

**Comments to the North Dakota Senate  
Appropriations – Education and Environment Division Committee  
Senator Ron Sorvaag, Chair**

**Submitted by Jim Poolman, Chair of the University of North Dakota  
Alumni Association and Foundation Board of Directors**

**Submitted January 21, 2025**

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee, I am honored to express my strong support for continued funding of the North Dakota Higher Education Challenge Grant program, a vital initiative that's had a transformational impact across our state's higher education system.

As president of the UND Alumni Association & Foundation Board of Directors, I have witnessed firsthand how this program fuels student success and inspires donors to amplify their generosity by partnering with the state.

Thanks to the Challenge Grant program, 319 new endowments now benefit every college on campus. These funds have enabled the creation of recruitment scholarships, high-achiever awards, endowed faculty positions, and programmatic support, all of which directly enhance the student experience.

In my years of public service, I know that legislation doesn't always hit the mark we intended. However, the Higher Education Challenge Grant has been a perfect piece of legislative policy, delivering measurable benefits that exceed expectations. Every institution in the state has been positively impacted, with thousands of students benefiting over the past 12 years.

The program's \$92 million investment of state funds has generated an astounding \$288 million impact—a testament to its unparalleled return on investment.

I also know that there have definitely been gifts to UND that would not have been made except for the incentive of receiving the state match. Many other times, donors have made the decision to give more to maximize their match.

Even in cases where the donation was already likely, the Challenge Fund has transformed an endowment that would provide \$4,000 in annual financial support into one that instead offers \$6,000. What a difference that makes for the student receiving that scholarship!

I strongly urge you to approve Governor Armstrong's \$50 million funding request for the Challenge Grant program. Imagine the extraordinary impact this investment could achieve over the next two years.

North Dakota's colleges and universities are already attractive options for students due to their affordability and academic reputations. By continuing to support the Challenge Grant program, the state sends a powerful message to prospective students and future workers: North Dakota is deeply committed to their education and success.

Thank you.

Jim Poolman  
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