

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

**Submitted by DeAnna Carlson Zink, CEO of the University of North Dakota  
Alumni Association and Foundation**

**Submitted January 21, 2025**

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony regarding the North Dakota Challenge Fund.

I want to thank each member of the North Dakota Legislature for supporting the challenge fund in the past as the benefits have been far-reaching. Over the past 12 years, \$94 million in state dollars have inspired \$188 million in donor gifts for a \$282 million impact across North Dakota's colleges and universities. Countless students have been helped by the generosity shown by our donors and you, our state legislators.

Through this public-private partnership, our donors are collaborating with the state to drive transformative change. By channeling many contributions into endowments, the Challenge Fund not only supports current students but also ensures a lasting impact on public higher education in the state for generations to come. Just at the University of North Dakota alone, 250 scholarship endowments have been created thanks to this program.

We are also seeing that this program generates interest from donors across the country. Sixty percent of gifts to UND through the program have come from donors outside the state who want to invest in higher education in the great state of North Dakota. Other foundations report similar engagement from out-of-state donors.

Donors want to team with the state to maximize the impact of their gifts. We have seen over and over how the Challenge Grant program has compelled a donor to give or to give more than they may have originally intended.

As an example, we have a family foundation that has said it wants to commit at least another \$100-thousand into its scholarship endowment in 2025 as long as the Challenge Fund program is in place.

Success stories can be found across the state: The UND Alumni Association & Foundation set another fundraising record this past fiscal year. Scholarship support at Bismarck State College rose 69% in just one year. NDSU successfully completed a capital campaign and Minot State has reached its campaign fundraising goal of \$50 million. At the North Dakota State College of Science, more than half of the \$17.5 million raised and matched has gone to Career and Technical Education and Allied Health scholarships and programs. The Dickinson State University Heritage Foundation hit a milestone this fall when it surpassed \$60 million in donations since it began rebuilding in 2016. Ty Orton has said the challenge grant has been a major factor in their fundraising success.

This is the legacy you have established through the North Dakota Challenge Grant program. Now, you have the opportunity to expand that legacy. By funding another round of Challenge grants, you will fuel an amazing period of growth and prosperity for North Dakota's colleges and the students they serve. We, of course, encourage you to consider Governor Armstrong's \$50 million request for this program in order to maximize the impact.

Private giving is more crucial than ever for higher education institutions across the state. Initiatives like this are essential for supporting academic programs, funding endowed faculty positions, and providing scholarships that ensure our colleges and universities remain accessible to students from all backgrounds.

As partners – our donors and you as state leaders – will ensure that we produce graduates that meet the evolving needs of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce.

Thank you.

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