

Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra,

As of submitting these remarks, it has been just a little over six months since the COVID-19 global pandemic completely upended our world as we know it. Recently the death toll from this pandemic has passed the 200,000 mark—a somber indicator of the grim scope of this crisis.

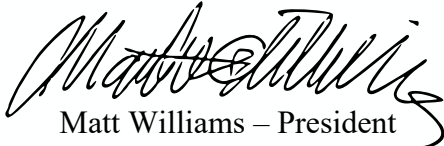
As a labor union, our organizational priorities are guided by the principle of solidarity and the concern for the wellbeing of our fellow humans. The labor movement was forged over concerns of health and safety, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory where fire escapes were locked by the owners to ensure the young, primarily immigrant women couldn't walk off the job when they discovered the horrific working conditions inside. As those who remember their American History know, 146 workers perished when the factory caught on fire and the workers could not escape. This incident would become one of the major catalysts of the American Labor Movement as we know it.

That was 109 years ago, and as much as things have changed, some things have remained the same. In the past six months, we have witnessed the creation of the “essential worker,” someone who was at first celebrated for the additional risk they took on to keep others safe, and who was later chastised and demonized by many when their demands for safety interfered with the comforts of others. We have watched outbreak after outbreak occur in industries where the most precarious workers found themselves powerless to fight back against the need for business as usual to continue—meatpacking plants, long-term care facilities, logistics, and retail/hospitality sectors. It is worth noting that many of the workers in these areas are immigrants and/or black and brown.

These are not just abstractions for us, these are the communities we live in and serve. It is through our commitment to solidarity that we are called to action over these matters. One such action is to ask tough and uncomfortable questions. For example, why is it that we live in a world in which the comfort of some matters more than the lives of others? Or relatedly and more specific to our realm, how would the actions of higher-education been different in this pandemic had we not been so reliant on tuition as a revenue stream?

These are questions that demand deep humility and reflection, a willingness to accept our roles in contributing to situations that clearly did not honor the dignity of all lives, and a commitment to change underlying structures. This work is the highest priority for the Minnesota State College Faculty. We are eager to partner with others similarly committed to this work.

Thank you.



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