Dear Colleagues,

Within the next few weeks, we expect to receive the Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Service's decision about who will be eligible to vote on union representation by Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The primary outstanding issue is whether 10 Professional and Administrative (P&A) classifications currently in Unit 11 should be included with the Twin Cities Faculty (Unit 8). This decision may put us on a path to an election as early as this fall. I believe the outcome of that election will shape everything we do together at the University in the future.

This election, therefore, will be a decision with long-term consequences. I urge you to learn more, challenge and debate the relevant issues, engage your colleagues on this issue, and to vote.

For my part, I do not support a faculty union. Labor unions have a proud and important part in our nation's history and have brought great benefits to generations of workers, but I firmly believe our work as faculty members depends fundamentally on our autonomy as individuals executing our three-part mission of teaching, research, and service. That autonomy, and the uniqueness of each college and each field of study, are at odds with unionization.

I come to this conclusion after considering the following questions:

• How would union representation affect our reputation as a top research university since few peer institutions have union representation of their tenured and tenure track faculty? I'm aware of no evidence that a union would enhance our standing in this area.

• How would a union affect our ability to recruit and retain field-shaping researchers and graduate students, and how would it affect innovation and progress on our Twin Cities campus strategic plan moving forward? Again, there's no evidence I can find that indicates a union makes us a more attractive destination for leading researchers. We do have some anecdotal evidence, however, that some recruits would find it negative. Similarly, I see nothing in the union's literature about how it plans to advance our strategic plan; indeed, I can't find any mention of our strategic plan at all.

• How would our governance structure change with union representation, knowing that important questions may need to be sorted out at the bargaining table? Much is unknown on this point except for the certainty that unionization would require changes in this area. If the union is voted in, it is the elected voice for its members on questions regarding terms and conditions of employment.

• What is SEIU’s ability to attract more research funding and advance our agenda at the Minnesota Legislature? There is no question that SEIU wields significant
influence in politics, but it's also true that it has both strong supporters and detractors. It's also worth noting that SEIU - which is a nationwide organization of some 2 million members - is already pursuing a lengthy political agenda and, from known data at this time, it is not obvious or clear where our issues would fit among those priorities.

• Is SEIU equipped to represent your teaching, research, and outreach interests, as well as interests related to merit salary, grievances, retention, promotion, consulting time, or other academic issues? The overwhelming focus of SEIU has not been on research universities and higher education; its ability to support the unique needs of our university's tenured and tenure track faculty is, at best, uncertain.

There are, of course, other questions to be answered prior to a vote, but these are the concerns uppermost in my mind. If the union is selected as the exclusive bargaining representative, everyone in the bargaining unit will be represented by the union and would pay dues or a fair share fee, regardless of how individuals voted. So I encourage you to consider all viewpoints and resources, including academic research, to answer these and other questions and inform your vote.

The following websites are a good place to start:

• University of Minnesota Faculty Election
• UMN Excellence (faculty against union representation)
• Academics United (faculty and P&A in support of union representation)

I will respect and support whatever decision you make on union representation. But it's critical that your vote is well informed because there is a lot at stake for all of us. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Eric W. Kaler
President

This email was sent to Twin Cities campus Unit 8 Faculty, selected Unit 11 P&A, Twin Cities Campus Deans, Vice Presidents, selected HR Leads and OHR Consultants by: Office of the President, 202 Morrill Hall, 100 Church St S.E., Minneapolis, MN, 55455, USA. Read our privacy statement.