

State of the University Address

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The last time I formally addressed you was on September 4, 2008. What has happened since, both within the university and in the larger community, is breathtaking. Most pervasive, perhaps, has been the precipitous decline in our nation's economy which has negatively impacted us individually and collectively. While thus far Nebraska has avoided the scale of disruption in other states, we cannot be certain that this will continue. In the national news, we have witnessed the change of administrations, the transitioning of the war in Iraq to the war in Afghanistan, a series of stimulus expenditures in dollar amounts too large to fully appreciate, and the decline or disappearance of some of the major business and financial icons of the American economy. Within higher education nationally, both public and private institutions are adjusting to significant declines in revenue while at the same time being asked to increase the percentage of our population with college degrees as a national priority. We are also seeing a large increase in funding for scientific research as part of the attempt to preserve America's competitive posture in the world. I should not need to further convince you that we are living in extraordinary times and such times always present both perils and opportunities.

At UNL, much has also happened – more than any speech or special edition of the Scarlet can fully recount. Here, quickly, are some headlines just to illustrate the scope of our work and the upward trajectory of our accomplishments.

This semester our entering students will be the first to participate in the Achievement Centered Education program of general education. Faculty and staff from across the university have constructed over 400 courses that are ACE certified to meet one or more of the 10 student learning outcomes we now expect our students to demonstrate. This program is viewed nationally as a remarkable achievement and reaffirms our leadership in undergraduate education.

Our graduation rates and retention rates are up; our enrollment continues to increase. Consider that this year we reached our goal of 24,000 students three years earlier than we predicted. Consider this year's entering class is the most academically gifted in history and for the eighth year in a row has a higher ACT than its predecessor. Consider this year's entering class is the most diverse in history with higher numbers of both students of color and international students.

A new student information system will come online this fall for students enrolling in the university for 2010. This has required a massive effort by many of our staff across the campus and throughout the university system.

We grew our federal research enterprise by 13 percent to \$122 million, \$84 million of which was federal support. This is a new record for both federal support and overall support. And significantly, these dollars were generated by a cross-section of disciplines.

Through Cooperative Extension the university contributed to the wellbeing of farmers and ranchers across Nebraska. Our irrigation demonstration project is lowering water use, energy costs, and carbon emissions. Our 4-H program, with the highest participation per capita of any state, has achieved national recognition for its Robotics, GPS/GIS, and Entrepreneurship curricula.

The Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction took the lead in forging relationships among faculty to address the energy efficiency and safety of buildings. As a country we have more opportunities to save energy by making buildings more efficient than we do by making transportation more efficient.

Important new research facilities, including the new Physics Building and the renovated Whittier building and Keim Hall will help address some of our critical research space needs.

The University of Nebraska system's work in developing the Holland Computing Center, combining the resources in both Lincoln and Omaha, gives our faculty access to large scale computing resources.

Notwithstanding the passage of Initiative 424, which wrote a ban on racial, ethnic and gender preferences into the Nebraska state constitution, we continue to make progress to diversity our campus. The new Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center will open in January and provide important space for pursuing our diversity objectives. The National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant that seeks to provide more faculty diversity in our science, engineering,

and mathematics departments is up and running and showing success. And we are implementing a university-wide program to adopt best practices to recruit and retain a diverse faculty.

Our campus has become more family friendly with the opening of our state-of-the-art childcare facility at Whittier, the implementation of our new lactation policy that will provide private spaces for nursing mothers, and the alignment in 2011 of our spring break with that of the Lincoln Public Schools.

We are increasingly a global university. We have major partnerships in China, India and in other countries around the world that provide us with research and enrollment opportunities as well as welcoming locations for our faculty and students. Student participation in Study Abroad is increasing and the University of Nebraska Foundation Grants Committee awarded us a major grant for this coming year to engage more faculty in leading study abroad programs. The International Program Advisory Council has developed a set of proposed benchmarks and strategies to guide our international efforts. In May, we held the first global Future of Water for Food conference for scholars from around the world. A University of Nebraska system-wide Global Water for Food Institute has already attracted attention internationally and will enhance our ability to address water issues in Nebraska and on a global scale. And we have recently launched our new "Put Yourself on the Map" campaign to vividly depict the global reach of our programs and our alumni.

The new Chancellor's Commission on Sustainability is seeking ways in which we can create a softer footprint on the earth's resources.

