

**Minnesota State  
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
February 27, 28, and March 2, 2018**

**February 27, 2018**

Present: Chair Michael Vekich, Vice Chair Dawn Erlandson, Treasurer Jay Cowles, and Trustees Basil Ajuo, Amanda Fredlund, Bob Hoffman, Roger Moe, Rudy Rodriguez, George Soule, Louise Sundin, and Cheryl Tefer

Absent: Trustees AbdulRahmane Abdul-Aziz, Ann Anaya, Alex Cirillo, and Jerry Janezich

The Board of Trustees met in social sessions with the three finalists for chancellor, as follows:

- Lunch with Dr. Ricardo Azziz from 11:30 am – 12:45 pm
- Social hour with Dr. Van Ton-Quinlivan from 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm
- Social hour with Neal Cohen from 2:30 pm – 3:45 pm

**February 28, 2018**

Present: Chair Michael Vekich, Vice Chair Dawn Erlandson, Treasurer Jay Cowles, and Trustees Basil Ajuo, Amanda Fredlund, Bob Hoffman, Roger Moe, Rudy Rodriguez, George Soule, Louise Sundin, and Cheryl Tefer (Trustees Fredlund and Hoffman participated by WebEx)

Absent: Trustees AbdulRahmane Abdul-Aziz, Ann Anaya, Alex Cirillo, and Jerry Janezich

**Open Forums**

Chair Vekich convened the open forums. He welcomed everyone and explained that trustees will have the opportunity ask questions for the first 15 minutes and then others will have an opportunity to ask questions. Chair Vekich introduced Dr. Rassoul Dastmozd, president of Saint Paul College, who facilitated the sessions.

- Dr. Azziz's interview was from 9:15 am – 10:30 am
- Dr. Ton-Quinlivan's interview was from 10:45 am – 12:00 pm
- Mr. Cohen's interview was from 12:30 pm – 1:45 pm

**March 2, 2018**

Present: Chair Michael Vekich, Vice Chair Dawn Erlandson, Treasurer Jay Cowles, and Trustees AbdulRahmane Abdul-Aziz, Basil Ajuo, Alec Cirillo, Amanda Fredlund, Bob Hoffman, Roger Moe, Rudy Rodriguez, George Soule, Louise Sundin, and Cheryl Tefer (Trustees Erlandson and Fredlund participated by phone)

Absent: Ann Anaya and Jerry Janezich

**Convene**

Chair Vekich called the meeting to order at 12:12 pm. A quorum was present for this special board meeting for the purpose of appointing the chancellor of Minnesota State.

### **Chair Vekich's Comments**

Chair Vekich stated that the most important responsibility of the Board of Trustees is the selection of the chancellor. A wise, effective, visionary, and collaborative leader is a necessary condition to the success of our colleges and universities and their ability to serve students and communities across the state of Minnesota.

Soon after the board agreed to continue the search for the next chancellor in February of last year, this board embarked, with great care and intentionality, on a national search for the next chancellor. Wheless Partners, a national search firm, was chosen to assist the process of identifying an outstanding pool of candidates.

The 22-person search advisory committee was led by Scott Peterson, executive vice president and chief human resources officer of Schwann's Food Company. The committee was comprised of trustees, students, faculty, staff, presidents, members of the chancellor's cabinet, and community leaders. I want to thank Scott Peterson and every one of the search committee members for the dedication with which they did their work.

Wheless Partners spoke with over 150 potential candidates, a third of which elected to submit application materials. From this pool, the search advisory committee selected seven individuals for initial interviews. Reference and background checks were conducted.

As a result of the initial interviews, the top three candidates were invited to stand as finalists. This past Tuesday, trustees interviewed the candidates, as did members of the chancellor's cabinet and many of our college and university presidents. The following day, members of the Board of Trustees, presidents, faculty, staff, employees, and students took part in forums held here in the system office and broadcast online. Those who took part in the forums were able to hear from the candidates, ask questions, and provide feedback.

The search process was robust, and I am proud of the great lengths we went in order to hear from as many stakeholders as we could. Everyone who took part in the search cared deeply about this process and its outcome. I know I speak for the entire board when I say thank you to everyone who participated in the search, met the candidates, asked their questions, and provided their feedback.

This is a critical moment for our colleges and universities. They play a central role in providing the talent businesses and communities across Minnesota need in order to thrive. And the chancellor is an incredibly important leader to this work.

All three of the candidates who visited this week engaged us in thoughtful discussions about the challenges our colleges and universities face, as well as the opportunities that are possible in the coming years. I want to thank them for their interest in our system and for their willingness to engage in this arduous process.

