

**North Dakota State University
State of the University Address
Dr. Allan G. Fischer, President
September 10, 1998**

Thirty years ago I came to this campus as a young assistant professor of biochemistry. My wife, Naomi, and I had our hopes and dreams, but I never thought that someday I would be standing here in front of my colleagues delivering a state of the university address, or that I would find my desk in the president's office. Before I begin my formal comments, let me say what an honor it is to serve as your interim president. The feelings that I have for North Dakota State University are not of the buildings or other physical manifestations of the campus, but are for its people—the people who answer the phones, who shovel the sidewalks, who serve the meals and stay late to answer students' questions. The people who teach and conduct research. For 30 years I have been a proud member of this academic community...proud because of my associations with you.

A long string of events has led to my being here in this capacity today. Dr. Plough's decision to accept the presidency of Assumption College was disappointing, but knowing Tom, you can be assured he agonized over his decision. That decision was in no small part made more difficult because of the tremendous outpouring of support from NDSU's student body. Tom and Monty were deeply moved by the affection and the support from across campus and the state. Last week, I spoke with Tom on the telephone. He said he is keeping busy in his new job and Monty is keeping busy unpacking boxes. Naomi and I know how that feels. He told me he feels they made the right decision. I wish them the best in their new venture and will continue to keep in touch with them by telephone as personal friends and advocates for this institution.

There was a time a few months back when, after reading all the headlines about the budget and other matters, I thought things might look bleak for higher education. But I've made a choice not to think that way. And I ask you to consider making that choice as well. First, no one ever said a career in higher education would be without a challenge. And, yes, we have our challenges. But we also have more than 100 years of service to the citizens of this region and we have good people with sound ideas and that will allow us to maintain that service in the future.

I choose to believe the future is positive, that our challenges will be met and that's what I want to talk with you about today.

First, I want to tell you what Chancellor Larry Isaak and I agreed would be my priorities for this coming year. Then I want to share some thoughts on recruitment and retention, and give you a preview of the university's new advertising plan.

My first priority this year is to be internal, to provide a leadership style that provides an atmosphere of trust and cooperation among faculty, staff and students. I don't have a secret recipe for this one. But after 30 years here, you know who I am and you know you can talk to me about your concerns. Some people talk about their desire to maintain an open door policy. It's a great idea but, in all honesty, it's easier said than done. Please understand that if I am not available to talk with you at a given moment, you can send me a letter, leave a message or send me an e-

mail. I will respond. I do want to hear from you. As a dean, I met with students and parents often. I told them that I would respond to their questions within 24 hours if I was in town and I give you the same promise.

But creating an atmosphere of trust and cooperation is something, ultimately, I can only encourage. Every faculty, staff and student member of the NDSU academic community has a role in this task. Collegiality is a word I like. It is defined, in part, as trust among colleagues. That is what we are and that is how we need to continue to approach each other. We need to do all we can to encourage our collegiality. It was a pleasure to see so many of you at the opening football game. It was an opportunity to enjoy some high quality entertainment and to remind ourselves of the common bond we share as members of this academic community. Attendance at athletics events is just one way we forge our common bond. The coming months will also be filled with drama, music, readings, lectures and so much more. I urge you to take advantage of as many of these as you can, just as Naomi and I plan to do. Through these activities, we build that atmosphere of support and cooperation. We are a community which spans from 12th Avenue North to 19th Avenue North and from University Drive to the new 18th Street. What better way to get to know your town than by exploring all it has to offer!

My second goal for the year is external. I will work with the Chancellor and the State Board of Higher Education on issues of importance to this campus. At the top of most everyone's mind is the full restoration of the university's budget. The process imposed with the 95 percent budget forced us to identify programs for elimination that we can not recommend as sound public policy. Yet, as a state institution, we clearly had an obligation to respond to the best of our ability to the directions of our elected state leadership. The Possibilities Thinking Committee, developed by Vice President Schnell in Academic Affairs, did a commendable job evaluating the 95 percent budget reduction and the restoration budget. It will continue discussions regarding the structure and programs of NDSU. I hope that NDSU is also credited for the on-going program review we have—and will continue to —impose upon ourselves under the auspices of the University Senate Program Review Committee. Through these efforts, we maintain our credibility when justifying the many university programs that serve the public good within the political and economic contexts of our times. This is how we maintain an effective dialogue with public leaders and it is through this dialogue that we can offer alternative budget scenarios. The Possibilities Thinking Committee, by the way, has sent forward an initial restoration plan which will restore funding in critical areas and still meet the 5 percent internal salary reallocation over the next six years as called for in the University System's Six Year Plan.

