

February 12, 2026

Mr. Kevin Black, Search Committee Co-Chair  
Mr. Jace Beehler, Search Committee Co-Chair

Dear Mr. Black and Mr. Beehler:

The purpose of this letter is to express my desire to serve as the next President of North Dakota State University (NDSU). I was honored to be nominated as a candidate for president at a university with so much future potential and promise. Based on my review of the position profile, you are seeking a leader that has a deep commitment to students, academic excellence, the Land Grant University (LGU) mission and a desire to join you as a part of the North Dakota community. Your next President must possess strong relationship building and communication skills with internal and external stakeholders and have a record of successful experiences in leading change at an incredibly challenging time in higher education on issues ranging from research to athletics to public trust. Finally, you are seeking a leader who exemplifies integrity, servant leadership, courage, strong ethics, nimbleness, diplomacy, enthusiasm, energy, and engagement. I believe I possess the leadership skills and experiences the university is seeking and deserves in its next university president.

While my path to a university presidency may not be viewed as traditional, I bring a depth and breadth of significant, unique, and relevant experiences from my 30 years in academia that have provided me with the opportunity to face and overcome many challenges across LGU's and equipped me with the leadership skills needed to successfully serve as your university president. My interest in this position is also strengthened by the alignment I found between what you are seeking and my personal mission to **Serve, Lead, and Grow** others. Due to my personal mission alignment with my professional life, I have had a very rewarding career in higher education as it is an area of work that lifts people up, serves the greater good, and provides economic and social mobility for millions of people through education. This is the essence of why I believe so strongly in higher education, desire to serve as an LGU president, and want to serve as NDSU's next president.

My academic career has given me the opportunity to serve and lead in three excellent LGU's and a university system – NC State University (NCSU), University of Missouri (MU), University of Missouri System (UM System), and Kansas State University (KSU). The leadership experience gained through the various academic, departmental, college, university, and system positions provided me with a strong foundation of executive leadership grounded in academia and the leadership, political, and relational skills that are required to navigate today's higher education landscape. Your next leader must successfully lead internally and externally if the university is to achieve excellence. My experiences in three R-1 institutions with strong faculty, staff, and student governing bodies, and extensive statewide extension networks prepare me well for this challenge. In my current role as Executive Vice President for External Engagement, I manage and facilitate the complexities of the external portfolio of the university from athletics to government relations to economic development to Extension/Engagement to military affairs to fundraising to alumni relations to communications/marketing. I also carry the additional executive responsibility of Chief of Staff for the President serving as the chief advisor and deputy to the President on all university issues and participating in university decision-making processes including but not limited to student life, faculty and staff governance, campus master planning, budgets, policies, crisis management, civil rights/Title IX and all other university-wide executive level initiatives. This role truly gives me a view

of and engagement in the full breadth of the university and involvement in all university-wide decisions thereby preparing me well for the Presidency.

Some of my key leadership achievements across three LGU's include:

1. Kansas State University, as Executive Vice President I played a central role in:
  - Increasing state appropriations from \$182M to \$360M
  - Increasing federal appropriations from \$0M to \$73M
  - Increasing freshmen enrollment from 2,939 to 3,788
  - Increasing research expenditures from \$212M to \$279M
  - Implementing **Next-Gen K-State Strategic Plan** to achieve excellence in student success, research and engagement.
2. University of Missouri, as Vice Chancellor I played a central role in:
  - Improving public sentiment after the 2015 protests and fallout
  - Increasing state appropriations from \$428M to \$528M
  - Increasing freshmen enrollment from 4,134 to 6,052
  - Increasing research expenditures from \$293M to \$535M
  - Implementing **MizzouForward Strategic Plan** to achieve excellence in student success, research and engagement
3. NC State University, as Department Head, Associate Director & Director I played a central role in:
  - Creating a new Family Life and Youth Development graduate program
  - Merging two academic departments in the College of Agriculture
  - Implementing a university-wide program to increase rural student undergraduate acceptance rates for the university
  - Acquiring state appropriations of \$95M for the Department and College
  - Implementing the **NC State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan**
  - Creating the CALS Proud leadership program for faculty/staff/student leadership

One of the most important challenges facing public higher education is the erosion of public trust. Creating a positive public narrative about the value and impact of higher education on society is critical and this area of work has been central to my leadership experiences. My leadership skills in external engagement were put to the test in August 2016 when I arrived at the University of Missouri. Due to an unfortunate convergence of protests and university leadership issues in 2015-2016, that fall semester (2016) student enrollment fell by over 30% and public as well as political support was at an all-time low. While not hired specifically to address this issue, it was apparent to me that if we did not win the state, we would not win state legislative support, increase student enrollment, or have the opportunity drive economic prosperity for the state. Over the course of the next 6.5 years, I was privileged to play a central role with the President and other executive leaders in the comeback of the university to include all-time enrollment highs, record state and federal appropriations, and renewed external stakeholder support. We changed the narrative by winning back the communities of the state. It was for me one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my career. One of the great lessons I learned was how fragile trust is in higher education and how easy it is to lose.