Each of the finalists had their own strengths, but as we evaluated the feedback we received from our stakeholders, it became increasingly clear that we had not found among the finalists the right person to lead Minnesota State over the next few years. And so I have asked Interim Chancellor Devinder Malhotra if he would be willing to serve as chancellor for a three-year term should the board choose to appoint him. I am delighted to report it was a resounding YES.

This board has vetted Dr. Malhotra for this important leadership role once before, so I don't feel the need to go into a great deal of detail about all that has prepared him for this role. As a quick reminder of Dr. Malhotra's accomplishments prior to his service as interim chancellor: He served for two years as interim president of Metropolitan State University, from 2014 through 2016, during a challenging time in the university's history. He was incredibly well-prepared for that role because he had served as provost and vice president for academic affairs at St. Cloud State University for the previous five years.

Before joining Minnesota State, Dr. Malhotra was dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Southern Maine. At the University of Akron, he served as chair of the Faculty Senate, chair of the Department of Economics, and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. For three decades he was a tenured professor of economics with a distinguished scholarly career writing on a wide range of topics in his field, including global economics and manufacturing in the United States. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Kansas State University.

Last year, when I proposed Dr. Malhotra as interim chancellor, I said he would understand us, he would hit the ground running, and he would continue to move the board's agenda forward. Since last August, he has indeed done all of that, and he has impressed us with his dedication, his commitment to the success of our students, and his steady leadership. He has led the system with calm, warmth, wit, humor, and heart.

As interim chancellor, Dr. Malhotra used these qualities to inspire calm in others, bring people together, encourage them to move past previous challenges to see what's possible, and to solve problems. Frankly, he has performed brilliantly as interim chancellor. He has never been a mere placeholder. Instead, he has kept his foot on the gas.

We have been fortunate to be able to tap into the deep reservoir of gifts that Devinder Malhotra has brought to his work as interim chancellor. Over the past year, he has again and again revealed a nuanced understanding of who we are as a system, where we have been, and – most importantly – where we need to go. He has deepened the relationship between Minnesota State and both the bargaining units and student associations. He has encouraged open communication between the board and our presidents. He has brought a laser focus to student success. And he has reaffirmed our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by fostering a culture in which we can have difficult conversations about this critical issue.

We, as a board, have enormous confidence in the mission-critical work that's being done across our system. We have strong presidents who lead the academic enterprise of their campuses. We are depending on the presidents to continue their strong leadership of their campuses, because the educational expertise sits within their colleges and universities. They will be critical to the execution of our strategic plan and its focus on affordability, access, and providing the talent Minnesota communities need to prosper.

We have exceptional faculty on every campus, and they are what makes our colleges and universities special. Leading all of this great work, is an exceedingly strong systemwide academic leader: Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs Ron Anderson.

In addition, the system office provides an increasing amount of support for the work of the campuses, in particular the strong financial management provided by Vice Chancellor Laura King and her team, and the forward-looking NextGen project led by Vice Chancellor Ramon Padilla that will update the data systems that were created in the last century and will help to evolve the student experience. We have great confidence in all of that.

What keeps this board up at night is the financial viability and our ability to articulate the value of our colleges and universities to students, their families, and all of the people of Minnesota – at a time when higher education is under increased scrutiny for how it delivers for its students. Therefore, the board has high aspirations for the work the chancellor must accomplish if we are to respond to an ever-changing higher education and workplace landscape. This includes: maintaining a laser focus on student success; completing the priorities this board has set, most notably implementation of Charting the Future; and moving forward on ways to ensure the long term sustainability of our colleges and universities.

To assist with these important goals, I will be commissioning a strategic task force to help us bring the system to the next level. The task force will evaluate all of our processes related to student success in order to see where we are creating our own barriers, to look for new knowledge, and to recommend to the board the changes that will be necessary to give us the results we want to see in the next years ahead.

### **Trustee Cowles' Comments**

Thank you Chair Vekich for a thoughtful summation of the approach that our search process took and the cares and priorities of the board going forward. I want to speak specifically to one aspect of that. Thanks to Steven Rosenstone's leadership through the long term financial sustainability workgroup, we have significant challenges in our business model and value proposition that are not sustainable for the long term. And, that requires an urgent and creative response on the part of the entire system. I am delighted personally that Dr. Malhotra was a member of the long term financial sustainability workgroup, along with myself. Despite the generous support of Governor Dayton and the legislature over the last few years those challenges continue to be squarely in front of us. I know they will be a

priority and focus of the board going forward and I look forward to a renewed partnership with Dr. Malhotra.