Last year, under the direction of Vice President Schnell, and with input from faculty, staff and other administrators, we spent considerable time providing input to the State Board's Six Year Plan. That plan, presented to the governor and legislature, was a response to their suggestion for a map of how higher education could serve the needs of the citizens of North Dakota. It became the basis for a needs-based budget, which is what we will recommend to the state's elected leaders for their consideration during the upcoming legislative session. Our ability to achieve the goals of the six-year plan depends on a needs-based budget. This is our message to legislators.

In my discussions with the Chancellor and State Board, I will also state our case for fairness and equity in funding. The impact of a budget cut, which I truly do not believe will occur, would be compounded by NDSU's current funding at 90 percent of state formula.

For those of you unfamiliar with the equity funding study, it was presented to the Board of Higher Education last February. It compares campus budgets for instruction, instructional support, support services, equipment, and physical plant or capital improvements. In all comparisons, NDSU is at or near the bottom of the funding formula. We receive funding for 413 FTE's, or full time teaching equivalents, but actually produce 441 FTE's. I refer to this as our productivity index as it clearly establishes our ability to do work and provide the classes for our students. If we were fully funded, it would bring another \$1 million to campus. Think of what we could do for our students with that money! On one hand, it is commendable that our faculty and staff provide high quality education under the burden of inadequate funding. Simply put, we are a very productive campus. But on the other hand, basic fairness should not be dismissed.

As we look ahead to the coming legislative session, I will make it a priority to talk bricks and mortar with the Chancellor and members of the State Board. We can anticipate some reluctance to invest in new campus buildings but, here at NDSU, we have three projects that are fully justified. They are the Animal Care Facility, Health and Wellness Center and a new building for the College of Business Administration.

In the last legislative session, we received what turned out to be partial funding for the new Animal Care Facility, a project that dates back before 1991. The funding story for this project is long and, at times, confusing. The short version is we thought we had sufficient federal funding in place, but found out later we did not. The project has now been divided into two phases and I am confident that funding for phase 1, the large animal facility, has sufficient legislative support. That financing package is to include a state appropriation of \$2.2 million with a matching \$2.2 million coming from federal and local sources. Still up in the air, though, is phase 2, the biotechnology and small animal facility. Let me assure you, we are working diligently on securing funding for this much-needed second phase and I am hopeful that we will be able to justify an additional investment from the legislature. I am encouraged that this is the Board of Higher Education's number one building priority. Last year, academic research involving animals brought in about \$1.8 million; money that could be jeopardized without adequate facilities. And, perhaps just as significant, funding that could be increased by the presence of adequate facilities. In addition, it's hard to imagine a more pressing need for this state's livestock industry than a high quality research facility for the state's land-grant university or a facility in which biotechnology can be pursued for animal and plant research.

A little bit later in this address, I will talk about the growing importance of marketing for NDSU. A key concept in our marketing effort is the recognition that we are a campus that students find welcoming. A notable exception is a need identified by our students, who then created a solution, campaigned for it, and have repeatedly said they are willing to fund. I'm talking about the proposed Health and Wellness Center. I think of this facility as a gift from the students of NDSU to the state and future generations of NDSU students. Not only are students willing to pay for its construction, but also the operation of the facility. Student Senate President Jeremy Green and the

student body are simply asking for legislative approval to proceed. I am optimistic that the next legislature will accept this gift and allow its construction.

The third piece of bricks and mortar is another example of where we are taking local initiative and not asking for state construction dollars. There are about 1,100 majors taking classes in the College of Business Administration in a facility that is simply too small. We will first seek legislative approval, and then request the support of the Development Foundation, to begin a private fund drive to raise money for a new business administration building. We need this project to meet market demand for educational services from this growing college. Here again, I think of this project as a gift to the state. This time from the alumni and friends who see the College of Business Administration as a vital contributor to the state and to the lives of the students it serves.

