

Reflections on the State of the University  
Presented by President J.L. Ozbun  
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North Dakota State University

It's been said that the only thing certain is death and taxes. Well, let me add another certainty to the list and that is a university president will always try and paint a bright picture in a state of the university address. So here I go...

This has been a difficult year for me personally. That doesn't sound too "bright" does it? I'll get to the positive stuff but first I'd like to talk about some of the challenges we've faced. Then I'll discuss how we can meet those challenges so that the future of this institution and the people who make up this academic community will remain bright.

Certainly the biggest challenge we've faced has been a budget reduction of \$6.5 million while at the same time, demand for our services—as measured by student enrollment—has increased. We are now doing more with less.

I think it's important to recognize the North Dakota legislature didn't cut our budget to punish us for doing anything wrong. They weighed a long list of needs with a short list of resources. They allocated funds according to their determination of greatest need. They allocated funds according to how they felt the voters of their districts wished. No one said we didn't need higher education. No one said we weren't important to the future of this state and its citizens. They simply said "this is what we are willing to spend now."

The lesson we learned from this past legislative session is simple, we need to do a better job of making the people of North Dakota aware of the many ways we make this state a better place to live. Some things are obvious, such as when Tecton locates a new plant with the potential for hundreds of new jobs in Fargo because they want to be close to this University. Or when a son or daughter graduates from this institution with the preparation to begin a successful career and life. Even though these examples are obvious to those of us close to higher education, they bear repeating over and over to our fellow residents of this state. We also need to do a better job of communicating the not-as-obvious benefits of NDSU and higher education. When the voters feel we are important, you can bet their legislators will, too.

That's the lesson for the next legislative session. Now let's talk about today and how the impact of the budget cuts have taken their toll. Looking around the audience today, there are members of our academic community who are missing. Their positions were eliminated or they chose to take advantage of early retirement offers. We had some 88 positions directly affected by the reduction in appropriations. And these weren't just positions, they were positions held by our friends and co-workers who, despite their many contributions, found themselves facing difficult choices and uncertainties. They remain a part of our academic community today and into the future. Our thoughts and best wishes remain with each.

As we look to a future of constant restructuring, let's review the restructuring that has already taken place. The departments of philosophy and engineering science have been eliminated. Not because they weren't valuable, but because program cuts were no longer negotiable. Some things had to go. Chancellor Treadway has been specific on this point, the North Dakota University System will no longer be able to offer every program we may wish. But the programs that remain will be quality programs.

We've also cut back on administration. The vice presidency for university advancement, for example, no longer exists with most of those responsibilities reassigned to my office. That vice presidency was something I proposed when I came to NDSU five years ago because I felt then, and still do today, that development and university relations are matters of primary importance. Its elimination was a tough decision made at a time of tough decisions.

We had to make cuts where we could because there were areas where we simply could not cut back. Enrollment for this fall semester is headed for a record with 9,411 students registered by the second day of classes. Final numbers will be announced in a week or so. These students need teachers and we have made every effort to provide the resources to meet our basic needs. Doing so will mean our campus this winter will be cooler. I'm predicting brisk sales of sweaters and sweatshirts. At night, our campus will be darker. Our buildings will not get the level of preventative maintenance that we want. Travel will be scrutinized. Virtually every expense is subject to review. That's the fiscal reality we face.

We've been forced to make a lot of difficult decisions these past few months and I've come to rely on your ideas for guidance. I've appreciated your support and efforts throughout this process because it is only through the efforts of this entire academic community that we will rise to meet the Chancellor's mandate for quality.

While the budget has presented my greatest source of consternation, it has been a difficult year for other reasons as well. The death of my brother in July is a loss that has affected me greatly. For the first time in 57 years, we will not celebrate our common birthday together. My annual hunting trip to Wyoming will not be the same without his companionship.

