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APC Hearings

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APC Hearings
May 3 and 6, 2002
John C. Owens, NU Vice President and Vice Chancellor

at our most recent meeting.

constituents at Scottsbluff,

Members of the Academic Planning Committee, and others here today, it is my responsibility to speak with you about the budget cuts we are recommending in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. This is a difficult task, because I must speak for cuts that I would prefer not to make, cuts I know are opposed by constituents and colleagues whom I hold in high regard, cuts imposed upon us because of the current status of the Nebraska economy.

In the latest round of university budget cuts, we in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources have been assessed a cut of $404,449. We propose to meet this assessment by cutting 3 vacant FTE tenure-line faculty positions and 4.15 FTE staff positions in these areas:

– $22,517 for a .55 FTE staff position in International Programs. We hope successful grant and contract funding will make it possible to continue the position;

– $62,991 in one vacant FTE faculty position in agricultural economics;

– $81,705 in one vacant FTE agricultural journalism position in Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication;

– $23,823 in one vacant FTE Nebraska Forest Service staff secretary III position;

– $213,413 in closing the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at the Panhandle Research and Extension Center Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, resulting in the elimination of 1 vacant FTE tenure-line faculty and 2.6 FTE filled staff positions.

Because of the interest about one of our proposed cuts, I will focus my remarks on the $213,413 cut of the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at the Panhandle Research and Extension Center. Please do not in any way construe this to mean that the other cuts made to our budget were easy, or that I feel good about them. I do not. There is not a "good cut" on our list. Every one of them diminishes the work our faculty and staff can do now and in the future for Nebraska. Let me be very clear about that. Unfortunately, the circumstances in which we and the State of Nebraska find ourselves necessitate our making difficult choices which we think will do the ***least*** overall, long-term damage to IANR programs, the university, and Nebraska.

April 24 I was in Scottsbluff when over 200 people turned out there to indicate their support for the Panhandle Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. I heard their concerns, as well as their strong support for the laboratory and its work, which speaks so well of the service provided by the IANR staff who work in this

laboratory and who are so responsive to our clientele. I have toured that laboratory, and I know the value it has to the Panhandle and to Nebraska. I also know, firsthand, how painful it is to look people in the eye and tell them they will lose their jobs through no fault of their own, but because of economic conditions none of us created, but to which all of us must respond. I would rather do almost anything than have to tell IANR employees that fact. Or to tell IANR constituents who support and value our work that, while we will continue to provide laboratory services and educational opportunities for them – and that is key, we ***WILL*** continue to provide laboratory services and educational opportunities – we cannot do so in the exact ways they wish, as we did in the past.

Currently the Institute must cut $404,449 from our budget. This $404,449 cut comes on top of the $1,464,060 we cut from the Institute budget as a result of the Legislature's October 2001 special session. When we made the budget cut necessitated by the October special session, we did a much more across-the-board cut. While this shares the pain, it also weakens every program. You'll recall that, at the time we prepared for the special session cuts, unsure what they eventually would be, Chancellor Perlman asked every unit at UNL to provide a 5 percent budget cut scenario.

As the Institute's administrative team studied the balance left in those

scenarios after we'd made the cuts required by October's special session, it was painfully clear we cannot continue to bleed all programs the same, or we will weaken the Institute beyond its capacity to provide the quality asked of its faculty and staff. Doing so would not be to the advantage of the Institute, the university, our constituents, or the State of Nebraska, so we made the hard decision to look ~~for~~ at PROGRAMS for vertical cuts where reasonable alternatives were available, per a recommendation of the IANR Budget Reduction Task Force. We did this to preserve other Institute programs from further weakening. That led to the difficult recommendation to close the Panhandle Diagnostic Laboratory, a vertical cut that accounts for $213,413 of the $404,449 the Institute must carve from our budget.

