

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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October 21, 2010

Board Members  
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To the members of the Board:

Thank you for taking the time to share your views with me.

The University has very deep values that go back to its founding to protect the rights of our faculty, students, and staff to pursue their curiosity. The original decision to postpone the showing of "Troubled Waters: A Mississippi River Story" and the rationale behind that decision could have been handled differently and communicated more clearly by the University. At no point, however, was there a question about the importance of the issues raised in the film or whether such a film should be made and shown. My October 15 public statement, which I have enclosed, further addresses the matters you have raised.

Thank you for your commitment to the mission of the University of Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Robert H. Bruininks  
President

RHB:ew

Encl.



## University of Minnesota statement regarding "Troubled Waters" documentary

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MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL (10/15/2010) —The following is a statement from University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks regarding the "Troubled Waters" documentary. Public documents about the documentary were made available starting today:

"One of the hallmarks of my 40-plus years at the university is a steadfast commitment to academic freedom. This value is the cornerstone of all great American universities. I have defended academic freedom at many levels throughout my career. The Board of Regents Policy on Academic Freedom and Responsibility, amended and strengthened during my administration, and which has been referred to as a model to be emulated by other universities, articulates principles that will not be compromised.

"That is why I am particularly disappointed in the turn of events surrounding the release of the film, *Troubled Waters: A Mississippi River Story*. I regret that the appropriate steps were not taken to ensure that academic and university leaders were convened to resolve any questions about the film and whether it had been subject to the appropriate academic review prior to the initial decision to postpone the Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) broadcast and the premiere event at the Bell Museum.

"Vice President for University Relations Karen Himle also acknowledges that this would have been a stronger course of action:

"After I reviewed the film *Troubled Waters*, at the request of the staff at the Bell Museum, I knew that institutional interests as well as matters of academic freedom were intertwined. While I did consult with deans with academic responsibilities related to the subject matter of the film, my mistake was in not immediately initiating a process that more broadly engaged academic leadership and other university experts to fully evaluate the options and to then make a shared decision as to the best course of action, regardless of the short time before the film was scheduled for a screening at the Bell Museum and to air on TPT. I am sorry for this mistake and I accept responsibility for my decisions and actions in this matter." (Karen Himle)

"Today the U of M has made available to a number of requestors, and in satisfaction of media requests, the internal e-mails related to the release of the film. They will show internal disagreement on the handling of this matter. Susan Weller, director of the Bell Museum, may have said it best, 'We are like a big family; things get messy, but they usually turn out alright.' She is correct.

"The film was premiered at the Bell Museum in two-sold out showings, and broadcast on TPT unchanged and on the originally scheduled dates. Over the past few weeks, we have completed our review of this matter. In short, the University already has strong policy and sound practice that provide that any institutional questions regarding academic freedom should be referred to the Provost as the university's chief academic officer. In this case, that happened only after the film had been postponed. Once it was referred, the questions were addressed, and *Troubled Waters*

was released on the original schedule.

"I am proud that the university is the place where faculty and staff are free to explore great ideas, debate and disagree, and take divergent positions on important issues and questions, all in the pursuit of knowledge and the advancement of learning. The Board of Regents Policy on Academic Freedom and Responsibility is fundamental to furthering that activity. We have reflected on this experience and learned from it."

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