Some have commented about this project that, perhaps, another business college is not needed in this region. I could not disagree more. Because of demand, some level of business education is offered at each of the 11 University System campuses. Eleven hundred students choose to come to Fargo, or stay in Fargo, to get their business degree at North Dakota State. Why would we want to turn them away? Where would they go? It seems unlikely that all 1,100 students would migrate on cue to another campus, or that we would want them to. North Dakota would be forced to build new facilities elsewhere to accommodate these students and who would bear that cost?. The question is not “should NDSU have a business college?” NDSU has a business college with roots as old as this institution. The issue before us is simply having adequate facilities to meet the needs for business education in the state’s largest and fastest growing area.

My next goal for my term as your president is to invest in the faculty of North Dakota State University. The contingency fund of the Office of Research Administration makes money available for faculty development, but there is a requirement that applicants find matching funds. I will make matching funds available for each faculty member for development expenses, such as travel to professional meetings or to purchase new software for teaching or research. The total disbursement will be in the amount of \$500 per faculty member. I feel this truly is an investment in our faculty and, by extension, in the education of our students. Look for details on this opportunity in next 10 days or so.

For staff development, I will make funds available to support 20 people who wish to attend the Frontline Leadership Series. For details on this program, I ask you to contact Teri Thorsen, director of Human Resources.

Now, let’s take a moment to consider how fortunate we are. The City of Fargo is a fantastic place to live and work. City leaders and NDSU, over a number of decades, have developed a wonderful and meaningful town-and-gown relationship. There truly is a strong link—a partnership—between the citizens of Fargo and this campus’ faculty, staff and students.

There is evidence of the depth of this public-private partnership at nearly every turn. The impressive building on the north end of our campus, the Fargodome, is the perfect example. It is a top-notch facility that has quickly become one of the state’s major attractions when it hosts sporting events, concerts, conventions and trade shows.

Newman Outdoor Field is another shining example of the citizens of Fargo and the university working together to make something extraordinary happen. It's a terrific facility—a fun place to bring the family to enjoy a baseball game or a jazz festival.

The community also responded positively to our call for support of the Skills and Technology Training Center. Or perhaps it was NDSU and the State College of Science which responded positively to the community's need for non-degree career training. Either way, the center is the result of an enviable relationship between the campus and community.

We owe our city a debt of gratitude and we must never take this deep-rooted town-and-gown relationship for granted. We, as a university community, need to maintain and enhance this important partnership with our neighbors.

I ask you, the fine faculty, staff and students of NDSU, to encourage family, friends and neighbors to come to our campus, enjoy the Festival Concert Series, share our art exhibits, cheer for our Bison sports teams and participate in the many symposiums and scholarly activities on our campus. I think they will be glad they came.

We have to get the word out also to the public about the many good things NDSU is doing. In this competitive age, all of us need an increased awareness and appreciation for marketing on all levels, whether it be by word-of-mouth, billboards or television ads.

We need to stress marketing because recruitment and retention are the key words to a university's viability and its future. We need to get prospective students to visit our campus, enroll here and keep them here, provide them with a quality education and prepare them for a successful career.

Please remember that retention is just as important to our viability as recruitment. I urge you to make connections with students, welcome them and work with them. Treat students as you would want your own son or daughter to be treated. At NDSU, every student should feel that he or she is an important and respected part of this campus. Their time at NDSU should become a lasting and pleasant memory.

The students we nurture today will someday have children of their own. I think it would be nice if that next generation also attends NDSU because their parents appreciate the quality education and the friendly, caring atmosphere.

There are many positive things occurring that I'd like to share with you.

! This fall's enrollment numbers are excellent and show a continuation of our five-year trend of enrollments around 9,700 students.

! The university can also take satisfaction in knowing that our focus on retention is

paying off. The Living and Learning program, peer mentoring, the freshman course and other programs are effective. In 1991, our retention rate for full time freshman to full time sophomore was 73 percent. This year it appears to be more than 80 percent. Please remember that recruitment and retention is everyone's job. We all have a stake in maintaining the size of our student population.

- ! Your efforts at securing federal and private research grants are becoming even more successful. This year, we saw a 32 percent increase in the dollar value of submissions with a 15 percent increase in the number of proposals. The product of this effort was a 3 percent increase in the dollar value of awarded contracts and a five percent increase in indirect dollars this year. With the increase in submissions this year, look for even better numbers next year.

