

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

More than 100 years ago, American philanthropist George Peabody declared, "Education is a debt due from the present to future generations." Today, on my seventh and final State of the University Address, I would like to reflect on that concept and discuss the accomplishments we've made and the challenges we face. Each accomplishment adds to our ability to pay the debt we owe future generations. Each challenge is another page in our payment book.

In the coming months, we'll be hearing a lot about the funding of state government. The North Dakota Legislature convenes in January and in this democratic process will rest our economic fate. In the last session, our general fund appropriation was cut by \$3.4 million. Programs were eliminated or reduced. People -- hardworking people who performed their jobs well -- were laid off. Equipment was not purchased. Important maintenance was put off. Opportunities were missed -- opportunities that, from my perspective, provide for the growth of this institution into the future and that we should avoid losing.

This year, the governor is asking for further cuts and we don't know what the outcome will be, but we can't merely sit on our hands and complain that "people don't appreciate us." To those of us in higher education, faculty and staff, it is obvious that we contribute in countless ways. Higher education is not only an investment in the future, but, as Peabody said, a debt owed future generations.

In North Dakota, there has been a historic recognition of the value of higher education. It is rooted deep in the culture of this state, just as are the crops we plant each spring in anticipation of the reward we harvest each fall. I worry that these days, as we struggle to balance state budgets, we forget that you can not harvest what you do not plant. Our leaders must not lose sight of their constitutional duty to support higher education at adequate levels and I challenge the concept that North Dakotans wish to abandon this tradition. Support of higher education is like the cost of spring seed. It is an expense far outweighed by the return received down the road. That concept has been recognized for more than 100 years and we should not forego it for the sake of short-term political expediency.

At this time, I can't help but reflect on the commitment and sacrifice that my parents made to my education back in the 1950's and how it has benefited me throughout my life.

So we in higher education need to clearly tell our story, even if at times it may be to an audience that does not want to hear it. It is obvious to me that the answer to North Dakota's budget problems will not be found in pitting higher education

against social services. Or social services against elementary and secondary education. And while cutting fat in government makes for popular rhetoric, the reality is that the fat has been cut. Now we need to commit the resources to adequately fund the state's basic needs.

Does this mean new or modified taxes? I hope not but, if it does, we should all be prepared to pitch in to get the job done.

This is a challenging message to many people who want to believe certain popular, but I believe inaccurate, truisms. One of which is that faculty members lead "the good life." A headline in *The Wall Street Journal* a while back declared, "College teachers: the new leisure class." Some take aim at us for being overpaid, overadministered, and living proof of waste in government. These perceptions exist despite empirical evidence showing that at NDSU, in particular, we are underpaid and have lower administrative costs when compared to regional and national averages. Studies also clearly show that rather than being a "leisure class", we put in far more hours than we get credit for. A forty-hour work week would be a nice change.

There are many reasons inaccurate perceptions continue. Communication research has established that people seek out and retain information that confirms their existing beliefs and, conversely, they place less value on information that conflicts with constructs they already hold. An acquaintance of mine has a poster that illustrates this; it declares, "Entrenched belief is never altered by the facts." A dozen news stories about contributions made by NDSU faculty and staff are easily overshadowed by one negative story. Many people want to believe they are being overtaxed to support a bloated government. They seek simplistic solutions to complex problems. And frankly, sometimes we make ourselves easy targets for external audiences by our use of critical thinking in university matters where we challenge concepts, not as an attack, but to establish validity. The external perception of a university community constantly engaged in debate makes us appear to be divided.

In 1986, Douglas Hilt wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that, "By training, professors are inclined to quibble and have the wrong tools to solve problems with their neighbors." He expressed this thought in an article on collegiality and I want to talk more about that concept later in this address.

I said we need to get involved in the legislative process in order to best take our case to a skeptical public. Last spring, I asked Dick Rayl and Russ Slotten to form a committee that brings together administration, alumni, faculty, staff and student representation to coordinate legislative initiatives. I think this is an important step because, to one extent or another, some legislators have perceived us as being divided -- faculty pitted against students and students against administration and so on. This makes us an easy target for cuts. We can not allow this to happen.

I asked this legislative committee to find the common ground on legislative matters so we can inform the campus community. If united, we form an impressive political block of some twelve thousand faculty, staff and students. Certainly, there is room for students to champion an issue that faculty may not. The purpose of this committee is not to dictate but rather to coordinate.