Our new Alumni Association structure appears to be generating creative ways in which alumni can reengage with the university. Alumni involvement with us can lead to opportunities unavailable otherwise.

For the first time we have a Chief Information Officer, Mark Askren from the University of California at Irvine, whose responsibilities are to insure that our information technology resources are directed toward assisting the university achieve its primary missions of teaching, research, and outreach. We welcome Mark and his family to Lincoln.

Consultants are close to providing us with the plans we need to initiate the development of Innovation Campus – an initiative that could transform the entire university in many ways. More about this in a few moments.

We will celebrate at least two significant anniversaries this year: the 20th Anniversary season for the Lied Center for Performing Arts and the centennial celebration for the College of Engineering.

Not insignificantly, our athletic teams are beginning to again match the competitiveness of our academic programs.

And most significantly of all, each graduate that walks across the stage at Devaney and accepts his or her diploma represents a major accomplishment of this university. A few may think they "made it on their own" but I suspect they were all impacted by the richness and vitality of the university and more directly by a nudge here or an act of kindness there from a member of the faculty or staff.

As an institutional matter I find it difficult to identify particular individuals to thank for their contributions because what we are accomplishing takes so many efforts, large and small, visible and invisible and to mention one runs the risk of omitting others. So I hope you will forgive me taking a moment to personally thank the vice chancellors and senior staff and deans with whom I've worked directly and who rarely receive the recognition they deserve. Their unselfish leadership and commitment to the success of the university is truly remarkable.

We salute the contributions of Will Norton, Cynthia Milligan, and Steve Willborn, who have left their deanships but have also left some lasting marks on the university. And I want to particularly acknowledge and thank John Owens who this week announced his retirement as Vice Chancellor and Vice President of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the end of this fiscal year. John has been a strong advocate for agriculture, a tireless contributor to the university, and a personal friend. We are fortunate that he and Virginia will remain at the university.

I am blessed to work with such people.

We are all blessed to be at an institution that each year receives a transfusion of new talent and energy from our student body. To remind us of our principal mission I am pleased to give you a short break from my voice and introduce the voices of Roctavo. Founded in 2006, Rocktavo was acclaimed at the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella at Lincoln Center in New York City as the best all male ensemble of 2007. The group is composed of undergraduate vocal music majors and coached by Senior Lecturer Alisa Belflower.

Their new, self-titled CD was released last spring and is available now in the Nebraska Bookstore. Here with a new take on a Nebraska standard, please welcome ROCKTAVO.

Many of you know that President Milliken conducted my 5-year performance review by asking a consultant to interview a broad group of individuals with whom I interact, both within and outside the university, including faculty and students. I have received a report of what was said in those interviews (relax, no comment was attributed to an individual). While there were positive comments, one has a tendency to remember the comments that were otherwise. Here are the ones I am particularly fond of:

His staff would follow him anywhere – but only out of morbid curiosity.

He works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat.

He doesn't have ulcers, but he's a carrier.

He would argue with a signpost.

He brings a lot of joy whenever he leaves a room.

If you see two people talking and one looks bored – he's the other one.

A photographic memory with the lens cover glued on.

Some drink from the fountain of knowledge; he only gargled.

With these comments in mind I vowed to do better. So I went to Barnes and Noble and asked the clerk for the self-help section. She said: "If I told you it would defeat the purpose."

Seriously, there were comments expressed in the review that I was not taking full advantage of the knowledge and creativity of the faculty in pursuing the university agenda. I take this concern seriously, and I will outline today some proposals for further engaging faculty and others in plotting our future course.

In 2000 this university coalesced around a report titled "A 2020 Vision: The Future of Research and Graduate Education." Other reports built upon that vision by focusing on undergraduate education, within the context of a public land-grant university. The 2020 report concluded that the university had not achieved its full potential and that our aspiration should include becoming "one of the nation's great public research universities by the time we celebrate our sesquicentennial anniversary in 2019." We are now half way to 2020.

One thing is clear -- we have made progress by any measurable criteria and by our own perception of ourselves. We have increased enrollment while also increasing the academic credentials, the graduation rates, the retention rates, and the geographic and racial diversity of our students. We adopted a 21st Century, nationally acclaimed general education program. Similarly, our research funding continues to set records, our faculty appear increasingly in top-tier journals, and the stature of our arts and humanities has never been higher. We are known in places around the world. We should be proud, but not satisfied, with our progress.

