



January 25, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Moe, Chancellor Malhotra, and Trustees. Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks at this month's Trustees meeting.

Happy New Year! The AFSCME staff that are on the frontlines at our colleges and universities are excited for another semester with the students! We are optimistic about enrollment going up, a good legislative session, more state funding for our colleges, and the promise of celebration and commencement a new semester always brings.

The staff at Hennepin Tech are thrilled with the permanent appointment of Joy Bodin as permanent president! There has been a season of healing, and while not complete yet, they are strongly on their way, especially with Joy's leadership at the helm. I would also like to congratulate Lori Kloos on her permanent appointment as the next President of St. Cloud Technical and Community College!

The upcoming retirement of Chancellor Malhotra is sad news for a system that also did a lot of healing under his leadership. I remember when there was not an open-door policy, or the invitation to contact the chancellor with problems. I hope that when the search for the new chancellor wraps up, that we have found someone just as open, welcoming, and understanding of the important of the relationships needed to run this system. I congratulate Chancellor Malhotra on his retirement – it is well deserved!!

As most of you know, finding qualified applicants for open positions is hard, country-wide, but felt very deeply here at Minnesota State. We have General Maintenance Workers who have two or three extra areas assigned to their workload because we can't fill positions. We have clerical staff who have taken on more than one job, because we can't fill positions. We have staff in Admissions, the Business Office, TRIO, Counseling/Advising, Bookstores ... the list goes on and on .... Of having more and more work to do because there is a lack of filled positions. Unfortunately, the fact remains there are still only eight-hour shifts, 24 hours in a day, and one person can't only do so much. While enrollment may be down and we don't have as many students on campuses, the square footage of our campuses have not decreased, and in many cases, thanks to Bonding Bills and HEAPR funds, have only increased.

A career with the state used to be something to reach for. It used to mean good wages, great benefits, retirement, and stability. However, that has changed. We are beginning negotiations for our next bargaining contract, and a big push, especially with a \$17 billion surplus, needs to be on wages for these frontline staff. The staff whose wages have not kept up with inflation, private industry, and our friends and family. We still have a responsibility to support our families, but it's hard to do when the take-home pay continues to shrink, and the increases of 2.5% a year get eaten up by the increases in our health insurance. These frontline staff who kept the colleges running through a three-year pandemic. Who

support our students, faculty and campuses by coming to work, keeping them clean, and having a job that is not doable by telework. A job that is LABOR intensive. A job we don't do because we can't find something else, but because we are passionate about education, students, and doing right for our state.

I look forward to another legislative session where hopefully we'll get something done this year for higher education and doing right by our staff, students, and faculty. Let's work together to show how important our frontline staff are and how much we appreciate all they've done for the last three years!

Thank you and I will stand for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Erwin, President  
AFSCME Minn State Policy Committee