

September 14, 2009

Ms. Margaret Sughrue Carlson
Chief Executive Officer
University of Minnesota Alumni Association
200 McNamara Alumni Center
200 Oak Street S.E.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Re: A University's Priorities

Dear Ms. Carlson:

Thank you for your response. You assert that the University is very successful in raising funds solely for academic programs. If true, your assertion reinforces my point that the University could have raised at least as much for such programs if it had not been asking the donors *at the same time* to contribute a total of \$90 million for a football stadium.

If big time college sports actually produced widespread alumni support for academic programs, then the universities with winning teams would dominate the rankings of school by percentage of alumni donors. Yet schools such as Ohio State, Michigan, and Wisconsin are not even in the top 75. In fact, smaller schools that provide a quality *academic* experience for *undergraduate* students dominate the rankings. See the September 2009 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* (enclosed). See also *Punting Our Future: College Athletics and Admissions* in the May/June 2007 issue of *Change* magazine (published in cooperation with the Carnegie Foundation) by Barbara Fried, the Saunders Professor of Law at Stanford University. Click the archives tab at www.changemag.org.

As you know, during each bonding session of the legislature the University submits its request for HEAPR bonds that are necessary for the maintenance and renovation of *existing* academic facilities. In the 2006 "stadium session" the legislature slashed the HEAPR allocation from the \$80 million requested by the University to \$30 million. In 2008 the legislature chopped the HEAPR request (the "cornerstone" of the 2008 Capital Request of the University) from \$100 million to \$35 million. Do you think that the University should have been seeking bonds for a stadium at a time when the legislature was wielding an axe on bonds for the maintenance of academic facilities? Did securing bonds for the stadium

serve the best interests of our children who attend the University in order to prepare for their futures?

Allow me to make my point with a personal example. Four of our six children have pursued undergraduate or graduate studies at the University. Our oldest son graduated from the dental school in 2005. He participates in programs that provide dental services *pro bono* to patients who cannot afford to pay. Our oldest daughter graduated *summa cum laude* from the College of Biological Sciences in 2003 and from the medical school in 2008. Upon completing her OB-GYN residency she plans to practice in a community health clinic. One of our twin daughters graduated from the School of Journalism in 2008. She served as the president of the Pi Beta Phi sorority, and she now works for the Women's Auxiliary at the University Hospital. Her twin sister graduated from the College of Liberal Arts in 2008 after being on the Dean's List each semester. She served as the vice president of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and is now attending the law school. She plans to practice public service law. (For the record, our middle son graduated from St. Olaf College with a degree in studio arts and now works as an art director at an advertising agency in Minneapolis. Our youngest son attended St. Cloud State on the ROTC program. He is now a 1st Lieutenant in the Minnesota National Guard and returned last year from a tour of duty in Iraq where he was awarded the Bronze Star.)

All of our children will make contributions to our community. Using state bonds to build athletic facilities does not provide any support for their present and future contributions.

In the 20th century intercollegiate athletics evolved from club teams to big business, especially in the primary revenue sports of men's basketball and football. There was a transition from a game in which a limited number of coaches with relatively modest salaries instructed local students to an annual \$58 million financial enterprise at the University in which numerous coaches with extravagant compensation engage in the national recruiting of young men merely for their athletic skills.

The result has been an endless series of embarrassments for the University: the on court riot instigated by the thugs recruited by Bill Musselman for the basketball team; the cash doled out by Luther Darville to the football players of Lou Holtz; the group sex after a basketball game in Madison by the players of Jim Dutcher; the academic fraud during the tenure of Clem Haskins; the 2007 conviction of a Gopher football player for criminal sexual conduct for ejaculating on the face of a

young woman who was intoxicated to the point of being unconscious; the dismal graduation rates for the men's basketball and football teams.

Now in 2009 we have the case of the star basketball recruit who arrives at the University with a felony assault charge for allegedly attempting to pull down the pants of a young woman and then punching her twice in the face when she had the nerve to resist. I am very aware that the law accords a presumption of innocence to an accused in a criminal proceeding as I served for five years as a state prosecutor for felony trials. However, the filing of a felony charge is by itself a basis for discipline under the student athlete code of conduct. Yet the University decides to overlook this violation for an athlete who can help the Gophers compete for a championship and thereby enable the basketball program to rake in millions of dollars. *At the same time* the University is now requiring students who attend the games to agree in writing to abide by a new student fan code of conduct. What lesson does this teach our children about honor or integrity or fidelity to principle?

There is a solution that would permit the University to disentangle itself from the big business of major revenue sports while allowing those programs to continue. Organize the men's basketball and football teams as separate corporations. The University would grant a license to those corporations to use the University name for the teams. The fee for the license would be a percentage of the revenues the corporations generate from ticket sales, broadcasting rights, advertising, etc. The University would use part of the license fee income to support the non-revenue sports it decides to retain, such as track and swimming. This is a solution that would enable the sports fans to continue to enjoy the games and enable the University to focus on its academic mission—the reason for its existence.

The adverse effects of the big money sports on education and research will increase as universities continue to participate in the accelerating athletic arms race. See, Sperber, *Beer & Circus: How Big Time College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education* (New York: Henry Holt & Co. 2000). It will take persons of foresight and courage to reset the priorities at their institutions. Let us now begin for our children and our community will be the beneficiaries.

Sincerely yours,

Michael W. McNabb
University of Minnesota B.A. 1971; J.D. 1974
University of Minnesota Alumni Association lifetime member

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