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Joy Castro [speaker], Installation of the 20th Chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ronnie D. Green, April 6, 2017

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Joy Castro
6 April 2017

Remarks for Ronnie's Installation

We are gathered here today in celebration, happiness, and hope for our shared future.

Public higher education is one of the greatest gifts we have and one of the greatest gifts we can give. Extending to all people the sharpened ability to reason, to research the facts, to argue effectively, and to use multiple disciplinary lenses to solve complex problems: this fortifies them against anyone who wants to consolidate wealth and power through brute force or deception (or both), because people who are well educated are not easily fooled and not easily led.

To impart a university education to ordinary people—a *real* university education, which includes the professions, the fine and performing arts, and the liberal arts (that is, the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities)—is to immunize them against exploitation, for the university is a place where we ask and answer not only immediately pragmatic questions—like “What is profitable?” and “What’s politically expedient?”—but also the big, long-term ones: “What is valuable?” “What is wise?” “What is good?” and “What is just?” And because we are a public land grant institution, we ask these questions on behalf of all Nebraskans and all those who come to us from other states and other shores.

We commit to the untrammelled intellectual exchange among all peoples of the world, and to protecting their freedom to study and learn with us. We commit to expanding access to higher education and to transforming our campus, our curriculum, and our pedagogy so that every student who comes to us, from no matter what background and facing no matter what challenges, will feel welcomed, affirmed, included, and seen.

I speak today as a representative of the faculty—an impossible charge, given the diversity of views and values we hold—but what I can say with certainty is that professors are highly educated people, and because of this, we are not easily fooled, and we are not easily led.

Yet—to a woman and man—every colleague with whom I’ve talked about Ronnie Green has praised him: his sharp grasp of the big picture (the national higher ed landscape as well as the political landscape we all must navigate); his sense of proportion and priorities; his mix of clear-eyed realism and ambitious dreams; and his knockout ability to talk for an hour, without notes, and *get it all right*. (Maybe we’re especially impressed by that, as professors, because we know how hard that is.) And for me, above all, stand his desire to listen and his capacity to hear—really, deeply hear—what people different from himself are saying. In a very brief span of time, Ronnie Green has earned our confidence—has come to feel like a leader not in name only, but in every genuine sense of the word.

Leaders need back-up. If they are continually to act with courage, boldness, and long-term vision, they need to know that the people they’re leading can handle the risk of that, can support and trust them in that. They need to know that we, too, are willing to be practical, gallant, and brave.

These are challenging times for public higher education and for the state of Nebraska. The arts, the humanities, and the sciences are under explicit threat, as are our natural resources—which are particularly important to us here, with our legacy of rich land and pristine water.

Leading the University of Nebraska will require unusual vision and courage. But it’s safe to say that Ronnie Green is a man not easily fooled and not easily led. As Chancellor, he has begun already to demonstrate his extraordinary capacity to lead us well.

We have every faith that he will.