- ! NDSU has a well-deserved reputation for excellence and that respect shows when our students graduate. For example, all of our 91 pharmacy and nursing graduates from this past spring found jobs, and a good number of them were placed in North Dakota positions. According to Dr. Bleier, director of pre-professional programs in the College of Science and Mathematics, we had more pre-med students accepted into medical school this year than in many years. I am anxiously looking forward to the next Annual Employment Report which I am sure will show excellent job placement for all of our students.

- ! We also are seeing steady growth in the number of students graduating each year. During the 1997-98 academic year, 1,405 students received undergraduate degrees, which was an increase of 23 from the previous year. In fact, we've seen increases each of the past four years.

That, of course, speaks very highly of our students. It impressively shows that they have the dedication and commitment to complete what they start. They clearly have the talent and desire to be successful.

The success of our students is matched by the success of our alumni, who through their generosity, complete the university's partnership with North Dakota. As we look to the state to invest in this campus, we, too, look to our alumni for investment. And their response is fantastic. The Development Foundation recently accepted on behalf of the College of Engineering and Architecture, the largest single gift in one year to this institution; \$2.7 million. These funds will provide scholarships and faculty enhancements. In fact, the assets of the Development Foundation now exceed \$40 million and are funding a growing number of scholarships, as well as funds for faculty development. In 1996-97, \$900,000 were distributed to students. Last year, \$1.1 million. This year, Foundation Director Jim Miller says it will be \$1,125,000, with another half million dollars in building project funds and departmental grants transferred to the university. This year, for the first time, NDSU has two endowed professorships funded through the Development Foundation—they are the Jordan A Engberg Professorship, and the Verna Gehrts Professorship. Both carry a salary stipend and a support package.

The Ehly Hall project continues the tradition of sharing. The building project for the College of Engineering and Architecture is funded completely by NDSU alumni and friends, notably Ray Ehly, Sr.—there will be no state appropriated dollars for its construction. Our students, faculty and staff will be the beneficiaries of this generosity.

These many exciting activities on our campus are things we need to tell prospective students and their parents. The residents of the state and region should understand and appreciate the quality work we do here. To help with that effort, NDSU is now undertaking a new and exciting three-year advertising campaign to supplement our marketing program. Putting this plan together has been a real eye-opener. I've spent my career in higher education and felt I had a pretty good handle on what students looked for when choosing a university. Some of my assumptions were put to the test this spring and summer as market research, including high school student focus groups reviewed current and proposed marketing materials.

Working with University Relations and Office of Admission has been the marketing firm of Flint Communications. I've asked their president, Roger Reiersen, to be with us today to explain some of the efforts we've gone through in the development of this plan and preview some of materials we have under development. Please join me in welcoming Roger Reiersen....

***** Flint Communications presentation *****

(Dr. Fischer)

As I look around this gathering, I have every reason to view the upcoming academic year with optimism and confidence. Each of you is an integral and valued part of our land-grant mission of teaching, research and service.

As we journey through this academic year together, think about my call for collegiality. We must be known as an institution dedicated to teaching and scholarship. While research is a critical component of what we do, I do not want to see this university become a “publish or perish” institution. Looking over the fall semester schedule, I am pleased to see so many full professors teaching one-hundred level classes; what Tom Plough referred to as “front-loading the freshmen experience.” We must remember that our students' education is our highest priority. The students are our bottom line.

NDSU's faculty and staff must continue to reach out to them and teach them what they need to know. It is our job to provide our students with the knowledge and the skills to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

We are a unique school. NDSU's size allows for big school opportunities, but we are still small enough to give personal attention to our students. Our technology is first-class and getting better because of our student's self-assessed technology fee. Our academic reputation — measured by accreditation, employment of our graduates, and satisfaction of our graduates — is excellent. Many have told me they can “hold their own” whether in the work force or graduate school because of their NDSU degree. Why? Because we offer hands-on learning; getting students into our labs through the McNair program, work study, the USDA labs, faculty research grants, and

EPSCoR sponsored programs such as Science Bound, Research Experience for Undergraduates, and Advanced Undergraduate Research Awards.

Thank you for your commitment. Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your excellence. And thank you for your attention. Naomi and I would like to invite you over to the house for some refreshments. Please join us. Thank you.