Contact: Rachel Boon

REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DEGREE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Science degree to Mr. William Frank Decker at Spring 2024 commencement.

Details of Mr. Decker's Accomplishments: It is a privilege to nominate William (Bill) Frank Decker for the Honorary Doctor of Science degree, acknowledging his contributions to national technology policy, computer networking and his extraordinary lifetime of service to the University of Iowa.

Decker's primary contribution to technology policy came between 1998 and 2000 while serving as Program Director for Advanced Networking Infrastructure within the National Science Foundation's Computer and Information Science and Engineering Directorate (NSF CISE). While there, he was responsible for leading a $43M federal grant portfolio intended to stimulate research and development of high performance infrastructure for the next generation Internet. The Internet had just transitioned from federal control to its current self-governing state, with rapidly increasing levels of commercial activity crowding out the kind of research activity that its predecessor networks had engendered. Decker's leadership drove both the Next Generation Internet (NGI) and the Internet2 initiatives, which supported the development of improved networking technology and, in the case of Internet2, ensured the availability of high-performance network services for institutions like universities. Indeed, the Internet2 consortium still exists today, providing universities, cultural organizations and the government with high-performance secure network services to advance research and education. Looking back, Decker's success was all the more remarkable given the fast moving, highly technical nature of the field and the fact that, unlike nearly every other NSF CISE program director, Decker never earned his PhD.

A native Iowan, Decker matriculated at the University of Iowa in 1962 and received his BA in mathematics in 1966. When the Board of Regents approved the formation of a Computer Science Department effective in Fall of 1966, Decker became one of its very first graduate students. He earned his MS in computer science in 1968 while working as an applications programmer for the Institute for Child Behavior and Development. He immediately started work on his PhD while taking a position as the systems administrator at the University Computer Center, later renamed the Weeg Center, beginning a professional relationship that was to last for the next 10 years.

In 1978, Decker left the Weeg Center to rejoin the Computer Science Department as a research scientist, responsible for computing services in the brand new CS Research Laboratory (CSRL). In this environment, and with a young family to support, time for his own research was scarce, and Decker reluctantly left the PhD program in 1980. Instead, he focused his considerable energies on managing the growing team of system administrators and computer specialists that CSRL had become, while also taking on research computing support for both the Statistics and Mathematics Departments. An excellent teacher, Decker concurrently fulfilled a second role as an instructor, teaching computer science courses in networking, operating systems, and computer organization, all while actively engaged in the department's curriculum design and development efforts. He continued in this capacity until 1993, including a brief stint as acting chair of the CS Department in late 1987.

In 1993, Decker was appointed Associate Vice President for Research and Director of what soon became Information Technology Services (ITS), the consolidation of four existing service units (the Weeg Center, the Administrative Data Processing Center, the Data Networking Center, and the Office of Telecommunications). Under his leadership, and with a staff of over 200 employees, ITS was responsible for all aspects of academic and administrative computing services as well as voice and data communication for the entire University campus. As CIO and director of ITS, Bill achieved national visibility as a leader in Internet infrastructure development.

After his two-year stint at NSF, Decker returned to Iowa City in 2000 and resumed his duties as Associate Vice President for Research, managing regulatory compliance, technology transfer, sponsored programs, research infrastructure, and leading several important study groups, including the original effort to create an Informatics program at Iowa. In 2003, when then-Vice President for Research David Skorton became President of the University, Decker became the Interim Vice President for Research, a position he held until his retirement in 2005.

Decker's career achievements are characterized by his dogged and visionary service to UI. Of his time at NSF, Decker once humbly remarked that, mostly, he had appreciated the opportunity to serve his country, having not been called to do so in Vietnam as so many others of his era had done. Decker's influence on national computing policy was instrumental in establishing and maintaining the level of networking services that are so critical to higher education, just as his leadership and dedication to this institution's research computing infrastructure eventually brought forth Helium, Neon, and now Argon, the current generation supercomputing cluster. Throughout his career, Decker was the consummate Hawkeye, dedicated to the University in work and in play. An honorary doctorate degree would be a very fitting acknowledgement of his many contributions.