

PREPARED TESTIMONY AND STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
Senate Bill 2256 –
Senate Workforce Development Committee
Senator Wobbema, Chair
January 31, 2025

Senator Wobbema and members of the Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Brigadier General James Cluff, United States Air Force, Retired, and I am here today in support of Senate Bill SB2256.

The topic at hand is funding for the North Dakota State Research and Technology Park. Through the course of this hearing, we have and will discuss very important topics such as innovation, technology, autonomy, and Artificial Intelligence to name a few. I urge this committee to remember that the heart of what we will discuss today revolves around PEOPLE. It is people, North Dakota citizens, that will lead the research, come up with the ideas, and execute the plans that we will discuss today. Of course, the technology is important, but it is the people that will make it a reality by converting those technologies into products that the military and commercial market benefit from.

I applaud the Tech Park's board of directors' prescient decision to bring Ms. Brenda Wyland back to public service from her work in the private sector. A woman of Brenda's talent and capability can succeed in any endeavor – she can easily be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. The fact that she is working for your state, leading the NDSU Research and Technology Park, is a bit of foreshadowing on this journey. You already have success in your grasp.

The Tech Park plan is not aspirational; it is ready to be executed. This concept is not about spending years and millions of dollars attempting to lure companies to North Dakota; it is not about linking existing businesses in the hopes they do business with each other and in the process create a few new jobs. This effort is about helping to solve some of our Nation's most pressing National Security challenges by developing technologies and capabilities that can be delivered to our Warfighters in realistic timelines.

There is a long, successful history of university research bringing amazing advances to our citizens. Institutions like Oxford University, whose research into production of a powdered form of penicillin saved thousands of lives during World War II. Jonas Salk's work at the University of Pittsburgh created the Polio Vaccine. How many lives has the University of Minnesota and James "Crash" Ryan saved through their invention – the retractable locking seat belt? For dog lovers in the room, over 30 million dogs have been saved because two researchers from Iowa State developed a Kennel Cough vaccine. The list goes on and on. Countless inventions that quite literally changed the world but would not have happened had they not been converted into a commercial product. They also brought hundreds of millions of dollars back to their states. Money that was then reinvested to continue that journey. With the investment we are asking for today, you are putting North Dakota State on the path to join some amazing organizations by doing life-changing work. The technologies, innovations, and capabilities Brenda and her team will develop and turn into tangible products with this investment have the potential to change the character of war and agriculture.

Senators, we are asking for a lot of trust today. I am asking you to trust me when I say that this effort can produce results that the Department of Defense desperately

needs. I am asking you to trust me when I say that Ms. Brenda Wyland and her team will not fail you or the people of North Dakota – she will deliver. Ms. Wyland, Mr. Josh Gelinske, and their team are asking you to trust them that this state’s \$20,000,000 investment will be paid back to the State and its people many times over.

This state has lived and breathed innovation and technology in so many ways. North Dakota is the Gold Standard in the Unmanned Aerial Systems ecosystem, particularly through the decade’s long efforts of Senator Hoeven. Grand Skies is a shining example of Public-Private Partnerships with the United States Air Force. As the Director of Montana State’s aviation program, it pains me to say this, but University of North Dakota’s Aerospace College, led by my United States Air Force Academy classmate, Dr. Bob Kraus, is the Gold Standard in the collegiate aviation training ecosystem. And that is why I am confident when I say that with your support of this funding request, and under the leadership of Ms. Brenda Wyland, the NSDU Research and Technology Park team, will be another example of North Dakota leadership and high standards.

There is so much more I want to discuss with the committee. I look forward to a fruitful and productive discussion. This concludes my formal remarks, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.