We should be thankful that the financial challenges we face pale in comparison to many of our peers. Yet, we face our own uncertainties about funding, uncertainties that are not within our power to control. While I remain grateful for the support we have received from Nebraska and optimistic that the Legislature and Governor will do the best they can on our behalf, the economic downturn in the country at large seems more than transitory, and preexisting structural issues within Nebraska narrow the possibility for significantly enhanced revenues. Our success thus far has been because we have been willing to focus on the things we can control. We have not, and should not, allow budget uncertainties to turn off the light at the end of the 2020 tunnel. Against the background of uncertain funding from our traditional sources, the question thus presented is how do we best position the university to increase our prospects for continued progress toward our 2020 Vision.

I am proposing two initiatives that seek to draw on the creative talent of this faculty and others to explore whether there are opportunities we have not yet exploited. First, we must carefully examine the traditional ways in which we have performed our missions in search of alternative methods, structures, or policies that will permit us to continue to make progress with the resources we command. I propose to appoint a Task Force to explore innovative options for the university community to consider.

I want this Task Force to focus on how we conduct our core missions of teaching, research, and outreach. Are there sensible alternatives available to us in how we teach, how we structure and organize research, and how we serve Nebraska that can result in greater benefits than the costs they incur? Continued prioritization has to be a part of the equation. But, are there structural or management changes that could also produce overall benefits to the university? Are there new processes or policies that could create additional incentives to reduce costs, both to the university and to the Nebraskans we serve?

Some universities have moved to responsibility- or performance-based budgeting models that generate incentives for each unit to seek savings in existing programs that can then be used to elevate other activities. I assure you I am aware that some of these models have produced significant negative unintended consequences and yet others appear to have been useful. Are there resources now deployed in multiple units that might be better coordinated? What is the best overall allocation of faculty positions between tenure track appointments, professors of practice, adjuncts and instructors, graduate teaching assistants? How might new technology be enlisted to reduce costs? Is the traditional four-year path to graduation, which has now become for many the 5- or 6-year path to graduation, the right model for all students or for the resources we have available? Are cooperative extension and our other outreach activities positioned to best serve Nebraskans and do they adequately engage the resources of the entire university? In short, are there ways we might do things differently to make us more nimble, more ready to meet the challenges of the future while making the best use of our current resources?

These are some, but certainly not all, of the questions I hope a task force might address. Like the task force that drafted the original 2020 Vision, I hope to engage students, alumni, constituents, and parents, as well as faculty, in pursuing this task. I would propose to name this task force: Pursuing a 2020 Vision: the Task Force on Academic Efficiency.

The second initiative involves the need to explore ways to increase revenue. This is largely a strange world for many of us. Throughout the university we are teaching students the elements of entrepreneurship – of taking risks in order to provide a new product or service to the public at large. I propose that we examine whether there are ways we can, as a university, become more entrepreneurial.

There are many examples across the university of entrepreneurial activity. Our primary products are education, research, and outreach. Some departments have developed distance education programs that bring in revenue. The university system is developing both the incentives and the infrastructure that should make this a fertile area for development and we intend to work hard at exploiting this new opportunity. In research we have worked hard to restructure our technology transfer office to position us to be of better service to faculty whose inventions have market value. A few academic units have looked at whether some initial investments in faculty could produce more revenue through additional enrollment. Do we have revenue opportunities internationally? Are we properly charging for the services we provide? While we

need to be true to our academic values and to our position as a state-supported university that should largely avoid competition with the private sector, we would also be remiss if we didn't take a hard look at how we might generate additional revenue. This could be important to us fulfilling our larger ambitions.

Accordingly, I am proposing a second task force to consider whether there are actions we could take to enhance revenue other than through tuition increases, either by ourselves or in collaboration with others. Again, this task force should be comprised of both university and external community members and should tap the energy and creativity of our faculty and staff. I would propose to name this task force: Pursuing the 2020 Vision: The Task Force on Academic Entrepreneurship.

My hope is that these task forces outline a series of alternatives that would serve our purposes, even if they have concerns about their viability or acceptability. We need a menu of options to consider. The task forces can then make their recommendations of which alternatives from the menu we should pursue. I intend to provide the task forces with administrative support and to tap some national resources to discover what other universities are doing or considering in these areas.