Let me tell you of some of their work, so far. This committee is challenging everybody who cares about NDSU to get rolling. I'm alluding to an acronym for a new legislative effort, ROLL, or Reach Our Local Legislators. ROLL is a program we consider an essential element of telling our story if we hope to achieve passage of a needs-based budget by the 1995 legislature.

Through ROLL, or Reach Our Local Legislators, we're asking faculty, staff, and alumni to offer their homes for a weekday evening, bipartisan coffee hour with those of you from the various NDSU constituencies and all of the legislative candidates from each particular district. Sign-up sheets are available at the back of the auditorium for volunteers. As you leave, let us know if you are willing to host a district meeting in your home, or sign that you are willing to attend. If you don't know which district you are in, or if you have any other questions about these efforts, call the Office of the President/University Relations, 237-1068.

Also, I want to call your attention to a Legislative Forum we're scheduling for Friday, October 14. Cass County legislative candidates will be available by district from noon to 1 p.m. at the Memorial Union. Mark your calendars now and look for further information. It is very important that everyone possible attend this forum.

Our legislative coordinating committee can help determine priorities and develop messages, but each of us on this campus -- administrators, faculty, alumni, staff and students -- need to be active in the legislative process. We can't afford to take further cuts without seriously damaging the quality of the education, research and public service we are charged with providing. When candidates ask for your vote, ask them if they will support adequate funding for higher education. And by all means, talk with your neighbors. Challenge false beliefs about higher education.

In my 40 years of work at universities, I have often heard others being critical of others for their lack of understanding about the land grant mission, their work hours, or their behavior. This is not only often untrue, but unproductive in terms of our work in the legislative process.

Last year during this address, I outlined what I saw as our priorities. I'd like to briefly revisit those areas because, in doing so, I can also illustrate some of our

successes. And I must say we have had an excellent year. It is exciting to reflect on all that has happened. Unfortunately, time will permit only a few examples.

Agricultural Restructuring

First, agricultural restructuring. With the appointment of Brendan Donnelly as our new vice president for agriculture and university outreach, we have the leadership in place to examine how we deliver service to this critical sector of our state. We welcome Dr. Robert Todd as our new director of the Agricultural Experiment Station. And late last week, candidates were screened for the position of director of Extension Service. This, along with Lowell Satterlee as dean of agriculture, provides effective leadership. This leadership and the involvement of many others on the various committees studying restructuring convince me we are, indeed, on the right track of building on more than a century of service to agriculture and finding ways to improve NDSU's contribution to this cornerstone of our state.

Campus Master Plan

Last January, the work of our Campus Master Planning Committee was approved. This important document is, in effect, a plan on how to plan. It gives us the framework to evaluate future changes and it proposes development of the western edge of campus, including the development of 18th Street. It addresses vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns and parking. It creates a main entrance from the west. It envisions a unique neighborhood surrounding our campus that includes bookstores, restaurants and coffeehouses.

Andy Keogh, who chaired the committee, has pointed out that previous NDSU campus plans look different than our campus does today. But, I like the vision this plan created and I like the decision-making matrix for future growth.

Our campus master plan is going to be formally accepted in the City of Fargo's comprehensive plan, the first time an NDSU master plan has been incorporated in such a manner. The work of the committee is to be commended, and now utilized.

Incidentally, work on a new master plan was one of my first requests when I became president in 1988. I am delighted that the request has been fulfilled in such a fine manner.

Lifelong Learning

The campus master plan incorporates discussions on lifelong learning. You may have read an article in the Forum three Sundays ago about how our student body is growing older. Almost a quarter of our students are 25 or older now. We are, in effect, expanding our market for students from the traditional 18 to 22 year olds, to the entire population of this region. NDSU is in a key position to help the people of North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota develop and upgrade the skills they'll need to be successful throughout the course of their lives. This,

too, is a topic I've been talking about for some time. An outreach task force report is due November 1st. I eagerly await its findings.

Technology

The challenge of technology is not tomorrow's challenge: it is today's challenge. You may have noticed that our campus looks like it had a serious problem with gophers or some other burrowing animal. After last week's performance on the football field, I can assure you the Bison haven't gone underground! This summer, trenches criss-crossed campus for new cabling which, among other things, will allow dorm residents to have cable TV and greater access to campus computer networks. In addition, at the end of this month, new telephone switching gear will be put on line to improve service today and well into the future. We have access to tremendous technology today. We need to continue our efforts at maximizing the capabilities, not just in how we deliver education, but in the daily tasks that make our institution run, everything from purchasing to personal communications.

