



Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D.
State of the University Address
University of Nebraska at Omaha
September 25, 2017

Welcome to the 2017 State of the University Address. Thank you so much for joining us today. I extend a special welcome to our community members, our alumni, elected officials, our regents, members of the military, and of course to our students, to our faculty, and to our staff.

Thank you for being a part of the University of Nebraska at Omaha family. It is a great honor to be with you today and an even greater honor and a privilege to have been asked to lead this great University. It is an honor to work closely with our students; faculty and staff; with our alumni; with our sister campuses and partner organizations; and even more so to work closely with the wide spectrum of diverse communities that we have the honor of serving.

I am truly humbled to have this opportunity to be part of this university, as I, too, have much in common with many of our students, both past and present, who are the first in their family to have a college experience.

My life story starts east of here, in the city of New York. My path traveled through the inner city, through public K-12 education, and a scholarship-supported undergraduate engineering degree, and then through countless full time and part time jobs. My path also traveled through a medical degree, several surgical residencies and fellowships in NY and Boston, and again, all were made possible through generous scholarship support, student loans and work-study employment.

For more than 25 years of service to patients with heart disease, to repair tiny little hearts and in so doing give literally tens of thousands of families both healing and hope. For decades of service to educate the next generations of clinicians, and as service as a physician-scientist, stewarding many millions of dollars of research support to advance the art and science of health and healing.

I have been honored to have my journey in the Academy include titles such as professor, department chair, center director, dean, provost and now

as a university chancellor. And even more importantly, I have enjoyed being the son of two hardworking parents, a sibling, a husband for more than 40 years, a dad to two wonderful children and most recently, and perhaps my most preferred title now: grandpa.

For all of these years, and even more so today, I too have continuously been a student, a learner. I have learned to listen and to hear, to reflect and to consider, and to hear the thoughts and the needs and the aspirations of others and at the same time maintain an inquisitive and yet data-driven approach to servant leadership.

Next January will mark my fourth year here in Nebraska, part of our university community. Four years since I was recruited by a search committee, hired by our Board of Regents, and began the work for the communities we serve. Four years to strive to be an exemplar for our nation, to set a new standard for the academic health sciences.

It was almost exactly a year ago that we all learned that Chancellor John Christensen, after a decade of remarkable leadership, was going to step down and serve the university community in a different way. [Speaking to Christensen] John, it was under your watch, and truly

remarkable leadership team that was assembled and honed, that the Maverick Momentum became truly unstoppable. Ladies and gentlemen, please help me recognize and thank Chancellor Emeritus John Christensen and his wonderful family. Thank you, John.

It was four short months ago, approximately, that I was asked to take on the leadership role here at UNO and to embark upon yet another phase of my journey. I was then, and am very much today truly honored, humbled, and excited to do so.

However, it was also almost exactly 45 years ago, in the fall of 1972, that another former UNO Chancellor was giving his first "State of the University Address," and this is in part what he had to say, and I quote:

"Beneath the veneer of tranquility which pervades the University of Nebraska at Omaha, there is discernable apprehensiveness, uncertainty, and curiosity. Such conditions in times of administrative change are not at all unusual."

This leader went on to say that "A new university chancellor is typically greeted by: 1) a few skeptics, 2) some individuals whose habit patterns are rigidly fixed and not immediately

susceptible to alteration, and 3) a considerable reservoir of human talent, which begs to be released and harnessed. It is the conversion of this raw energy, of that great bulk of his constituency, and turning that into 'go power.' This is the major task of the administrative head of any institution."

Those are the words of former UNO Chancellor Ron Roskens. In this address he then added, and I quote, "We, in this room, are numbered among the guardians of her destiny."

"The guardians of her destiny" – a profound responsibility, a profound calling for us all. It was important in 1972, and I suggest to you that it's even more important today.

You and I, each of us here today, and many, many others, are charged with this important responsibility to be the "defenders and protectors" of UNO. To defend and protect our mission as this great metropolitan university must serve our current and future students, the entire UNO family, and the university community.

I believe that never has this responsibility, the need to steward our mission and our values been more important. Never have we been called so profoundly to guard her destiny.

To mention just a few of the stresses that currently confront higher education, you're well aware of the increasing competition for students; the increasing competition in research and scholarly pursuits; decreasing high school enrollment; increased needs of college bound students; the continuous recruitment and retention of superb faculty; of course the budgeting issues at the state and national levels across this country; and the rising costs of education and research, just to mention a few; but perhaps even more profoundly, the increasing questions both locally and nationally about the lifetime value proposition of earning a college degree and those degrees that may follow.

Indeed, it was in The Atlantic Magazine in 2017 that reported that the Harvard Business School Professor Dr. Clayton Christensen – who coined the phrase "Disruptive Innovation" in the 1990s – predicted that up to half of the nation's 4,000 colleges and universities will fail in the next 15 years. This prediction is up from one approximately a decade ago that predicted between a fifth and a quarter of our nation's universities would not survive.