I remain an optimist about our future and our ability to achieve our 2020 Vision. At the same time I do not think it a wise course to have our future depend entirely on forces beyond our control. I know of no single step that would be more important than if we could find ways to do more with what we have and to earn more from what we do.

Let me now focus on the extraordinary opportunity we have to develop an Innovation Campus at State Fair Park. Innovation Campus is far more than a piece of land—it is an idea, an attitude, a catalyst that should alter the DNA of the entire University. This project is not only consistent with our 2020 vision, but is the natural culmination of that vision.

The idea is simple. A research university is key to progress and competitiveness in the 21st century. Our responsibility is clear: to be the source of talent and ideas that help address the challenges of the state and nation. The attitude is humble: to achieve these objectives as well as our own internal university aspirations, we will need partners. The collaborations that have been forged among our faculty to produce such an extraordinary growth in research must now be expanded with the private sector. Innovation Campus is

premised on the importance of public-private partnerships – the expectation that the purpose of research is not only to satisfy our academic curiosity about the world but also to improve the human condition. Innovation Campus is the modern embodiment of the land-grant mission.

Through both its geography and its activities, Innovation Campus has the potential to transform the university. It is stunning how this piece of land connects in a physical way what we have come to call the city and east campuses. This is an opportunity to bring us together as a university. We should begin to think of Innovation Campus not as a third campus but as an opportunity to create an attitude and operating principle that we are a single university, one animated by our missions of teaching, research, and outreach, one driven by the opportunities of innovation and public-private partnerships, and one unified by our common aspiration to be a great public, land-grant, research university.

Innovation Campus will be open to opportunities presented from the full breadth of the university. However, the consultants developing a master plan and business plan for Innovation Campus have confirmed what we suspected – that life sciences research, primarily focused on food, energy, and water, is likely to be one of our key strengths in attracting private sector interest. Similarly a team of external academic reviewers who examined our efforts in molecular biology identified existing strengths but urged us to bring greater coordination to our programs across the university.

There is a common understanding of the importance of life sciences for the university, for the state of Nebraska, and for the world. Global food security, in which Nebraska can play an important role, is emerging as one of the critical issues of the 21st Century. We have opportunities to enhance the full range of the life sciences, including areas that impact environmental sustainability and human health, and we would fail in our responsibilities if we were not a world-class resource for ideas and talent needed for the future of food production. While we have made progress over the last few years, I believe we must now reach for a new level of coordination and collaboration among our faculty which is necessary to reach our 2020 Vision. In constructing a strategy I consulted with senior university leadership, a cross-section of life science faculty, and a committee of external friends of the University. One of those friends was Senator Ron Raikes who tragically died in a farm accident last weekend. Ron was passionate about the importance of the role of modern science for the future of agriculture and was highly engaged in our discussion. We lost not only a friend but an opportunity to draw on his wisdom and experience. We will all be poorer as a result.

Any proposal for change inevitably causes suspicion and concern. My past description of the interrelationship of the three missions of the university may have shortchanged, in its rhetoric, the importance of our extension and outreach activities. I have often reiterated that the University's two highest priorities are undergraduate education and research. This might appear to leave out faculty whose primary mission is in cooperative extension and the constituents who depend on their services. Yet I am completely committed to the role of a land-grant university to extend our teaching and research to the citizens of Nebraska. Serving the people in Nebraska through our teaching and research and focusing our teaching and our research to respond to the challenges facing our state benefactors is our highest calling. Those faculty and staff who directly engage with the people of Nebraska on their farms, at their businesses, and in their homes are critically important to our success. No change that we might propose for the life sciences should detract from our extension and outreach mission. No benefit that may result from our innovations will be complete if we cannot translate them into contributions that better the lives of those we serve.

Before I describe my proposals for the life sciences, let me emphasize what I do not propose. I do not propose altering the basic organizational structure of the university. The roles of the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Engineering, and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources -- our primary life science units -- or the academic units contained in each, will not be diminished in any way. The unique strength of the College of Arts and Sciences is to insure that the rigorous logic of scientific exploration is tempered by the realities of the human condition. The unique role of the College of Engineering is to move innovations into operation. The unique strength of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is to assure that agriculture will be accorded a strong priority in our efforts. The proposals I will make are designed to benefit all of the life sciences and will permit us to marshal the full range of talent that will be necessary to serve our students, our clientele, and the world at large. This is particularly important for the Institute as it works to create and translate the science that will determine the future success of agricultural production.