Faculty Development

Faculty development is a top priority at NDSU. One particular success I wish to point out is our work to incorporate multimedia into the classroom through funding from a PPRC -- Planning, Priorities and Resources Committee -- grant. This past year, 55 NDSU faculty and staff plus two teachers from the Fargo Public Schools and two more from State College of Science enrolled in courses teaching multimedia use. Minard 219 was brought on-line and now four portable platforms have been assembled for additional classroom use. I am encouraged by the results of our efforts at improving our focus on learning via faculty workshops and by our outstanding work in the area of assessment.

I am also very proud of the efforts of our faculty, department chairs and deans in increasing competitive grant support. Competitive grant support is becoming increasingly critical in higher education as state and federal dollars decrease. This past year, competitive grant support increased to \$24.3 million -- a thirty-three percent increase in one year. The benefits of this increase on campus are abundant, but it also represents a tremendous, often underrecognized, source of new wealth for North Dakota and, as such, is just another contribution we make to the quality of life in this region.

Cultural Pluralism

I think our most misunderstood campus priority is our efforts in cultural pluralism. I'm not sure why this should be a misunderstood concept because I don't think there's a lot about it that's new. It champions concepts such as respect, tolerance and understanding. These are traditional values encompassing the best of what this country should be, and they are completely consistent with the concepts of democracy and the founding principles of the land-grant university system.

My theory is that cultural diversity is misunderstood by people who tie it in with the Political Correctness movement and all its associated baggage. That misunderstanding is a shame because this institution has been recognized nationally for our leadership in cultural pluralism. We have been invited to several national conferences as a model of how to create a definition of cultural diversity that is specific to our institution. Through the efforts of Robert Littlefield and the NDSU team, we're winning grant support to implement programs for our campuses and for elementary and secondary teachers across the state.

Democratic theory and moral judgment aside, there is a real-world reason to be cognizant of cultural diversity. We have a clear obligation to our students to prepare them for careers in the world economy. Back in the 1950's, there was the stereotype of the arrogant, self-absorbed Ugly American. That image is unfair and so counterproductive. Understanding other cultures and respecting their values are fundamental to being able to successfully conduct business in and with these cultures. We fail our students if we do not prepare them intellectually to live in our global village.

Constituency Fund Raising

Now in its second year, the \$20 Million Campaign for North Dakota State University is off and running. The \$20 Million Campaign is built around five areas of need. They are scholarship endowments, teaching endowments, a new alumni center, the Century II Fund, and the College of Engineering and Architecture. Your personal involvement in this campaign is important. I know some have said they can not afford to participate because of inadequate salary increases. But budget cuts are hurting everyone, including those least able to absorb the rising costs of education. I urge everyone to demonstrate how much we value higher education by participating in this campaign to the best of his or her ability.

Research Foundation

The NDSU Research Foundation has made giant strides this past year. With the help of the Pioneer seed gift, our endowment now stands at nearly \$400,000. If projections hold true, in the next several years the endowment will reach in the millions. This will be an important source of future revenue for the campus.

Significant intellectual property developed on this campus is being presented to the NDSU Research Foundation Board every month. It is impossible to report each project, but currently the university is actively pursuing patents on five new discoveries. I would like to emphasize Greg Gillespie's development of laser spectroscopy technology which has evolved into our first university-sponsored business, Dakota Technologies, of which the NDSU Research Foundation holds an equity share. We are currently in negotiations to develop three more such university-spawned businesses.

In addition, we are about to have a potato patent issued which will be the second in the nation -- again emphasizing our lead in certain areas of agricultural research.

Fine Arts

There is good news and sad news to share this year about Fine Arts. First, the good news. We've put renewed emphasis in the area of fine arts. We've increased scholarships and have been able to attract an outstanding group of faculty and students. I'm told this year's concert choir, under the direction of Jo Ann Brorson, is among the best in the history of NDSU. We've also put resources into making the fine arts more visible in the community, the state and, for that matter, the world.

