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Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council

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- SOME QUOTES

NEBRASKA AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
MARCH 23, 2001
JOHN C. OWENS
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful-citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

That quote by the late anthropologist Margaret Mead seems "especially-fitting" to me tonight as I look out at all of you. People who are committed to leadership in agriculture and ⁱⁿ Nebraska. People with vision and creativity who give of your time and talents to preserve, to strengthen, and to move forward those things in which you believe. People determined to succeed.

I think that "determination" is a critical part of leadership.

Thomas Edison once said that, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up," which ^{FOR ME} always seems to me to be a good reminder to push on, whenever I think my cause is just, is right, and is needed. Of course, it also was Edison who had the vision, the patience, and the long-term view when pursuing his creative activities and when finding something that did not work to say, "

have not failed. I've just found "10,000 ways that won't work."

Long-term view is important. Perhaps we all should keep a "running tally" and, when we are "discouraged" that our leadership efforts are not going as quickly or as smoothly as we might like, or obstacles are in our way and progress seems more "dream" than reality – something sure to occur at times, at least in my ^{OWN} experience! – then we can "check" our tally and say to ourselves, "well, that's number 1,043 that just won't work. I still have a ways to go to catch up with Edison!"

I want you to know just how pleased my wife Virginia and I are to be with you here tonight. I am looking forward to getting to know you and to visiting with you now, and in the days ahead. As the new guy on the block in the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, I "welcome" every opportunity to meet and talk with Nebraska's residents. All of you, by your presence here tonight, have made "clear" your commitment to leadership in agriculture and in Nebraska. And I hope you will share with me "your insights" into the most-significant "concerns-and-challenges" facing agriculture and Nebraska today and in the future. I also hope you will tell me "how" you think the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, as well as the entire University, can and should "help" meet your concerns.

I want to commend the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council for "sponsoring" the Nebraska LEAD program. ^{ALSO} I want to quote your mission statement – "to prepare and motivate men and women in agriculture for more effective leadership." "Thank you for the vision that prompted you to "come-together" for such a purpose. You have identified a need and you have filled it.

Let me also recognize here Dr. Allen Blezek, long-time director of the Nebraska LEAD Program. Thank you, Allen, for your leadership and your dedication "in building" our program. I understand, Allen, that a few years ago you were "recognized" by your peers across the country as the "Dean of Agricultural Leadership Programs." It's always a special honor, I think, to be "recognized" by one's peers.

I also want to commend and congratulate the 30 members of Nebraska LEAD 19 for completing "your" two-year program. I know you have put a great deal of time and commitment into your participation. I know it has taken you across Nebraska, to Kansas City, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, "and abroad," to Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. You have had "the opportunity" to explore your own place – and Nebraska's place as well – in the global community, to experience a

diversity of cultures and opinions, to gain skills in building alliances and coalitions, and to examine what you think and what you believe. Thank you for making all of that a high priority. Thank you, also, for your interest in providing leadership in agriculture, in your home communities, and in Nebraska. I am sure that in that time and through that experience you have developed some strong ideas and solid opinions about what we need to do in Nebraska, and in agriculture, and in our rural areas. I certainly want to hear those ideas from you as we get to know each other.

Because I am new on the job and because I am seeking to learn as much as I can as quickly as possible, I am trying to do a great-deal of listening when I have opportunities to visit with people. In the Institute we think of ourselves as partners with Nebraska. We believe in our land-grant university mission to take the resources of this great university to the state. I want to know how you – each of you, everyone in this room – think we can best-partner with our great state and its citizens. I want to know what your hopes are for Nebraska, and for the communities, the families, and the individuals who make Nebraska what it is.

Because I'm asking you to tell me what you think and believe, I think it's only fair to tell you a bit about what I think and believe, also, particularly

as it applies to the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the work we do in our priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people, and communities.

I've been asked many times since my arrival what my goals are for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. What is it that I plan to do?

Well, I've already told you my short-term plans, because I think they're the basis of any building and strengthening activities that, working together, we might do. Those short-term plans are to listen, to seek out information and ideas, and to assimilate that as quickly as good practice allows.

It needs to be very clear that I did not start my new job as University of Nebraska Vice President of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Harlan Vice Chancellor of IANR on January 2 feeling like a physician with a prescription for what the Institute, the University, and the State of Nebraska need. I've always been leery of people who do that, myself – people who arrive and begin talking about what needs to be done before they've ever done the work necessary to find out.

