

9-16-2002

Nebraska Lead XXII Dinner

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Owens, John, "Nebraska Lead XXII Dinner" (2002). *John Owens: Speeches & Appearances*. 60.
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NEBRASKA LEAD XXII DINNER
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA EAST UNION
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2002
JOHN C. OWENS
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR

I'd like to start tonight with the words of the late anthropologist Margaret Mead, who once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

As the LEAD22 class I have no doubt that you are a group of thoughtful Nebraska citizens, and "we" look forward with enthusiastic anticipation to your very important "participation in various agricultural and other organizations when you complete this "wonderful" program. We in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources "look-forward to all you can and will do in the years ahead, and we look forward to working-with-you for the betterment of agriculture and Nebraska.

We know "taking-part" in LEAD is a major commitment for you, as well as for your families, and we "applaud" that commitment. We "thank" the people investing between \$10,000-\$12,000 in each LEAD fellow present, a significant commitment on their-parts." We know they are "looking-forward" to a great return on the investment they are making in you. Such investments ^{SUCH} and commitments show the "high-regard" in which you're held, and the "great-hopes" others have for you.

Here in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources we've shown our "own ~~very-great~~ commitment to LEAD by ~~serv~~ing as the program's ~~home-base~~" since its inception over 20 years ago. And as Allen Blezek, recognized ~~nationally~~ by his peers as the "dean" of agricultural leadership programs, ~~will-tell-you~~, we have made a *considerable investment* in LEAD, as well. In fact, over the past 20 years the Institute has invested more than \$2 million in LEAD by providing the director's salary and ~~office-space~~ for the LEAD program. We in the Institute ~~believe-in~~ and we ~~support~~ LEAD. We ~~believe-in~~ and we ~~support~~ you. And we welcome your ~~belief-in~~ and your ~~support-of~~ the ~~very-valuable-work~~ the Institute does ~~throughout~~ Nebraska to strengthen and to preserve agriculture, natural resources, families, and communities in ~~our state~~. OUR STATE.

As ~~your~~ land-grant university, we continually ~~work~~ with the citizens of Nebraska to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of ~~this-university~~ to Nebraskans. We in the Institute take ~~very-seriously~~ our land-grant university mission in our focus areas of food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources. Every land-grant university ~~worth-its-salt~~ continually is engaged in a give-and-take ~~exchange~~ of ideas, vision, and concerns with the citizens of its state, and I think Nebraska does ~~that~~ in a remarkably — successful way.

That's why it's so important we work together with you, exchanging ideas ~~and~~ knowledge, identifying needs, and figuring out how, ~~working together~~, we can meet those needs. In the Institute we see ourselves as partners with Nebraska, and as our partners, we look to you ~~to tell us~~ how we're doing. We value your ideas, and ~~your help~~ in identifying the needs of Nebraska. We hope you will work with us to find the solutions to meet those needs.

At present, your land-grant university is going through extremely difficult times, and we know we are not alone in that. There are more than enough hard times to go around in both our nation and our state right now, with the drought and Nebraska's economic difficulties. Many of us are sharing in them.

At the university, Nebraska's revenue shortfall has led to cutting our budget three times in less than a year. Last Tuesday, Chancellor Harvey Perlman announced that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will cut the equivalent of 164.8 full-time positions, and 110 people will lose their jobs, as UNL makes \$7.5 million in cuts required of it. The Institute was assessed slightly over \$2 million of that \$7.5 million cut. Twenty-nine people within IANR will lose all or part of their jobs, and we will lose vacant positions, as well.

This over \$2 million cut comes on top of \$1.9 million cut from the Institute's budget in earlier rounds of budget cuts. With this latest rounds of cuts, the Institute

has been forced to cut nearly \$4 million from the budget-year we are operating in right now. We cannot cut nearly \$4 million and not-bleed. That is a fact, not a whine, and I share it with you tonight because every Nebraskan here is a stakeholder in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. There is no-university that belongs so-completely to the citizens of its state as your land-grant university, and because you are our stakeholders, a stakeholders report is due. In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, as with the rest of the university, we are cutting deeper-and-deeper into the muscle and bone of the work our faculty and staff—conduct with each-round of cuts.

Within the Institute we do not think we can make these cuts in our current fiscal year as across-the-board budget-reductions, because to do so could weaken all of the Institute to a point from which we never could recover. That would be irresponsible. Instead, we are, with a great deal of regret, proposing some vertical cuts, as we did after the Legislature's regular-session-cuts earlier this year, when our vertical-cut was the Panhandle Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

IANR administration is shouldering 25 percent – over \$500,000 of our proposed over \$2 million cuts – in administrative-positions that range from our department heads and directors up through the offices of our deans and vice chancellor. Over the years, the Institute has consciously-reduced its administration

"in favor of diverting dollars to IANR programs, faculty, and staff. That continues here. We propose eliminating the equivalent of 4.25 full-time administrative positions. I want to talk about a couple of them tonight, just to clarify what you may have read in the newspaper, which listed two of them without explanation. The State 4-H Director is one of our cuts, but we are not in any way abandoning 4-H, an extremely important program to us, and to Nebraska. The person formally in that position will retire at the end of the fiscal year, and the Associate Dean of our Cooperative Extension Division has assumed additional duties as the State 4-H Program Administrator."

