

March 15, 2019

The Honorable David McMillan, Chair
The Honorable Kendall Powell, Vice Chair
The Honorable Thomas Anderson
The Honorable Richard Beeson
The Honorable Linda Cohen
The Honorable Michael Hsu
The Honorable Dean Johnson
The Honorable Peggy Lucas
The Honorable Abdul Omari
The Honorable Darrin Rosha
The Honorable Randy Simonson
The Honorable Steven Sviggum

Dear Members of the Board of Regents:

Naming and unaming buildings and other structures within the University of Minnesota system are important responsibilities of the Board of Regents. As Board of Regents Chair David McMillan stated in his framing remarks prior to the delivery of the report of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History to the Board of Regents on March 8th, 2019, “this is consequential and important stuff for the University, its governing board, and the state and the people who reside in it.”

The Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC) concurs, and was pleased to hear Chair McMillan acknowledging the varying views individuals bring to the table and requesting ground rules for the discussion: “I ask all of my colleagues as well as the University community, and those outside our University community who are watching and interested in this to be understanding of and accepting of differences in perspective. Healthy debate conducted in a respectful manner leads to good decisions, especially on issues like this that touch the very core values of our University.”

The FCC supports civil debate and engaging in a constructive manner with history (not rewriting it, but understanding it). We appreciate the request and need for incorporating additional information from the families of the individuals in question, as well as external audiences. Peer review and debate are essential parts of any scholarly endeavor, and the report of the Task Force is a work of scholarship that will inform the ultimate decision by the Board of Regents.

We agree with Chair McMillan that the Board of Regents discussion on March 8th did not proceed as intended due to time constraints. The one-sided nature of this part of the meeting, resulting portrayal of the Task Force’s report, and ensuing discussion comparing the report to trial proceedings, set a tone and burden of proof inconsistent with the task at hand: approaching the naming and renaming of buildings from the perspective of our University values.

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We are one University community, striving to lead our institution to the best decisions possible. We all want the best for the University of Minnesota, but we fail to live up to our shared goal when we lose sight of this shared value. Engagement in respectful debate on important matters is how we progress towards greater outcomes. The heart of academic excellence is based on an inclusive and respectful environment where widely divergent ideas are discussed and peacefully debated.

The FCC requests that the Board of Regents schedule a special meeting devoted to the debate on this important topic. We request a venue other than the Board of Regents Boardroom and a framework that focuses on discussing the relative strengths of the arguments for and against renaming, addressing each building separately.

Respectfully,

Members of the Faculty Consultative Committee, University of Minnesota

Amy Pittenger, chair

Philippe Buhlmann, vice chair

Robert Blair

Sheri Breen

Sue Chu

Lester Drewes

Colleen Flaherty Manchester

Catherine French

Frank Gigler

Jennifer Goodnough

Tabitha Grier-Reed

Jessica Larson

Lynn Lukkas

Peh Ng

Peggy Nelson

Ned Patterson

Donna Spannaus-Martin

Wendy St. Peter

Eric Watkins

Philip Zelazo

cc: Susanna Blumenthal, professor of law and associate professor of history, and co-chair,
Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History
John Coleman, dean, College of Liberal Arts, and co-chair, Task Force on Building Names
and Institutional History
Karen Hanson, executive vice president and provost
Eric W. Kaler, president
Brian Steeves, executive director and corporate secretary, Office of the Board of Regents