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SB 2003
Senate Appropriations Committee
January 8, 2025
Tim Mihalick, State Board of Higher Education Chair

Chair Bekkedahl and Committee Members: My name is Tim Mihalick, and I serve as the Chair of the State Board of Higher Education. I am here today to begin discussion of SB2003.

The State Board of Higher Education has eight voting members selected via committee, appointed by the governor, and approved by the Senate. We have two non-voting board members who serve in an advisee role as representatives of both the staff and faculty that work within our higher education system. Our mission is to enhance the quality of life, and the social and economic vitality of all served by our public colleges and universities.

Our Board has six strategic goals that include: workforce development, optimizing student affordability while maintaining campus financial health; providing access to programs people want, where and when they need them; preparing students for success; maximizing the strengths of a unified system; and research excellence and innovation. We know how important our business community is, and because we serve the entire state, we have the ability to connect students and trained workers to careers across the state. We take students, skills and knowledge, as well as workforce needs into consideration with all aspects of what we do to serve the state.

I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the North Dakota Legislative Assembly for their unwavering support of higher education last biennium. Your commitment has been instrumental in enhancing the educational landscape of our state, providing our students with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. The State Board of Higher Education exists to serve the state and its citizens, as you do, and

A new theme emerged as part of the Envision 2035 process and the theme establishes a framework for prioritizing future higher education initiatives. "Retool and Upskill Now for North Dakota" or RUN-ND consists of three pillars, which are student vitality, workforce, and intelligent machines, and they sit atop physical and digital infrastructure.

We hope this framework can help define the current and future needs for higher education in North Dakota. Further, we'd like RUN-ND to initiate larger discussions about how best to educate the future workforce for industry advancements and innovation, which have been accelerated by AI and digitization.

The three pillars that we focus on to develop higher education now and into the future include:

Workforce:
Our budget has investment opportunities for the state that create economic diversification through research and further innovation on our campuses. Public private partnerships as well as partnerships with industry and business are very important to both connect students with jobs and continue to build North Dakota's economy.

Polytechnic: The Bismarck State College (BSC) polytechnic education model allows students to combine multiple academic programs, and skill sets to create customized college degrees embedded with industry-recognized credentials. BSC integrates work-based learning into all degree options and encompasses many opportunities in collaboration with business and industry, including service learning, project-based learning, apprenticeships, internships, field experiences and clinicals. BSC engages with business and industry leaders to identify workforce needs and quickly respond with programs, certificates and even non-credit courses. BSC's Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILTs) are composed of business and industry stakeholders who provide BSC with strategic advice and feedback on

We continue to find great success through Public Private Partnerships and strive to continue utilizing them across the system to address capital funding needs. This lowers the cost burden on the state and allows for needed improvements.

Intelligent Machines/Technology:

Our campuses continue to innovate throughout the system including in classroom study/space, research and adapting ever-evolving technology in learning spaces that eventually helps students innovate in the workplace. The effective, consolidated use of AI and machine learning functionality will be pivotal in helping all NDUS institutions to be adaptive, responsive, and innovative leaders in the higher education sector. It is imperative that a system approach is used to ensure availability and impact at all eleven institutions. Examples of a system approach in technology include:

Core Technology Services is in a supportive role of Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning (AI/ML) for all 11 campuses. CTS has enabled numerous AI tools and features within the system wide Learning Management System over the past several months. We are preparing the use of data (data lake) and security around the possibilities of utilizing AI either off the shelf or custom developed tools.

Dakota Digital Academy: The Dakota Digital Academy (DDA) was launched to coordinate, expand, and enhance educational opportunities in computing and cyber sciences in North Dakota and the upper Midwest. DDA has funded several certificates in Cybersecurity and Software Development. The courses are offered through a web portal and are stackable to serve workforce needs. The DDA has quickly pivoted to support the emerging AI/ML technologies. The DDA has sponsored several grants and scholarships to help faculty incorporate AI into their curriculum and the DDA partnered with Valley City State University to host the inaugural AI conference centered on important and futuristic topics about how AI will impact higher education and virtually every aspect of the workplace.

end, we support investment in physical and digital infrastructure. As artificial intelligence expands, the need for data security and data storage will expand with it.

In closing, we are committed to preparing students for lifelong learning and to support a broad spectrum of workforce needs throughout the state. In our pursuit of connecting students to careers, we want to ensure North Dakota is also prepared to meet the challenges ahead. We will continue to work toward the betterment of the entire state and delivering the benefits of higher education our communities are accustomed to.

The University System and its 11 institutions provide the state with an educated workforce ready to meet the challenges of an ever-changing work environment while providing outreach and continuing education programs for the state's residents and businesses. We will continue to create and support jobs and employment opportunities through research, extension, and teaching activities, all of which provide economic benefits to enhance local and state economies.

I am available to answer your questions. Thank you.