I'd like to share a portion of a letter I received in June from a retired psychologist in New York who described visiting Notre Dame cathedral in Paris last spring:

There suddenly appeared before us a choir who then delivered a concert of extraordinary proportions. It was a magic moment for us and the audience. I thought they were the Cambridge University Choir - whose records we possess. They were the North Dakota State University choir. I was filled with joy and pride and you have every reason to feel the same.

Those feelings of joy and pride are tempered this year with the knowledge that Don Stowell, the founding director of the Division of Fine Arts, is no longer able to lead the division he worked so hard to build up. As many of you know, Don's illness is taking its toll on this fine human being. Don has every reason to be proud of his work in making the Division of Fine Arts the exemplary program it is. I also appreciate that Richard Bovard has taken over as interim director and I wish him well.

Student Retention

NDSU needs to do more than attract students; we must keep them once they're here. One of the major factors in our record enrollment this semester of almost 9,700 students is an increase in the number coming back to NDSU. The Division of Student Affairs has long been concerned with student retention and has been working successfully at developing programs to address this area. The newest of these programs, Project Success, has just started this year.

Another reason for our success is that this is the second year we have been using a selective admission process of screening and selecting applicants based on core courses from high school and performance criteria and test scores. This results in our admitting students who are best able to be successful in this academic environment. We welcome Kate Haugen's presence in enrollment management and look forward to her coordination of efforts in admissions, financial aid and Project Success.

Incidentally, those of you who weren't around Fargo this summer missed some very flattering media recognition of our summer orientation program. In addition to the news coverage, the program received very positive evaluations from parents and students.

Earlier, I quoted Douglas Hilt on collegiality. This is an important discussion throughout higher education. In Hilt's words, "At the departmental level, many of us cordially dislike our neighbors down the hall."

Hilt, who was chair of foreign languages at West Georgia College when he wrote this article, identified a couple of reasons for this atmosphere. First, he said, the characteristics which we were taught in graduate school, such as the ability to dissect an issue, to compete with others, to quantify and criticize, simply do not work well in interpersonal situations. Next, he said, the need to publish is hurting daily teaching. We've created a system where promotion and tenure are based on getting published in scholarly publications that Hilt says are often "of marginal value and totally unrelated to daily teaching." This is not the same, he says, as true research allied to effective teaching.

A year ago, Alexander W. Astin, the director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, expanded on this theme in a lecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He said, "Many of our internal difficulties can be traced to the lack of any real sense of community that characterizes the modern university."

He went on to say, "the most esteemed members of the university community--the faculty--are hired and rewarded primarily on the basis of their ability to succeed in the highly individualistic and competitive fields of scientific research and academic scholarship, while community-building efforts such as good collegiality are largely ignored."

North Dakota State University is not isolated from this damaging trend. Our department award was created to recognize those who contribute to collegiality. But we need to do more, to redefine the criteria we use to grant other institutional rewards. Being published is good. Being a good teacher is better. And being a published scholar and good teacher is best. Astin states that "giving greater priority to teaching, learning, and student development may indeed be one way to develop a real sense of community on the campus." We may not be able to change all of academe, but here at North Dakota State University, let us recommit ourselves to the centuries-old tradition of being collegial members of an academic community.

I would like to share with you a vision for an academic community that was developed by the University of Albany, State University of New York. It reads:

A University is above all a place where intellectual life is central and where faculty, staff and students strive together for excellence in the pursuit of knowledge. It is a particular kind of community with special purposes. Moreover, this academic community, if it is to support our broad ideals, must also be just...equality and liberty are basic.

This statement provides an inspiring vision for all of higher education.

In my last year at NDSU, I stand before you and recommit myself to rebuilding the sense of community that has made the calling of higher education among the noblest and most personally rewarding professions. I ask you to make the same commitment. Next year at this time, I will be a proud North Dakota rancher...riding horseback and looking after cattle. I am returning home to western North Dakota, to the land of my youth. My career took me away but I always knew this is where I would return. You see, I believe in North Dakota. I believe in North Dakota State University. And I believe in you. Thank you for allowing Sonja and me to be a part of this institution and your lives and I wish you the very best in your search for a new president.

Marilynn Wheeler, a reporter for the Associated Press, recently asked me what I looked forward to doing when I retire. I told her I wanted to ride across my land, climb up on the tallest peak and look as far as I could see in all directions, take a deep breath of fresh North Dakota air, and shout for all the world to hear, though in reality to no one, it's great to be alive!