

February 13, 2022

Dear Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you to Senator Rarick for the invitation to share written testimony for the February 15, 2022 hearing about the University of Minnesota's decision in October 2020 to eliminate three men's athletic teams. We have two sons, Owen (a graduate student) and Eli (a redshirt sophomore), on the men's indoor track and field team. Carson (their dad) ran at the University in the late 1980s, and Joelle's dad (their grandpa) ran there in the early 1960's – so our family has three generations of experience with Gopher running that we value deeply.

To see the University make this decision using Covid as cover and creating Title IX problems itself (by cutting women's rosters spots) to help justify it has been disturbing. Even more alarming, however, has been learning how little oversight of athletics President Gabel's office provides and how little the Board of Regents hold athletics to any kind of reasonable standards around transparency and accountability, as they insist on for most other realms. For example, AD Coyle provided no written plan in the immediate decision to cut the programs or described how the decision fits into any broader direction for where Gopher Athletics is heading. When his projected \$75 million Covid budget shortfall used to justify the cuts ended up being \$21 million, the Senior Vice President of Finance and several Regents chuckled publicly over how far off Coyle had been in his projections, something very difficult to take for student athletes and their families who lost their opportunities as a result.

Our son Owen won the Indoor Big Ten mile in 2021, the last Gopher to have this honor unless steps are taken to reinstate the indoor track and field program, which would add an annual cost of just \$110,000 we have been told. Indoor track and field is an integrated year-round running program for distance runners (cross-country in the fall, indoor in the winter, and outdoor in the spring). The team operates as a unified men's and women's program, so as it currently stands the Gopher track and field program is in an unfortunate place where female athletes are competing indoors and their male teammates are unable to do so, unless they arrange on their own to run unattached. The men no longer have their championship opportunities at Indoor Big Tens, Regionals, or Nationals. It is not just disheartening; it makes the entire program less competitive. Whether the University likes it or not, the path to Olympic sports currently runs straight through collegiate athletics. We understand that the current model is broken but believe the University can be part of a growing movement to create a new future, not settle in and accept and advance a broken system.

Track and field is the second fastest growing sports for young people, and is one of the most diverse and accessible sports. Since this decision, we have been heartened connecting with impacted student athletes, coaches, high school coaches, youth athletes who want future opportunities at their home university, alumni, donors, and other supporters. We have seen very directly how much they value Olympic sports at the University of Minnesota and how the community has come together to bring solutions and funding to the table.

We hope the Minnesota Legislature can help ensure that the University does better on athletics. We hope that the men's indoor track and field, gymnastics, and tennis teams are reinstated. To ensure that these poorly handled decisions do not happen again, we believe a commission reviewing the athletic

department's decision and actions as well as President Gabel's oversight on athletics is important. We found out that our kids' opportunities were cut immediately after Fall 2020 tuition was due, which we found disgraceful. We hope a commission will also seeking engagement and statewide input on athletics. We suspect the reason the University hasn't on its own being willing to take these steps is because they know that all sports, including these Olympic sports, are quite important to Minnesotans. Supporters have solutions in hand to help self-fund programs, if needed. If the Legislature is able, we hope you might consider funding to support Olympic sports. Engaging in solutions that protect and even grow opportunities for student athletes should be part of the Athletic Director's job. If Mark Coyle lacks the interest, vision, or motivation to pursue solutions, perhaps he is not in the right line of work. He certainly from our vantage point does not deserve a contract extension and other financial rewards.

Thank you for your willingness to listen to those directly impacted by these cuts, and for anything you can do to ensure that the University does better on athletics in the future. The student athletes like our two sons deserve better.

Sincerely,

Joelle and Carson Hoeft
Golden Valley, Minnesota
C: 763.544.1992
joellehoeft@gmail.com, carsonhoeft@gmail.com

Enclosed: Related Context

Related Context: Below are some related links that provide additional information and context to the University of Minnesota's decision to cut men's sports, including perspectives from those directly affected, if the Senate Higher Education Committee is interested in further details:

