

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

## DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

John Owens: Speeches & Appearances

Agriculture and Natural Resources, Institute of  
(IANR)

---

9-14-2002

### The Nebraska State Grange

John Owens

University of Nebraska–Lincoln,, jowens2@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/owenspeech>



Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#)

---

Owens, John, "The Nebraska State Grange" (2002). *John Owens: Speeches & Appearances*. 58.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/owenspeech/58>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Agriculture and Natural Resources, Institute of (IANR) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in John Owens: Speeches & Appearances by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**THE NEBRASKA STATE GRANGE  
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2002  
HOLIDAY LODGE, FREMONT  
JOHN C. OWENS  
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR, IANR**

Thank you so much for inviting my wife Virginia and me to be with you today. You've picked one of my favorite topics in asking me to speak about the land-grant university. It delights me to talk about land-grant universities in general, and about the land-grant university mission we take so very seriously in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources in particular, because I am so proud of the way our faculty and staff continually strive to contribute to and improve the economic and societal well-being of rural Nebraska, as well as all of Nebraska.

I am a true believer in the land-grant university mission, and a great admirer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Vermont Senator, Justin Smith Morrill, whose Morrill Act of 1862 created land-grant universities. I also am a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into law on July 2, 1862. I consider the Morrill Act one of the most far-sighted and far-reaching pieces of legislation ever passed by the United States Congress.

I like to quote the Morrill Act whenever I can, and am particularly fond of the

phrase, “the leading object,” as it’s used in the Morrill Act: *“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 such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal-and-practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.”*

When you visit the Institute on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s east campus and at its statewide research and extension centers – and I hope you do visit us, whenever possible – you find the words “The Leading Object” on the doors to Institute buildings. I think that <sup>“</sup>each time <sup>“</sup> we in the Institute, and those who visit us, <sup>“</sup>see those signs <sup>”</sup> we are reminded of the great land-grant university mission to which we are called, and the illustrious <sup>“</sup>educational heritage <sup>”</sup> that is ours to advance.

The leading object of land-grant universities, <sup>“</sup>true <sup>”</sup> when they were first established and just as true today, is <sup>“</sup>to work <sup>”</sup> with the people we serve, and to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of the university to the citizens of the state. Every land-grant university <sup>“</sup>worth its salt <sup>”</sup> is engaged in a <sup>“</sup>give-and-take <sup>”</sup> exchange of ideas, vision, and concerns with the citizens of its state, and I think Nebraska <sup>“</sup>does that <sup>”</sup> in a remarkably successful way. That’s <sup>“</sup>why <sup>”</sup> it’s so important we work together <sup>“</sup>with you <sup>”</sup>, exchanging ideas and knowledge, identifying needs, and

figuring out how, together, we can meet those needs. In the Institute we see ourselves as partners with Nebraska. As our partners, we look to you to tell us how we're doing.

We in the Institute fulfill our land-grant university mission by discovering new knowledge through research in our focus areas of food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources. Then we share that new knowledge with the world. That is what land-grant universities do best. We provide solid, unbiased, research-based information people can use to make choices and decisions in their lives. We transfer that knowledge in our classrooms and teaching laboratories, along with the learning and living skills that help people apply knowledge and build on that knowledge so they can participate in lifelong learning, and so they can be responsible community, state, national, and world citizens.

We also transfer knowledge in another meaningful way when we extend knowledge to the citizens of Nebraska through our statewide Cooperative Extension programs. Extension education is a key component of the land-grant university mission and of the university's scholarly activity, and I know you value it, too. The book you've shared with me, "The Grange in Nebraska 1872-1987," compiled by Max Malone, notes that the Grange was instrumental in the development of the Extension Service, and even before Extension was available, the Grange was

bringing the latest agricultural information to Nebraska producers. The Grange and land-grant universities both know the value of education, and what it adds to people's lives. Both have long and proud legacies of providing education people can use. Both understand the importance of building skills that contribute not only to a career, but how to live a life.

I firmly believe the Morrill Act of 1862 that created land-grant universities was the key to democratizing higher education in the United States. Before the Morrill Act, higher education belonged mostly to the rich, and colleges did not concentrate on practical solutions based on science and technology.

I think of my maternal great-grandfather, Heinrich Englebrecht, who immigrated with no money and no education from Germany to this country just as the Civil War broke out here. He left Germany to escape military conscription and, with remarkably bad timing, landed at the port of Galveston just in time to be rounded-up and sworn, under gunpoint, into the confederacy.