While the circumstances were different when I arrived at Kansas State University in January 2023, there were some similarities as enrollment and state/federal support were declining. By employing a new external engagement approach, K-State has had three years of enrollment growth, state and federal appropriations at an all-time high, and successful navigation of the turbulent higher

education political landscape. Much of this success has been based on the idea that as land grant universities we must win the state if we want to win for the land grant university. When we win the state, the university wins, but more importantly the university's students, faculty, and staff as well as alumni, donors and partners win. I share these as examples of the relationship-building, stakeholder engagement, communication and advocacy skills that I have demonstrated and that are required of today's university president. Diplomacy, political navigation acumen, and change management skills are essential for both internal and external audiences to ensure the institution can carry forth its mission. The land grant tripartite mission of teaching, research, and engagement if executed effectively, can position the university as the state's higher education leader for community, state, national and global impact. My demonstrated ability in winning the hearts and minds of citizens, elected leaders and university stakeholders in three states (NC, MO, KS) to enable each university to grow investments, both public and private, is a strength I would bring to the university.

In the **Opportunity** section of the position profile, the university's high interest areas were identified. For this letter, I consolidated the interest areas into six themes to highlight my experiences, successes, and commitment across three universities as follows:

1. Leadership – integrity, clarity, strategic, forward thinking
  - a. Executing successful strategic plans at the unit, department, college, university and university system levels (NCSU, MU, KSU).
  - b. Communicating and engaging successfully with internal and external audiences through change management processes related to budget transformation, academic restructuring, and legislative mandates (NCSU, MU, KSU).
2. Student-Centered – success, access, affordability
  - a. Creating new pathways to grow acceptance rates for underserved rural students (NCSU).
  - b. Advocating successfully for need-based aid and scholarships to enhance affordability (KSU).
3. Faculty/Staff – teaching, research, engagement
  - a. Creating new labs and classroom space to enhance research and teaching success (NCSU, MU, KSU).
  - b. Successfully retaining great faculty and creating new approaches to intentional recruitment of faculty talent through new, targeted approaches (NCSU, MU, KSU).
4. State-focus – land grant mission, state-wide impact, economic/workforce development, strong state relationships
  - a. Deep commitment to the land grant mission and proven experience in leveraging the statewide Extension network to grow community impact, economic development, and state/federal support (NCSU, MU, KSU).
  - b. Proven record of impacting economic, health, and education impact areas in the state by leveraging the university-wide expertise of land grant universities (NCSU, MU, KSU).
5. Financial resources – state/federal relationships, philanthropy
  - a. Serving as an ex-officio member of the KSU Foundation Board and leading the institution's effort to set philanthropic and legislative priorities in 2024 leading to a new philanthropic fundraising record (\$296M in 2025 - \$86M above goal) (KSU).
  - b. Co-leading the university's budget transformation initiative to prioritize degree and credential programs, reduce operational redundancy, enhance technology and increase statewide impact (KSU).

- c. Setting new state and federal appropriation records for the university for three years with over \$300 million new dollars acquired (KSU).
6. Athletics
- a. Serving on the KSU Athletics Governing Board, representing the university as the President's designee on the Big 12 Board of Directors when he is unavailable, reviewing and signing athletics-related contracts and participating in discussions related to conference expansion, the House case settlement, NIL and revenue-sharing (KSU).
  - b. Developing a strategy for engaging the state and community in athletics as co-investors to address revenue-sharing challenges (KSU).

Land Grant Universities, by charter and design, are about serving students, growing the economy, creating social mobility and positively impacting people on the community, state, national and global stage. If I was fortunate to become your next President, the first question I would want to ask our internal and external stakeholders is, ***“What do you want from your state’s land grant university?”*** Collectively, 800,000 North Dakotans, as taxpayers, are the largest donors to the university, and they also serve as the extended student body given that LGU’s are chartered to serve the state – **we need to know what they want from their university**. Land grant leaders must honor the unique partnership they have with the people of the state. It takes all of us working together to achieve excellence in fulfilling our institutional mission and everyone has a role to play. This culture of “we”, working together internally and externally, will be a cornerstone of my approach to serving as your institution’s leader. No one can do this alone and it requires that we create an organizational culture where everyone sees how their contribution makes a difference. This culture results in better recruitment and enhanced retention of faculty, staff and administrators, thereby making NDSU a higher education destination campus. As a result of this approach, we will do great things in the state that will impact the world and position the university as being nationally and internationally recognized for excellence!

In closing, I want to thank you for leading this search committee process. I hope my letter and CV have piqued the committee’s interest and will cause you to want to engage with me further as a candidate for this important role. If selected to serve as your next President, I can assure you that I will commit to being the servant-leader, land grant advocate, and relationship-builder that you are looking for and that NDSU deserves.

Sincerely,



Marshall Stewart