weeks are full of energy, but after classes fully commence and the stresses of college officially begin, students are struggling. To battle this climate, we are doing three things. We are relocating funding into student mentors that will help new students get acclimated and have a supporting role model. We are creating exciting programming that engages new students and encourages them to get involved. And we are supporting an initiative to fund professional advisors on campus. These solutions, we believe, will boost the student experience and help our retention.