After the Civil War, he began farming and accumulated land both in Central Texas, where he lived, and on the High Plains, as well. My great-grandfather never had the opportunity to go to college. But his grandchildren and great-grandchildren did, in fields ranging from electrical engineering, to veterinary medicine, to English, to nursing, to law, and to agriculture. I'm firmly convinced I am in debt to this

nation's land-grant university system for opportunities in my family. And we can thank land-grant institutions for the education they've provided legions of people down through the years, people who've made valuable and important contributions to our world because they had access to the higher education needed to provide them the knowledge and the opportunities to excel. We can thank land-grant universities, also, for the research conducted to benefit agriculture and those involved in it, as well as consumers of our agricultural products, and for all those extension-education programs that share the results of university research and put it to use in people's lives.

I have been associated with land-grant universities most of my life, and I can tell you without reservation that all of us in Nebraska have a land-grant university of which we can be especially proud. It is a land-grant university going through extremely difficult times at the present, and we know we are not alone in that. There are more than enough hard times to go around in both our state and nation right now, and 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. The latest proposed cuts have been much in the news this week; Chancellor Harvey Perlman announced Tuesday 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. In the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, we were 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 announced ~~this week~~, in the Institute we have been forced to cut nearly \$4 million from the budget year we are operating in right now.

Folks, we can't cut nearly \$4 million and not bleed. That's not a whine – that's a fact. It's a fact I share with you today 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.

We have determined in the Institute that we cannot make \$4 million of cuts in our current fiscal year budget across-the-board, 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 earlier this year, when our vertical-cut was the Panhandle Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

In the Institute, 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, and I want to talk about a couple of them, just to clarify what you may have read in the newspaper. The State 4-H Director is one of our cuts, but we are not in any way abandoning 4-H, a very 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 State 4-H Program Administrator. We also are cutting the vacant Director of the School of Natural Resource Sciences position because this School and our Conservation and Survey Division are merging under one director. I think it important that I tell you this so there is no misunderstanding about our 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 us <sup>even more</sup> strength in this area. And actually, although we included <sup>it</sup> in the cuts for the Nebraska Forest Service, there is another administrative position – Assistant State Forester – that is a proposed cut, which makes <sup>over</sup> five administrative positions <sup>gone</sup>.

As I said earlier, although we explored many, <sup>many</sup> budget ~~reduction~~ scenarios, we could not find a responsible way <sup>to make this over \$2 million budget cut asked of us without vertical cuts</sup>. We are, <sup>with sadness</sup>, proposing closing the South Central Research and Extension Center, and the West Central Research and Extension Center 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 <sup>the smallest</sup> number of faculty and <sup>the least</sup> infrastructure of any of our research and extension centers. With the states' financial circumstances <sup>forcing</sup> university cutbacks, we no longer <sup>can afford</sup> as many ~~research and extension center~~ locations across our state. We must <sup>consolidate</sup> our resources to where there is <sup>the critical mass</sup> necessary to conduct those quality programs <sup>expected</sup> of us.

<sup>Tenured faculty</sup> 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 Tuesday, 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 that 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 some 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.

You *know* these are not cuts we want to make. These are cuts we *have* to make, because the dollars are permanently gone. We have agonized over making them, seeking other solutions. It is extremely-frustrating to be forced into cuts we know eliminate needed programs, cause our constituents unhappiness, and cause good employees hurt. But we must. This is the hand we've been dealt, and this is the responsibility we've been given. We're responding to 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 <sup>1</sup>very conscious<sup>2</sup> that what is happening now <sup>1</sup>literally<sup>2</sup> does affect Nebraska's – and Nebraskans' – future. We also are <sup>u</sup>highly-conscious<sup>4</sup> 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 know that when we make these cuts we will be <sup>u</sup>a different<sup>^</sup>, more narrowly-focused Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. As our <sup>u</sup>stakeholders<sup>''</sup>, you need to know we are *determined* to remain a *strong* Institute, focused on the <sup>u</sup>quality-work<sup>''</sup> needed to fulfill our partnership with our state, and the people who make it possible for this great land-grant university to exist. We welcome your support and ideas as we work our way through this very-hard-time <sup>u</sup>facing<sup>''</sup> us all.

Thank you. I would be glad to take questions, if you like.

###