### **Trustee Cirillo's Comments**

I want to thank everyone who was involved in the search and the search process. There were quite a few people from the organization and they represented us well. Thank you also to Chair Vekich for how he handled the search process itself. Thank you to the candidates who provided a mirror to us of looking at our own place and taught us quite a bit. I saw in the processes that I was involved in that we came to some recognition of what needed to be done here.

### **Appointment of Chancellor**

The following motion was made by Chair Vekich and carried unanimously:

*The Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of Chair Michael Vekich, appoints Devinder Malhotra, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, effective immediately. The board authorizes the completion of an employment agreement in accordance with the terms and conditions of the MnSCU Personnel Plan for Administrators with the effective date of August 1, 2018, for a duration of three years.*

### **Chancellor Malhotra's Comments**

I am humbled and grateful to all of you for the confidence you have placed in me and for your continuing support and guidance. I look forward to working with all of you and tackling the challenges you so well laid out in your comments. There have been very few moments in my life when I have been tongue-tied, speechless and this is definitely one of them. I am reminded of a line in a Beatles song about "life is what happens to you when you are planning for something else." All through my life I have been an accidental administrator. In that sense, I try in situations which call for change leadership and change management. The last few months have been an incredible opportunity in leading Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. As you all know, we open each and every door of hope and opportunity for all Minnesotans. We are indeed the economic and social engine that will secure our future and provide Minnesota the talent it needs.

Our faculty and staff, and our presidents focus on student success and the stewardship of their communities in which our colleges and universities are located. I am inspired by the transformative work that goes on in the colleges and universities each and every day. No doubt that there are enormous challenges, but I also know that as a system, as faculty, staff, and the leadership of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, we will not let our system be defined by the constraints of the challenges it faces, but also by its potential and its compact with the citizens of Minnesota.

Chancellor Malhotra commented that today he will renew his commitment to Chair Vekich, the Board of Trustees, and everybody else who works at Minnesota State colleges and universities to meet their expectations and goals as we serve our students and the State of

Minnesota. It is an awesome responsibility and also a great opportunity to strategically position our colleges and universities who live in our compact with the citizens of Minnesota. How many opportunities does one get in one's life time to rethink their own profession? I am incredibly excited; I know higher education today is facing some strong headwinds. If you look over the last 30-50 years, our knowledge of the physical phenomena and universe have increased dramatically. Our knowledge of life sciences and genetic makeup has also gone up dramatically. There has been a tremendous amount of mobility across nations which has altered significantly and dramatically the demographics of the western hemisphere. Add to all this mix, the impact that technology has had on each and every aspect of our existence. The way we think; the way we process our information; the way we communicate has changed very dramatically. Today, simultaneously there are billions of interactive conversations going on which are shaping the future as we speak in real time. All of these changes will require for us to rethink our programmatic structures, our curricular designs, our modes of delivery. It will require us to shed old ways and embrace change with all its attendant challenges and risks. We need to be bold and courageous. We need to rethink our organizational structures, our approach to the way we are supporting students, and the way we allocate our resources. Add to this, the new budget realities, increasing disinvestment in public higher education and our need to reaffirm our value proposition in a very clear, distinct, and persuasive manner. We need to adapt to this changing environment and we need to do it quickly.

As great as our challenges are, so are our capacity and resilience to meet these challenges. We need to heighten our focus and also need to redouble our efforts with a sense of focus and urgency, to realign ourselves to the changing demographics, to realign ourselves to the needs of the new learners, because they access information differently and process information differently. We need to catch up to them. Then we also need to realign ourselves to new budget realities as Chair Vekich and Trustee Cowles alluded to that require rethinking of our existing models. There are days when the challenges are overwhelming and then on those days I am reminded of a quote on my desk from John Maynard Keynes, a noted economist, "the power of the vested interest and status quo is vastly exaggerated when compared to the gradual encroachment of ideas."

Our work is through our ideas, through our work to expand the scope and size of that encroachment so that we indeed usher in a new era where we can deliver on our innate potential and promise and prepare our students not only for work but also for life and citizenship so that they can not only better themselves through education but they can also contribute to the progress of the communicates in which they live and work.

Thank you Chair Vekich and Board of Trustees. I look forward to working with you and the rest of our colleagues at Minnesota State colleges and universities. I also want to thank my partner, Laura, who believes in me and a shout-out to my daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter.

### **Adjournment**

Chair Vekich thanked Chancellor Malhotra and adjourned the meeting at 12:40 pm.