



To: The Stevens Community
From: Nariman Farvardin
Date: September 28, 2017
Subject: Announcement on Naming of the Gianforte Academic Center

Yesterday, the Stevens Board of Trustees deliberated on the matter of the naming of the new academic building. The statement of the Board, appended below, articulates the process undertaken to reach a decision, including the work of the [Committee to Consider the Naming of the Gianforte Academic Center](#); the factors the Board weighed in considering the naming of this building; and the decision the Board reached.

As you will read, the Board offered its full support to modify the name of the building to **The Gianforte Family Academic Center**. This name recognizes the principal legacy of Mr. Gianforte from an institutional perspective (as described in the Board's statement) as a loyal and generous alumnus and successful technology entrepreneur and business executive. Importantly, it also acknowledges the record of accomplishment, contributions, and principal legacy of his wife and business partner Susan Gianforte and parents Dale and Frank Gianforte '58, a respected and engaged Stevens alumnus and executive in the aerospace and real estate development industries. Mr. Gianforte has agreed to this change.

I am extremely pleased that the Board of Trustees and Mr. Gianforte reached this alternative solution, as it demonstrates that both parties have kept the best interests of Stevens—and, in particular, the best interests of our students and the education we deliver to them—in mind in resolving an issue that has caused concern to members our campus. The Gianforte gifts will have a transformational impact for Stevens, providing support for our planned, state-of-the-art academic and research building scheduled to open in Fall 2019. This gift also comes to Stevens without any requirements or restrictions. As a charitable organization, Stevens would never endorse or promote any political, religious, or other position by a donor or otherwise. Stevens' only obligation in accepting this gift is to build the academic center.

This experience has presented a unique learning opportunity for our students and for our University. I am proud of the rigorous process that Stevens has undertaken to research, study, and apply critical analysis and reasoning to deliberate and come to a resolution on this matter. I am also grateful to the many members of the Stevens community who took the time to express their input on this issue, and I am especially grateful to the members of the Committee whose efforts materially assisted the Board.

Further, I want to make a commitment on behalf of the entire administration of the University that Stevens will redouble its efforts to ensure that all members of the community feel that Stevens is a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive environment in which academic freedom, freedom of expression, and civil discourse are not only protected, but encouraged. Stevens remains deeply committed to these values and to perpetuating a diverse and welcoming environment for all persons in which discrimination is not tolerated. In the coming weeks, we will be seeking input from the community on how to expand upon our initiatives and efforts in support of this commitment.

Recent accolades, including our ascent in national rankings, vividly illustrate the incredible progress taking place at Stevens today. With your ongoing, active and collegial participation, we will continue to build a world-class university that provides a launching pad for increasingly impressive outcomes for our students and even greater impact of our faculty. I look forward to working with all members of our community as we come together in the weeks and months ahead to achieve and exceed our goals.

Per aspera ad astra,

Nariman Farvardin
President

Statement of the Board of Trustees Decision on the Naming of The Gianforte Academic Center

September 27, 2017

Background

Since last spring, some members of the Stevens community—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends—have been engaged in discussions concerning the naming of the new academic building at Sixth and Hudson Streets. Alumnus Greg Gianforte '83 and his wife, Susan, through the Gianforte Family Charitable Trust, made their first gift of \$10 million toward this project in September 2012, and a second gift of \$10 million in December 2016, at which time Stevens agreed to name the entire complex the Gianforte Academic Center.

Mr. Gianforte has been an active and engaged alumnus and a successful technology entrepreneur. Through his philanthropic efforts, he has supported many charitable causes including education, faith-based activities, poverty relief, and the arts, among others. His entrepreneurship activities created jobs and contributed to economic vitality in the areas in which his businesses operated.

Some members of the Stevens community and others have expressed opposition to naming the building the Gianforte Academic Center. Criticism has focused on Mr. Gianforte's political positions including those focused on the LGBTQ community, questions about his acceptance of religious beliefs over scientific principles, and his philanthropic support of certain organizations, among other matters. Opposition increased following an incident in May in which Mr. Gianforte was charged with assaulting a reporter.

Given the level of interest in the naming of the new academic center, as well as the strong and

divergent viewpoints of many within the Stevens community, in June 2017, the Board of Trustees appointed a [Committee to Consider the Naming of the Gianforte Academic Center](#), comprised of respected leaders of the Stevens community from all key stakeholder groups—faculty, students, alumni, Trustees and staff, and chaired by alumnus and Trustee J. Scott Swensen '74.