This has also been a year of continuing adjustment to a new higher education management system. Chancellor Douglas Treadway and the Board of Higher Education have a clear vision for higher education and I look forward to their continued support, advice and encouragement as we move ahead with our agenda.

I mentioned the early retirements that were offered to some. I, too, have decided to take advantage of early retirement. At the June Higher Ed Board meeting, my decision to retire June 30, 1995 was announced by Chancellor Treadway. When I came to NDSU five years ago, I said that a university president can be most effective for a period of seven to ten years. In the remaining two years of my presidency of NDSU, we will have a full agenda. With your help, we will accomplish much. More

on that in a minute. But first, let me tell you of my reasons for retirement. At the forefront of this decision was my desire to chart a course that was in the best interests of Sonja and myself and this institution. I believe that announcing my decision two years before I actually retire will give the University time to prepare for a new president and time to concentrate on the opportunities facing us — without unnecessary distractions. This is the time for looking ahead, not looking back. Announcing my decision now allows us to do that.

So, what is on this agenda for the next two years? I have identified several priorities that we can address to prepare this institution for the future. My President's Council has agreed to cooperate and I want you to know that your assistance and guidance is absolutely critical to our success.

#### Agricultural Restructuring

Number one—how can we restructure our agricultural initiatives? Three weeks ago, I convened the President's Task Force on Agriculture and the University. This group was chaired by interim Extension director Bob Christman and included Roald Lund and Virginia Clark of NDSU; Colin Kaltenbach, director of the University of Arizona Agricultural Station; Leo Lucas, dean and director emeritus of the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service; Paul Langseth, chair of the North Dakota Research and Extension Consultation Board; and Vern Freeh, facilitator, a North Dakota native, NDSU graduate and agricultural business leader. I want to thank this exceptional group of individuals for the tremendous job they did.

Their recommendations, which have been discussed in detail elsewhere, include coordinating our agricultural efforts under a newly created vice presidency. This person would have a long list of responsibilities and a long title to match. He or she would be the Vice President for Agriculture and Outreach and Director of the Extension Service and Experiment Station. The committee's recommendation is based on the goal of ensuring the coordination of programs and the integration of research, teaching and extension faculty for maximum efficiency. Their findings are in the process of being reviewed by my President's Council before any decision is made.

The next step towards implementation is to forward the findings and recommendations to the Chancellor and Board of Higher Ed. Our purpose in this restructuring is to integrate the reporting lines of one of this institution's cornerstones and I believe we can accomplish this at little or no additional cost as the position of Director of Extension is currently vacant and the duties of the Director of Experiment Station are being carried out by the Dean of Agriculture. I see no need for an increase in personnel or funding. We will facilitate communications and direction without spending additional scarce dollars on administration.

#### Campus Master Plan

Vice President Rayl has taken a leading role in planning for this university's future. Among the most exciting ideas is the possible establishment of an NDSU Technology Park on the north side of campus. Here, small and medium sized businesses could locate their research and development departments in cooperation with academic

departments. This has the potential to provide funding for a life-long learning center far quicker than through the traditional legislative route.

An important aspect of planning for the future is the establishment of the campus master plan. A sub-committee chaired by Andy Keogh will have a report by January first. This report won't be a definitive list of where new buildings will go. Rather it will, for the first time, establish a list of criteria to be used when new buildings are considered, so that future development is done with maximum efficiency. Between now and January, this sub-committee will be meeting with campus groups and scheduling campus forums. I encourage you to attend and offer the benefit of your experience in this important endeavor.

#### Life Long Learning

Higher education has traditionally been thought of as something for 18- to 22-year olds. Of course that concept is outdated. Our next priority, then, is establishing the concept of life long learning in our community and state. Periodically there is discussion that North Dakota has too many institutions of higher education. But let's look at that concept from another angle. Picture a map of North Dakota with each of the cities having a college or university highlighted. What we have is a state where every resident is within an easy drive to higher education. Every North Dakotan has access to North Dakota State University through our interactive television network. Every North Dakotan has access to the opportunity that comes from life long learning. We no longer have to wait for the students to come to our campus, we can go to them. Providing that service will make our state more productive, will allow us to help improve the lives of more individuals, and will be proof positive when legislators sit down to allocate funds.

