Chair Bernardy, Chair Tomassoni, and esteemed members of the House & Senate Higher Education Finance & Policy Committees. My name is Mike Burns, some of you know me now, others of you have heard from me in the past several months. I was the head coach for the men’s gymnastics team at the U of M for the past 17 years. Upon the completion of the 2021 NCAA Men’s Gymnastics season, I was relieved of my duties because of a vote of the Board of Regents back on October 9, 2020. The vote was taken a month after our Athletic Director Mark Coyle presented a plan to cut four men’s sports from the department at the end of the 2021 academic year (men’s tennis, men’s indoor and outdoor track & field, and men’s gymnastics). That October vote of the Regents over Zoom was witnessed by over 1300 concerned citizens and members of the national gymnastics community. What they witnessed was the end of an era of three sports that totaled over 300 years of athletic and academic excellence at the University of Minnesota. The other thing they witnessed was the late-night dealings to secure the proper number of Regents votes to pass the proposal to drop these sports. 24 hours before the vote there were four sports slated to be dropped. 30 minutes before the Regents meeting got underway that was dropped to three sports. Very interesting process. How did the Title IX issue of too many male athletes that required four sports to be dropped the day before the Regents vote suddenly not pose a bigger discrepancy in Title IX roster numbers when only three male sports were being dropped? While I’m not the Dean of the Math Department, these numbers just don’t add up. They didn’t add up then and they don’t add up now. When AD Coyle was asked this very question by Regent Davenport, he conceded the response to Senior Women’s Administrator Julie Manning. She basically said that after looking at the Title IX numbers very closely, there should be no issue with adding that 4th to-be-dropped sport (men’s outdoor track & field) back as a varsity sport.

How could this be? How could this be? All the reasons to drop sports revolved around two things: a huge revenue deficit and a need to get in compliance with Title IX numbers. According to AD Coyle, he needed to drop four sports to make the numbers work. Then, to gain a couple of much needed votes from the Regents, he only needed to drop three sports. The optics of that move looked about as bad as any optics could look, Yet, with the exception of five regents who voted against the proposal to drop these three sports, the vote passed, and the lives of countless student-athletes and their families were impacted for all time.

Life goes on for those seven Regents who voted to drop three sports. Life goes on for AD Coyle, and life goes on for President Gabel. But in their wake, they left a lot of male student-athletes with such a bad taste in their mouths about the University of Minnesota, that no amount of Listerine could wash that taste away.

The Special Commission being requested of the Board of Regents is only the first step in shining a light on some of the ways the Board of Regents does business. The dropping of three sports was an egregious move that was appalled by many. Many who have been impacted are still fighting a valiant and noble fight to bring these sports back. The stubbornness shown and the lack of response to be willing to look at alternative solutions to difficult problems still boggles my mind. Why won’t they listen? Why won’t they entertain a collaborative approach to solving problems? I don’t know the answer to that question. I can only surmise they figured the public outcry would soon blow over after that fateful day in October of 2020. Well, I can’t let that happen. Too many people that I was charged with caring for as part of the men’s gymnastics team are forever scarred by this decision. It was wrong and I feel in my heart and soul it needs to get right.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this written testimony.