The Work of the Committee

The Committee proactively reached out via email each week over a five-week period to approximately 30,000 individuals. It received and analyzed input from all stakeholder groups, including: comments submitted to a public web site from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and others; emails, social media, and petitions; and statements by the Faculty Senate and the Torch Alliance. Approximately two to three percent of each stakeholder group provided input. The Committee also met with Greg and Susan Gianforte to discuss their views on Stevens and the academic center. The Committee also examined relevant Stevens policies and those of other universities; engaged in fact-finding on the public and business record of Mr. Gianforte as well as his philanthropic history; and deliberated on a number of complex issues, all in order to develop a framework for the Board's consideration.

Key findings of the Committee's work are summarized below:

- Mr. Gianforte's philanthropy has supported many organizations, both public and private, with a record of supporting higher education, low-income children, veterans, and the arts, among other activities. In addition, his philanthropy supports organizations whose missions are Christian-based and socially conservative. The Gianforte Family Foundation was founded in 2004 and, at the end of 2015, the Foundation had assets of more than \$156 million. Of the \$51 million in grants awarded as of 2016, less than four percent of the Foundation's giving (\$1.9 million) has been directed to organizations mentioned in a petition opposing naming the academic center after Mr. Gianforte. Some of these organizations include, among their other efforts, pro-life advocacy and support for heterosexual marriage. The positions of these organizations work against abortion rights and equal rights for the LGBTQ community—including marriage rights for gay and lesbian Americans. While these positions are within the range of views held by a significant number of people in the United States, the Committee noted that many people believe that these issues are the civil rights issues of our era. Mr. Gianforte's status as a sitting Congressman results in his positions being public and therefore subject to criticism.
- Mr. Gianforte has stated to the Committee that he is strongly opposed to discrimination based on any personal characteristic whatsoever, and that all of his companies were run as meritocracies. He noted that the Supreme Court has ruled that any two people may marry and that this is the law in the United States. He also stated that he is a scientist and an engineer, that he believes in the existence of God, and he does not see a conflict.
- The Gianforte gift imposed no requirements or restrictions on Stevens' programs or operations. The only agreement Stevens has made in accepting these gifts is to devote the funds to the building of an academic center and to provide naming recognition.
- The policies and experiences of other universities that have grappled with renaming issues on their campuses were instructive to the Committee. The Committee recommended that the Board focus on the concept of "principal legacy" in examining

the named person's reputation. The Committee adapted this concept from a recent report by another respected university and interpreted the concept as one which calls for the university to examine the overall, long-lasting impact of the named person during his or her lifetime and thereafter. While each person is multi-faceted and may be viewed from many vantage points, the Committee suggested that the primary focus of analysis should be to review the principal legacy of a person from the institutional perspective of Stevens.

The Committee recommended that the Board review the totality of the circumstances involved with any renaming decision. In addition to any other factors which may be relevant at the time, the Committee recommended a balanced analysis using the following decision framework:

1. embracing the principles of sound governance which includes transparent and consultative input from key groups;
2. adhering to relevant Stevens policies and the core values and beliefs that underlie them;
3. analyzing the alignment or conflict with the University's strategic plan;
4. examining the donor's overall public record, including the means by which he or she accumulated wealth; and,
5. considering the impact on the University's reputation and well-being, over the long term.

The Board of Trustees Decision

The Board of Trustees reviewed materials and analysis of the Committee, considered input from the President's Cabinet and the President's Leadership Council, and met on September 27, 2017 to deliberate on this matter. In light of all the facts and input considered by the Board and following extensive deliberations, the Board has given its full support to changing the name of the academic center from the Gianforte Academic Center to The Gianforte Family Academic Center. This name acknowledges the principal legacy of Mr. Gianforte from an institutional perspective as a successful technology entrepreneur and loyal and generous alumnus. It also recognizes others in the Gianforte family including: Susan Gianforte, a Cornell engineer with an MBA from New York University, who has worked in partnership with Mr. Gianforte on RightNow Technologies and Brightwork Development Inc.; and Mr. Gianforte's mother Dale and father Frank Gianforte '58, a mechanical engineer who worked in the aerospace industry before launching a career in real estate development and management. Mr. Frank Gianforte was a gracious and dedicated alumnus of Stevens who remained engaged with his alma mater throughout his lifetime. Mr. and Mrs. Gianforte have agreed to this change in the name of the academic center.