Let me be very clear here: Our Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System has multiple locations within the system – as part of the Panhandle Research and Extension Center at Scottsbluff, at the West Central Research and Extension Center in North Platte, and on the East Campus in Lincoln. That has made Nebraska especially fortunate. Virtually all of the states that surround us have only one such laboratory. Our two laboratories outside of Lincoln provide a limited scope of services, with more sophisticated testing referred to UNL's full-service Veterinary Diagnostic Center in Lincoln. It takes one day to ship the lab samples to Lincoln. We've heard the concern that people will ship their samples to Wyoming

or Colorado if the Scottsbluff laboratory isn't available, and while that might be accurate – certainly some veterinarians in northeast Nebraska already send specimens to Brookings, South Dakota – it would take one day to send specimens to Wyoming and Colorado, as well as to Lincoln. There would be no real gain there, nor any tremendous loss of time, when one-day shipping is available. Shipping to Lincoln allows results and types of diseases to be tracked in Nebraska, and to be used to assist producers in the statewide extension veterinarian program.

Our constituents in the Panhandle note that the Panhandle laboratory has been the most productive of our two satellite laboratories in the system in recent years, and they are absolutely correct. There is, however, context to that statement. The difference in productivity between the Panhandle and West Central laboratories is narrowing. Until last year the West Central laboratory, which has better facilities, went essentially two years without a veterinary faculty member. Since that faculty position was filled at North Platte a year ago, the number of samples tested has steadily increased. And, the veterinary pathologist who left the Panhandle center was an extraordinarily high and seasoned performer who we were especially sorry to see leave to go into private industry.

We know that three laboratories in Nebraska provide convenience to the Institute's constituents, and we value that. However, with the budget constraints the

governor and Legislature have imposed upon the university because of the state's revenue shortfall, we unhappily can no longer provide this convenience. We can, however, ensure that our constituents' needs are met through our Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System, and I propose that their needs will be met. The reality is, the tenure-line position at the Panhandle laboratory is vacant. And, unless a financial exigency were to be declared, the university will not make cuts in filled, tenured faculty positions, and that is as it should be for the university.

Since this cut was announced, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has said the Panhandle laboratory is important to it in identifying Chronic Wasting Disease in deer and related species. We are in discussions with Bruce Morrison of the Game and Parks Commission now for a grant or a contract to provide lab availability and an employee for their testing there. Mr. Morrison has indicated to me that there is a high probability of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission providing funding for this project. But... grants + contracts are difficult

And, because the Panhandle lab provides extension education, as well as laboratory services in the area, we are asking the Head of our Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences Department and the Dean of Cooperative Extension to work together to find alternative ways we can provide critical extension veterinarian-education programs there. We are committed to that.

Our commitment to the Panhandle region and to Nebraska is deep-rooted, and it is real. The only MBA/Community Development Specialist located at any research and extension center in Nebraska is at the Panhandle Research-and-Extension Center, and has been there for a number of years. We refilled that position this past year when the person who had been in it left the university. The Scottsbluff Learning Center is a high priority for the university, and its faculty and staff do a superb job of serving the public, in partnership with Chadron State College and Western Community College. Just this March, we refilled the Learning Center coordinator position, demonstrating our continued commitment to the role of the Learning Center in the Panhandle. We also, in August of 2001, filled a new family life specialist position at the Panhandle Research-and-Extension Center. Unfortunately, cutting budgets means cutting programs – productive, good, programs. Cutting budgets means making choices you'd rather not make, choosing what you think is the least "bad choice" from an array of bad choices, knowing you are disappointing, even angering, people you value and respect. With state revenues for March below forecasts, and with early indicators pointing to lower-than-expected April revenues, as well, the state's budget situation remains highly-uncertain. If we do not make today's proposed cuts, then we will need to make comparable dollar amount cuts elsewhere, in ways that we think will hurt our

programs, our constituents, and Nebraska even more than these proposed cuts.

There are no good choices. We think these are the least bad of the lot. Thank you.

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President's Council IS MEETING NOW

Assoc. V.C. – Chuck Laglen
Dean Elbert Dickey
DEAN STEVE WALLER
+
OTHERS ARE IN THE ROOM.