#### Technology

This discussion leads us to preparing our campus for the 21st Century. Technology moves faster than our ability to incorporate it and so we face a major challenge in preparing this institution for the educational applications of technology. Dick Rayl likes to talk about how we can't afford to buy the next generation technology, we need to leap ahead two generations. I am committed to maintaining our national leadership role in the application of technology and for that, I again need your help. We need to identify and then seek out funding for these technologies. It will be expensive but I don't believe we can afford to sit this one out.

By the way, if you haven't seen Minard Room 219, then by all means you should. Here is an example of what a 21st Century classroom will look like with computer interface and multi-media displays. It's perhaps the biggest change in education since the textbook. And if you're doing a technology field trip, take another look at the Industrial Agricultural and Communications Center. It's one of the finest facilities of its kind in the nation and it's a building that will take us readily into the next century

#### Faculty Development

With our emphasis on technology, we must not lose sight of the basics and that includes the importance of teaching. We have made this a priority in our strategic

plan and we are putting financial resources into it. Our teaching portfolio program was designed to help faculty document their advancements for promotion and tenure. Good teachers are the foundation of NDSU and this administration is committed to faculty development.

#### Cultural Diversity

Part of our mission with our next priority is to correct some of the unjustified criticisms of our efforts in cultural diversity. Those criticisms have had their basis in incomplete or inaccurate information. First, let me set the record straight...multi-culturalism is not a threat to the American way of life. It is not about the immigration policies of this nation, and it is not an excuse for miscommunication between teacher and student. Simply put, multi-culturalism is a recognition that we are not isolated from the rest of the world and that we have an obligation to prepare our students to live and work in a multi-cultural world. This includes people and cultures from around the world, around our nation, and even around our state. You see, in North Dakota, our task force on cultural diversity, chaired by Robert Littlefield, has identified Native Americans and the Germans from Russia ethnic groups as a part of North Dakota's unique multi-cultural picture. I don't see much threatening in a piece of apple kuchen from Wishek and I believe we can not ignore our obligations to the study of cultural diversity.

#### World Economy

Tying in with our cultural diversity concept is priority six...preparing our graduates for working in a world economy. There are many things we can do to prepare our graduates for careers where business contact with foreign businesses can be anticipated. Introducing our students to the concept of cultural diversity is a starting point. Attracting international students and teachers to our campus is another. Equally important is supporting international experiences for our students and faculty so they can share their international experiences with those of us who remain. We simply can not assume that North Dakota is isolated from the rest of the world. Our products span the globe, whether it is grain shipped to Morocco or Melroe Bobcats sold to Japan. We will do our graduates a grave disservice if they are not fully prepared for their careers. A joke going through the United Nations is that a person who speaks three languages is called tri-lingual. A person who speaks two languages is called bi-lingual. And a person who speaks one language is called an American. We should not allow the joke to remain on us.

#### Constituency Funding

Across the country, institutions of higher education are being asked, as we are, to do more with less. As the state's share of support falls off, we need to aggressively seek new sources of funding. Our constituency funding program brings in professionals to identify and seek special interests to support specific programs. In another vein, our Development Foundation is embarking on an aggressive \$20 million drive that offers tremendous promise for success. We must do what ever we can to support these worthy efforts.

### Research Foundation

In 1989, the NDSU Research Foundation was created to build bridges between private businesses and the intellectual capacity of this institution. The Foundation handles proposals for new businesses and works in securing patents, trademarks and licensing agreements for the university. We've got the facilities and the people to address this state's most critical need: economic development. The Foundation provides the mechanism.