No, I came knowing the Institute and the University bring Nebraska

many strengths. I intend to do my ["]best["] to build on those strengths, and to develop others. But I think it would be presumptuous of me, being on the job about eleven weeks now, to pretend to talk ["]as if I have in-depth knowledge about Nebraska's needs and ["]all the Institute can and should do ["]to help["] meet those needs. You can be assured, however, that I'm doing ["]my very best["] to find out. Throughout the spring and summer I will be traveling across Nebraska, listening carefully to hear what you and others have to say about ["]Nebraska's needs["] that you believe the Institute can help address. I've already had the opportunity to visit Grand Island, Kearney, Columbus, Schuyler, Walthill, ^{and} Scottsbluff, , and I certainly look forward ["]to being["] in those areas again. I've enjoyed meeting with Nebraska residents ["]every-place["] I've been. *NORTH PLATTE + CURTIS - West West!*

There is ["]one thing["] I should tell you about myself. If you've happened to hear me make ["]a presentation["] before ~~tonight~~ you ["]already["] may know this, and if you hear me speak another time you may very well hear it again, because it ["]so influences["] how I view my work, the work of the Institute, and the work of the University as a whole. *I am a strong believer in the land-grant university mission.*

Justin Smith Morrill, the 19th century Vermont senator whose Morrill Act

of 1862 "created" land-grant universities, is "one" of my true heroes. Another is Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into law on July 2, 1862. And incidentally, because this is a room "filled with leaders", and because I've learned "both" the triumphs and trials of leadership throughout my career, let me "share" with you a quote from [REDACTED] Abraham Lincoln. It is a quote I remember when I need to take a long-term view, because my short-term ^{goal} is not moving as quickly – or perhaps even in the direction – that I would like.

"I am a slow walker, but I never walk backwards," Lincoln said.

He also said, "I never had a policy; I just tried to do my very best each and every day," and "The Lord prefers "common-looking" people. That is why he "made" so many of them." President Lincoln had vision, courage, determination, and a sense of humor. How could I not admire him?!

There is a phrase in the Morrill Act that I'm particularly fond of; three words – "the leading object," as in: "the leading object shall be, without excluding "other" scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, "to teach" such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order "to promote" the liberal and practical

education of the industrial classes in the several-pursuits and professions of life."

The leading object of land-grant universities, true when they were first established and just as true today, is to work with the citizens we serve, and to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of the University to the residents of the state. That is one of the guiding principles by which I work.

I am a big-believer in service because I think public-service is a land-grant responsibility. I consider both the concept of service and the act of serving to be highly honorable. I believe that leaders serve, and I think that there is much, all of us working-together, can do to meet the needs of agriculture, rural Nebraska, and this state. While I have not been here long, I-already-have-met enough Nebraskans from those areas we call rural in this state to know I would never bet-against their tenacity, their resiliency, and their determination. I believe it is equal to the tenacity, resiliency, and determination of those-people who settled and grew Nebraska. Those early settlers came here with a dream, and they worked hard to make their dreams happen. When one thing didn't work, they tried another. I believe the-survivors and the-thrivers were those people who,

when something didn't work, did not spend their time doing the same unworkable thing "harder and longer," nor did they bemoan that "nothing-else" would do. They were the people who said to themselves, "well ... if that didn't work ... I wonder what might work?", and then ^{they} tried that new course of action.

I also believe, after three short months here, that people with that same-ability "to dream" and "to accomplish" their goals reside in Nebraska today. I think such people are in this room tonight, and I look forward to working with you.

The American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes, also a surgeon, a teacher, and a lecturer, once "said" that, "*What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.*"

Nebraska needs leaders who can look within themselves and find what it takes to have the courage to step up to the challenges of leading; to have a vision and to share that vision, and to inspire others to "work-together" toward a common good. Nebraska needs citizens with the ability to see "the whole" as well as the parts. Nebraska needs citizens with the capacity "to-step-up" with courage and with good will to do "all" that needs to be done.

I hope that ^{EACH} all of us, working together, will prove ^{to be} that kind of leader.
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Thank you.

Congratulations - AGAIN -

LEAD CLASS 19,

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