- 2021-22 University of Minnesota Men's Track and Field Roster: <https://gophersports.com/sports/mens-track-and-field/roster>
- Instead Of Cutting College Sports, Schools Should Stop Spending Money Like Fools - <https://thegrowtheq.com/instead-of-cutting-sports-colleges-should-stop-spending-money-like-fools/?fbclid=IwAR3KWxykKBJeI4E8w4pif0lvmTUYLISAtwPPNVrPIV4PN8uDpC88ZkkoIXg>
- Why Cutting College Sports Programs Is A Bad Idea – Especially Now (10/4/20): <https://www.forbes.com/sites/donnalopiano/2020/10/04/why-cutting-college-sports-programs-is-a-bad-idea-especially-now/#2163251353fd>
- Limit Spending To Save College Sports: https://www.athleticdirector.com/articles/limit-spending-to-save-college-sports/?fbclid=IwAR3HFkMkjpgoTwQxik5E9a3_jwu6zVCnt75LbwHbx7j9ZD7_1m897iaJkE
- Impact on athletes of color - College sports cuts hit Black student-athletes hardest. Go figure.: <https://www.startribune.com/college-sports-cuts-hit-black-student-athletes-hardest/572668972/>
- Gophers planning to cut 41 women athletes in addition to pending men's cuts - In addition to terminating three men's teams, the Gophers athletics department also plans smaller rosters for eight women's and two men's teams, according to data obtained by the Star Tribune.: <https://www.startribune.com/u-will-drop-41-women-s-athletes-in-addition-to-cuts-for-men/572602682/?refresh=true>
- Pitting men's and women's sports against each other at the U is wrong - Mark Coyle is hiding behind this claim, pitting men's and women's sports against each other. <https://www.startribune.com/pitting-men-s-and-women-s-sports-against-each-other-at-the-u-is-wrong/573336981/>
- U Regents should take time out on proposal to eliminate three men's sports programs. Diversity goals could be undermined by cutting whole programs. <https://www.startribune.com/u-regents-should-take-time-out-on-proposal-to-eliminate-three-men-s-sports-programs/572669022/?refresh=true>
- Gophers leaders, Mark Coyle get it wrong: men's track and field program too good to cut: <https://www.startribune.com/reusse-wrong-call-coyle-men-s-track-program-too-good-to-cut/572442292/>
- With all-white leadership, Gophers athletic department under fresh scrutiny to improve diversity - Athletic director Mark Coyle has hired 11 white head coaches in his tenure. <https://www.startribune.com/with-all-white-leadership-gophers-athletics-department-under-fresh-scrutiny-to-improve-diversity/600032408/?refresh=true>
- Patrick Reusse's annual Turkey of the Year was done. But then 2020 happened ... - <https://www.startribune.com/patrick-reusse-s-annual-turkey-of-the-year-was-done-but-then-2020-happened/573202321/>
- U of M track athletes, alumni fighting to save program: <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/u-of-m-track-athletes-and-alumni-fighting-to-save-program/89-4c67b614-d177-4d32-936e-51e6c78638b0?fbclid=IwAR0LoX8sEW-eF5BzQQVxfQKho1lcQOiyUDNnEsKZf94AAAsQIXI5z4KEeGo>
- Other B10 Schools (note: we know that Wisconsin and Michigan athletic departments also made deliberate decisions not to cut immediately, and with larger deficits than Minnesota):

https://www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/29952176/ohio-state-buckeyes-project-107m-deficit-fiscal-2021

- TalkNorth Podcast: EP: 96 Hassan Mead: <https://talknorth.com/2020/09/15/ep-96-hassan-mead/>
- [Harun Abda Milesplit Article](#)
- Obsa Ali podcast: https://open.spotify.com/episode/2axi39hdRkaiSw9RzKQ5yV?si=EaTO_v1RQWqZJDe9es3zw
- Two Black Runners Podcast: Ep.25 || Obsa Ali | Running Through the Challenges of 2020 | UMN Alumni | 2018 NCAA Steeplechase Champ: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-25-obsa-ali-running-through-challenges-2020-umn/id1486031415?i=1000493100207>
- Two Black Runners Podcast: Ep.24 || Save Univ. Minnesota Men's T&F | Hassan Mead, Ben Blankenship, Harun Abda: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-24-save-univ-minnesota-mens-t-f-hassan-mead-ben/id1486031415?i=1000492251320>
- UMN Captain; "If you vote to cut these programs, you fail the state of Minnesota" <https://medium.com/@mollysr23/umn-captain-if-you-vote-to-cut-these-programs-you-fail-the-state-of-minnesota-c923df2c4f22>
- The Athletic - 'Like taking a piece of your soul': The fight to save Gopher men's track https://theathletic.com/2116857/2020/10/06/gopher-track-and-field-cuts-mark-coyle-john-simons-khalid-hussein/?source=emp_shared_article
- The Dismal Fate of College Athletics: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-dismal-fate-of-college-athletics-with-the-hoeft-family/id1552783739?i=1000516996471>
- Some colleges axing "secondary sports" like gymnastics and tennis as pandemic continues: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/college-sports-cuts-gymnastics-swimming-pandemic-60-minutes-2020-12-06/>
- Stanford Announces the Continuation of 11 Varsity Athletics Teams: <https://gostanford.com/news/2021/5/18/stanford-announces-the-continuation-of-11-varsity-athletics-teams.aspx>
- Clemson to reinstate men's track teams, add female sport following Title IX investigation: <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/2021/04/22/clemson-university-reinstates-men-track-field-cross-country-teams/7335329002/>
- Brown University Reinstates the Men's Varsity Track, Field, and Cross-Country Teams <https://www.runnersworld.com/news/a32823114/brown-university-reinstates-mens-varsity-track-field-cross-country-teams/>
- William & Mary reinstates all eliminated sports following two-month saga: <https://www.pilotonline.com/sports/college/william-mary/vp-sp-william-and-mary-sports-reinstated-20201105-l4synbjpszg55aiobrp27t44-story.html>