### Fine Arts

In our rush to technology, restructuring agriculture and internationalization, we must not neglect the fine arts. In fact, we need to reemphasize this aspect of our university. Back in the 1960's, when President Albrecht wanted to increase the visibility of and support for athletics he revitalized the Team Makers. This year, they've set a goal they expect to meet of raising more than \$600,000 and they've helped raise the visibility of Bison Athletics far beyond what was expected. We need to do the same for the fine arts. We have a tremendous resource in our fine arts faculty and facilities. They bring valuable opportunities for our students and countless hours of enjoyment to our community and those benefits deserve to be returned with increased financial resources.

### Student Retention

We must do more to help students who enter our academic community complete their course work. To that end, the Student Affairs division, under Vice President Wallman, has several initiatives underway. This past spring, Project Success was launched. This will be a campus-wide effort to better support our new students and improve our student retention efforts. It will involve reorganizing orientation, providing more learning assistance support, an early warning system will be developed to identify students who are at risk socially and academically, and it will coordinate summer orientation with our new freshmen course. That freshmen course will be required starting in the fall of '94 and it will teach study skills, how to take tests, how to find resource materials and much more.

Another change will occur in the career service area. The Board of Higher Education approved an eight dollar per semester career service fee that will allow us to increase our career education efforts, develop a corporate recruitment program and we plan on starting career education efforts as early as the freshmen year.

### Internal Communications

I can't emphasize enough the need for open, two-way internal communications. There have been many changes at our institution in the past months. There will be many more to come. I know I can not make decisions in a void and you can not support initiatives you know nothing about. To manage change and not be managed by it, we need to communicate effectively and candidly. When there are differences of opinion, spirited debate within our university community is the most productive method of resolving the conflict. The least productive communications are those directed off-campus where, often, the reputation of the university is at risk and the debate characterized as "petty squabbling."

### Prepare For Next Legislative Session

I mentioned earlier that when legislative candidates go door-to-door asking for support, they need to know that higher education is important to the voters of their district. That is something each of us can take responsibility for. Get involved. Ask your representatives to support higher education. Ask your neighbors and relatives to do the same. The key to economic development in our state is education, not cutbacks. We can't cut more from our budgets without doing serious damage to the programs that remain. Chancellor Treadway is absolutely correct when he says we must maintain the integrity of the programs we retain. It is up to each of us to work at retaining as many programs as possible to preserve the integrity of this university.

This has been a rather long list of priorities and perhaps you've heard me speak of these before. The next step is to make these priorities part of the fiber of this institution. The President's Council agreed at its June meeting to support each of these goals. Now I ask for your support, as well. Without it, these initiatives will fail and North Dakota will be the lesser for our inaction.

There has been some speculation that by announcing my retirement two years earlier than my retirement date, I have saddled NDSU with a lame duck. I wouldn't intentionally do that to you and I have no intention of allowing it to happen. The Board of Higher Education and the Chancellor have been most supportive of me and I believe that because of my announcement, I am in a unique position to facilitate these changes. I won't act like a duck, walk like a duck, or talk like a duck. That's my personal pledge to each of you.

British statesman Benjamin Disraeli said in 1873, "A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning." I say the light of NDSU shines brightly, freedom is ever-present and learning continues for student, faculty and staff. I want to thank you for five wonderful years...and two more exciting years to come.

I spoke of my brother earlier. He lived hard and he worked hard. When he retired, he returned to North Dakota. He set out a list of goals that he wished to accomplish and then he set about doing just that. When his chosen lifestyle resulted in deteriorating health and he was unable to accomplish his goals, my brother took his own life. He could not live if it was not the life he envisioned.

I, too, returned to North Dakota later in life and I, too, developed a list of goals. In the next two years and with your dedication and assistance, I promise to do everything possible to accomplish these yet unfinished goals. For the sake of North Dakota. For the sake of this institution. And, if you will allow my self-indulgence, for the sake of my brother.