



Board of Regents Special Meeting

April 2019

April 26, 2019

1:00 p.m.

Boardroom, McNamara Alumni Center

BOR - APR 2019 - Special Meeting

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BOARD OF REGENTS DOCKET ITEM SUMMARY

Board of Regents

April 26, 2019

AGENDA ITEM: Historical Building Namings

Review

Review + Action

Action

Discussion

This is a report required by Board policy.

PRESENTERS: Chair David J. McMillan

PURPOSE & KEY POINTS

The purpose of this item is to act on resolutions related to historical building namings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Board of Regents Policy: *Namings* reserves to the Board full authority to name buildings or remove existing names from buildings.



REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

RESOLUTION RELATED TO

Statement on Historical Building Namings

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Regents adopts the following statement:

The University of Minnesota holds the privilege and carries the responsibility of promoting the highest ideals and deepest values of our society. The policies of the Board of Regents underscore the principles guiding us. They reinforce the University's commitment to discovery and the search for truth, and counsel doing so with integrity, civility, tolerance, and a respect for differences. Advancing diversity in all of its dimensions, free from discrimination, is part of our mission as a land grant university.

It is against those standards that the Board of Regents must assess the question of whether to rename four University buildings. Our dialogue builds upon the ground-breaking project entitled "A Campus Divided: Progressives, Anti-Communists, Racism, and Antisemitism at the University of Minnesota, 1930-1942." Its evidence of anti-Semitism and racial discrimination at the University is the foundation for a Minnesota Student Association resolution and Presidential directive calling for an examination of the actions of two University presidents and two senior leaders of that time. The Council of Graduate Students and the Professional Student Government have spoken strongly in support.

The Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History (Task Force) agreed to undertake that work. Its historical research built upon the framework for a principled assessment of naming and renaming designed by the President's and Provost's Advisory Committee on University History, comprised of faculty, staff, students, alumni and community members representing all five system campuses. While the subsequent charge to the Task Force focused on the role of the four senior administrators, its report offers more than a recommendation to change the names of four buildings. It invites a richer debate over the role of the University of Minnesota in discriminatory practices that run contrary to the values we hold dear. Recognizing that more monumental challenge, the Task Force reminds us that the education that comes from examining history is more important than whether the four names remain etched in stone.

Indeed, the Task Force report opened up a vibrant and controversial campus conversation over the purpose of namings and how the evolution of society's thinking should shape the answer to the question before the Board of Regents. The University's faculty is commended for contributing to

this ongoing public discussion concerning our core values. Disagreement over the President's recommendations from that report should not cloud the respect this Board holds for the quality of the Task Force's work product and the integrity its members brought to bear on their academic inquiry.

The Board of Regents also finds that the issues at stake reach beyond namings. The question before us is not wholly centered upon the conduct of individuals. Presidents act in concert with Regents, as the evidence corroborates. Individual conduct often mirrors the best and worst of social norms. The University debate over these matters illustrates that the President's preliminary recommendation for renaming is not the appropriate action at this time. The public policy issues before us have the Board focused on a broader inquiry addressing the social, legal, and governance context of the time. Some questions are not answered easily; the lens of history sometimes leaves some issues unresolvable in hindsight. It is important, however, that this University take steps to acknowledge and atone for its past discriminatory practices. All agree that we cannot erase that history; we must learn from it. Perhaps the reason why we struggle with naming issues is that we recognize that prejudice persists and our shortcomings often leave us ill-equipped to judge others.

How do we acknowledge and atone for past discrimination?

Not without doubt, the Board of Regents believes more reflection will come from letting the four names stand as a reminder of the weaknesses of all of us. Their failings are our failings. Also, not to be forgotten is that their accomplishments blend into their character, as well as that of this University. By declining the President's invitation to rename buildings, we do not want to suppress probing debate holding individuals accountable for their decisions as leaders of this University. To the contrary, we hope the faculty will keep that important conversation alive on our campuses. Archival resources and research into the University's history should be bolstered. We should never shy from supplementing the record with the actions of Presidents, Regents, and other senior leaders. The administration is also charged with developing permanent exhibits and other educational means to keep ever-present the challenge of this University to do better.

What is not in doubt is the proof that the University of Minnesota engaged in discriminatory practices. This University must accept responsibility for sowing division by race and religion. The University cannot avoid the judgment its history requires.

The far more important challenge, however, is where we go from here. How do we ensure that all are welcome at this great university? What lessons can be learned from how we name future buildings? Can this controversy serve as another way to teach how fair-minded students and scholars should use history – no matter how unsettled and uncertain – to test our own values and inspire future service to why this university was founded in 1851?

The University of Minnesota is about to open a new chapter of its history with the invocation of its 17th president. The Board of Regents challenges President-designate Gabel and the entire University community to determine how to further remedy discriminatory practices – past and present. This is no time to stand still. Upcoming naming decisions present an opportunity to embrace the diversity of our community. What principles will we apply when undertaking that question? How do we highlight the University's discriminatory past within the buildings named for the four named leaders in question? And most significantly, what more can this University do to support the teaching, research, and service that will inspire us to learn from our history?



REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

RESOLUTION RELATED TO

Historical Building Namings Recommendations

WHEREAS, in March 2019, President Kaler advanced preliminary recommendations to change the names of Coffey Hall, Coffman Memorial Union, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Regents declines the recommendations to remove the names of Coffey Hall, Coffman Memorial Union, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall.



REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

RESOLUTION RELATED TO

Institutional History

WHEREAS, in March 2019, President Kaler advanced preliminary recommendations to change the names of Coffey Hall, Coffman Memorial Union, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall; and

WHEREAS, Board of Regents Policy: *Namings* reserves to the Board the decision to name or rename a building or other significant University asset.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Regents directs the President to:

1. Develop, during the 2020-21 academic year in consultation with the Board of Regents, ongoing commemorations, educational activities, and/or permanent educational displays within or nearby one or more of these buildings to reflect the University's complex institutional history;
2. Consider and recommend to the Board of Regents additional commemorations, educational activities, or markers across the system to promote reflection on the University's history; and
3. Recommend revisions to Board of Regents Policy: *Namings* that establish clear principles and procedures to guide future renamings discussions.