I propose the following initiatives to help us enhance and energize our life science programs. They all address the need to bring a higher degree of collaboration, consultation, and coordination among those in the life science community.

- 1. I propose we create a Faculty of the Life Sciences in order to fashion a more coordinated faculty perspective to the life sciences. This proposal would*

have no impact on a faculty member's status within the disciplinary based departments but would serve as a forum for conversations across discipline lines – to share research interests, to learn about new life science faculty and the work of those recently tenured and promoted, to facilitate mutual assistance in recruiting life science faculty, to provide more active collaborations for speakers and colloquia, and to promote ideas for research or hiring initiatives that could draw on the resources of more than one discipline -- in essence, to draw on the expertise and engagement of the faculty who want to participate to move the life science efforts of the university forward.

2. I propose a new effort to establish a core life science curriculum with a process modeled after the one that developed our new general education program – one that identifies the learning outcomes expected of every life science major and constructs an assessment mechanism to measure our success. Senior Vice Chancellor Couture and Vice Chancellor Owens have already begun this initiative, which will fully involve faculty who are invested in its success.

3. I propose we develop a system of faculty evaluation for promotion and tenure that will be more uniform across our campuses. Both of the Vice Chancellors are also working to make this a reality.

4. I propose a process to identify, inventory, and designate core facilities and instrumentation for life science research. Core facilities are efficient, are designed to enhance collaboration, and will be one of the key amenities available to private sector companies thinking about locating on Innovation Campus.

5. I propose to establish a more comprehensive process for identifying and evaluating potential areas of excellence for the life science, with particular, but not exclusive, attention to their impact on agriculture. I realize that in science, the ultimate application of basic research is uncertain, which is why we need a comprehensive life science research program. We have some established areas of excellence, such as the Center for Plant Science Innovation, the Nebraska Virology Center, and the Redox Biology Center. We have emerging areas in renewable energy, in gut science, and in nutraceuticals. We are pursuing new initiatives that could have a global impact in food science and in the use of water for food production. We should reevaluate our efforts in public policy as it impacts agriculture. The farmers and ranchers I talk to worry as much about farm policy as farm economics. With two departments of economics, a law school, a business school, a public policy center, and the diverse resources

within the Institute, we may already have considerable strength if it can be coordinated into a major initiative.

6. I propose the establishment of a procedure to bring more coordination to the hiring of life science faculty. With the interdisciplinary nature of modern life science research, we run the risk of multiple departments hiring the same expertise while important gaps in expertise remain unfilled.

I have provided more detail for each of these proposals in a white paper that will be on my Web site soon for your review. Let me emphasize these are proposals, not decrees. While I have tried to consult with many who have special expertise and experience, I invite the comments of others. My sole objective in any of these is to position the university to enhance our activities in the life sciences. While these steps may not be the perfect solution for the perfect world, I hope they will be received as a reasonable way to begin, with the understanding that working out the devilish details will be the hard work that lies ahead.

My focus today on the life sciences does not imply that this is the only opportunity we face, or the only area that will receive attention. No one appreciates more than I, that the most important driver of success for any effort is the talent and leadership of the faculty. As I contemplate our growing reputation and as I look across the landscape of higher education, I wonder whether we are positioned to attract to Lincoln additional faculty who could contribute immediately to our success. In addition to our normal processes to build our faculty with young and promising faculty, I will explore with the Vice Chancellors the potential for engaging in some targeted searches for established faculty in identified priority areas across the disciplines.

On a daily basis, I see both significant accomplishments and intriguing prospects for the arts, for the humanities, for the social sciences, for the physical sciences and for our professional schools. All elements of the university are important if we are to reach our vision of 2020 by 2020. Before I invite you to enjoy the picnic, I want to reiterate how fortunate I feel to serve as Chancellor in this extraordinary time in the history of the university. I am grateful for the support you have given me, but more grateful for and proud of the contributions each of you have made to our success.

*Someone, far wiser than I, told me that there were **three** rules to being a successful Chancellor.*

First, keep your speeches short.

Second, never tell them everything you know.