Key aspects of the Board's deliberations supporting this decision include:

- The Board will always insist that the University uphold its values including those of academic freedom and nondiscrimination. By donating to the University, donors endorse the mission of the University. The University does not endorse any political, religious or other personal statement of a donor by accepting a gift or using the name of a person. In this case, the Gianfortes have asked nothing of the University other than that their funds be used to construct the academic center. Their gifts come with no restrictions or requirements which call into question Stevens' policies or values.
- As a tax-exempt, charitable organization, Stevens relies on philanthropic support from

numerous individuals and organizations including those holding a range of religious, political and social beliefs, and who may lend their support to various philanthropic organizations. Stevens is and will remain neutral on religious and partisan political issues, and the University reaffirms its commitment to be a community in which diverse views are explored and valued.

- The Board believes that Mr. Gianforte's assault on a reporter was wrong. As we are a country of laws, Stevens has policies which govern conduct on its campus, and assault on another person cannot be excused. In addition, this assault was on a member of the press which implicates another set of important values—the freedom and independence of the press. These laws and policies are not absolute and they operate hand in hand with concepts of punishment and rehabilitation. We note that Mr. Gianforte has taken responsibility for his actions and apologized, his apology was accepted by the reporter and accompanied by a statement on the importance of the free press and a donation to an organization devoted to those efforts. He has also been sentenced by a court in Montana. In this instance, the Board believes that, given the steps described above, this recent incident does not define Mr. Gianforte's character or principal legacy.
- The Board considered the overall record and contributions of Mr. Gianforte in assessing his principal legacy: as a student leader who later served on the Board of Trustees as a young alumnus and who has been continuously engaged with his alma mater in substantive ways, including through philanthropy, since his graduation in 1983; who has exemplified the promise of a Stevens education through his career success as a technology innovator and entrepreneur, creating opportunity and jobs for many hundreds of employees and contributing to the economic growth and vitality of the regions in which his companies operated; as a generous philanthropist who has invested a significant portion of the proceeds of the sale of his company in a charitable foundation which has supported causes including creating entrepreneurship programs, promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and advancing education. These accomplishments illustrate the ideals to which many Stevens alumni aspire.
- The Board noted that the goals and values articulated in Stevens' Strategic Plan are designed to enhance the reputation and value of a Stevens education. As articulated above, the principal legacy of the Gianforte family is consistent with the goals of the Strategic Plan. Furthermore, a generous gift toward the University's first new academic building in more than a decade significantly advances progress toward Stevens' Strategic Plan, providing state-of-the-art research space for faculty in areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and cybersecurity as well as healthcare and the life sciences. It will also support urgently needed modern classroom space to accommodate the University's growing undergraduate and graduate enrollment, as well as faculty offices. Stevens' students and faculty will be the primary beneficiaries of this facility.

Moving Forward

The Board has made a decision that it believes is in the best interests of the University and all its constituencies, in particular our students. The Board asks all members of the Stevens community to respect this decision and to work together to continue to make Stevens an even better university. We have achieved unprecedented success over the last six years due to the focus, dedication, and aggressive pursuit of ambitious goals by every member of the Stevens community.

In addition, to further support the Board's commitment to diversity and inclusion on campus, the Board has directed the President to work with the Cabinet and faculty and student groups to review Stevens' existing programs and resources that support diverse populations and perspectives and recommend enhancements and new initiatives. Our hope is that these efforts will result in an expansion of existing Stevens programs, underscore Stevens' deep commitment to diversity and nondiscrimination, and foster civil dialogue on campus among people with varying perspectives.

The Board wishes to thank the Committee as well as the entire Stevens community for their time, their input, and their insights in this matter. The Board particularly wishes to thank each member of the Committee for the rigorous and thoughtful approach that guided the group's work. Stevens will benefit significantly from the Committee's efforts, and we owe the members our gratitude for their selfless dedication to this task. This process and, in particular, the work of the Committee, are exemplars for an honest and thoughtful exchange of ideas, interests, and concerns by caring and reasonable people with differing perspectives.

The Board encourages our community to consider this approach as we implement the Board's decision and take action to unite in the coming weeks and months ahead. Stevens has the opportunity to set an example as a campus dealing with controversy in a balanced and respectful manner.

The Board of Trustees
Stevens Institute of Technology

This message has been approved by the leadership of the sender's division.