We also are cutting the vacant Director of the School of Natural Resource Sciences position because the School and our Conservation and Survey Division are merging under one director. I think it important that I share this with you so there is no misunderstanding about the university's commitment to natural resources. Our commitment remains strong, and we think this merger of the School of Natural Resource Sciences and the Conservation and Survey Division will provide Nebraska even more strength in this area. And, actually, although we included it in the cuts for the Nebraska Forest Service, there is another administrative position – Assistant State Forester – that also is a proposed cut, which makes over five administrative positions gone.

We did explore many, many scenarios before proposing vertical cuts, but in the end we could not find a responsible way to make this over \$2 million budget cut asked of us without vertical reductions." We are, with sadness, proposing closing the South Central Research and Extension Center, and the West Central Research and Extension Center Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

The South Central Research and Extension Center, located at Clay Center, is a \$661,707 cut in which 19 positions will be lost. While South Central is a productive center, it has the smallest number of faculty and the least infrastructure of any of our research and extension centers. With our state's financial circumstances forcing university-cutbacks, we no longer can afford as many research and extension center locations across Nebraska. We must consolidate our resources to where there is the critical mass necessary to conduct the quality programs expected of us."

Tenured faculty at the center will move to another research and extension center or to East Campus as we look for the best match for their expertise and the needs of the university and our state. Others employed there will lose their jobs. I went to Clay Center the day the cuts were announced to tell the people there what would occur. Believe me, I would rather do almost anything than have to look into the faces of good employees who have done their best for our state – excellent

work of value to Nebraska – and tell them they are losing their jobs. We simply do not see any other choice.

We do plan to maintain the existing South Central Research Farm as a field laboratory. That will allow us to continue much of the agronomic research of benefit to area producers. The University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center, located at the center, will not be cut in this round of budget cuts. And while we have proposed the South Central center close, our Cooperative Extension Division county-offices in that district remain, and will be reassigned to our remaining four extension districts which will be restructured over the coming year.

Another proposed vertical cut on-our-list is the West Central Research and Extension Center Diagnostic Laboratory at North Platte. This is a \$211,370 cut that affects the equivalent of 3.5 full-time positions. While we were able to save this laboratory in the last round of cuts, we cannot, in these extremely difficult economic times, afford the convenience of satellite services, much as we would like to keep them available. Our laboratories outside Lincoln traditionally have offered a limited scope of services, with more-sophisticated-testing referred to the full-service Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Lincoln. We think the Lincoln laboratory will continue to meet the state's veterinary diagnostic needs, but we will do so —

differently than in the past.

We are making other cuts, too, of course – it takes a great number of cuts to reach over \$2 million. We are proposing a merger of the Nebraska Forest Service and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, thinking we can see significant savings through efficiencies and sharing of resources there. We also are cutting other positions in other units as we must to make these over \$2 million in cuts asked of us.

These are not cuts we want to make. These are cuts we have to make, because the dollars are gone. We have agonized over making them, seeking many, many other solutions. It is extremely frustrating to be forced into cuts which we know eliminate needed programs, cause our constituents unhappiness, and cause good employees to hurt. But we must. This is the hand we've been dealt, and this is the responsibility we've been given. I know you can understand that, just as you understand that there have been a lot of cattle sold in our state over the past year that nobody really wanted to sell. But with the drought, there were't resources to keep them. Such decisions hurt to the bone, but when they're the decisions you have to make, you make them.

We are responding to the cuts asked of us, and we're doing it in the best way we know how, struggling to preserve as much of the seed of future Nebraska harvests as we can. We are especially conscious that what is happening now

literally does affect Nebraska's – and Nebraskans' – future. We also are very-conscious that more-budget-cuts may occur when the Legislature convenes in January. This is of grave-concern to us and, we think, to the future of Nebraska and its university. We welcome your ideas and ^{your} support as we work-through this very difficult time.

(pause)

As you participate in the LEAD program over the next two years, I wish you much good-fortune. As a LEAD Fellow you now are part of an exciting, challenging, productive experience which I think you'll find to be of significant value throughout-your-life. I urge you to embrace every opportunity you have with the LEAD program, and to take everything you can from it. Then pass it on!

I will be glad to take questions, or visit with you later, if you like. Thank you.

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