I predict, however, that if indeed they do fail it will not be for purely financial, academic or structural

reasons, but if they fail it will be for failures of vision, failures of creativity, failures of flexibility, earnest planning and resilience. As Admiral James Stockdale said, to fail to continually face the brutal facts and always stay focused on the future horizons.

Yes, there are unquestionable challenges ahead of us – challenges both known and unknown, challenges that we need to own and embrace. Our core values of access, academic excellence, and unwavering focus on our clearly stated mission, on our role as a metropolitan university, embedded in the Omaha community yet impacting the world, will be the foundation of our continued growth and our success.

The focus on the UNO academic mission, the success of our students and the success of communities that we serve should and cannot waver, they will always be our guide. This focus must guide also how we prepare for and react to the challenges, how we continue to evolve; how we continue to grow; how we turn each and every challenge into an opportunity.

Over the past four months, I have come to better know this great university. I have learned much by reading, attending countless meetings – and I mean countless meetings –

working with the senior leadership, the colleges, the deans, department chairs, and others, meeting with the transition advisory councils and teams as well. I have learned that there is good cause to be optimistic about our future. For we are growing in many ways.

Earlier this month, we announced a record-breaking freshman class. This is the third historic first-year class in UNO's 109-year-history. Our Graduate Studies had the second largest class in university history. And our national retention is high. Our graduations are high. Extramural research funding is at record levels as well. This is true growth, and by the way, in this day and age, the opposite of growth is not maintaining the status quo. The opposite of growth is non-sustainability.

However, I have learned far more about UNO by walking through the campus on nights and weekends, meeting students, faculty and staff, meeting them in our classrooms, our labs, our studios and conference rooms, our athletic venues, as well as meeting rooms in student centers.

I have learned by talking with our students and alumni about their pride in UNO, and how much they and their family have sacrificed to enable their education, and about how much their

college experience here has changed their life and added to their success.

These are lessons that are difficult to quantify and hard to record, but are invaluable to me and to all who are privileged to serve this great university. I continue to hear stories of working families, first-generation students, many challenged by multigenerational poverty. I hear stories of our faculty, many of whom themselves were first generation students. Other stories about our faculty, about their current and former students, the pride they have, their research, their dedication, and their ongoing community engagement. Countless stories about the innovative community impact of UNO here in Omaha, across the state, and around the world.

I recently had the opportunity to meet a first-year med student from South Omaha, a proud young woman, a graduate of the high school alliance and the shared UHOP program. She's a first-generation student, educated with scholarship support, and already volunteering her time in the community in which she grew up, clearly, having truly limitless potential. This young woman embodies the Maverick spirit and is proof positive that it can be done, and that the UNO mission is a vibrant reality.

I am not only honored to join you on this journey, but even more so I am inspired by those who I have joined with me on this journey of a lifetime, and those who have come before me.

I get asked all the time, "Jeff, what is your priority? What do you hope to accomplish?" and invariably, they always ask "What keeps you up at night?" Let me tell you, very little keeps me up at night. But simply said, my priorities are to help steward the destiny of this university. Not merely sustainability, but true excellence, distinction and distinctiveness in the mission -riven areas we choose to pursue.

My priorities are also to help set and then to clearly communicate this strategy. If we have dozens or hundreds of priorities, we truly have none. I hope to help align the priorities and initiatives of our colleges, departments, students, faculty, staff, and the leadership of UNO, to increase the impact, to find new resources, and to accelerate the success of our goals.

If we struggle in aligning these priorities, and if we don't share these priorities clearly, as well as taking the opportunity to share our success and the brightly colored mile posts of our journey, or as we would say "tell the Maverick story," all of these priorities,

initiatives, and goals would truly fall short.

Further, my priorities are to maintain and even more so strengthen the Maverick spirit, the Maverick reputation, and the Maverick value. To continue to grow and to thrive. To create opportunities for all, and by the way I do mean all whom we serve and those who serve us as part of the Maverick family. And at the same time, to vigilantly steward the resources, the talent, the time and the treasure, of all who make our mission here possible. And finally, my priority is to make you proud, proud to be a Maverick, proud to be part of the University of Nebraska, and proud to be on this journey together. I will continue to measure my own success by quote “making other people’s dreams come true,” by making your dreams come true.

In closing, I would like to leave you today with a bold call to action, an aspirational goal that will hopefully inspire you as it continually inspires me. It consists of three critical parts: First, to know the O, not merely the colors and bands, but to fully understand the Maverick mission, the vision, and the Maverick spirit. Second, to show the O, not only to wear the brand, but to carry it inside and out, to tell the world, to to be a continuous advocate and ambassador

for UNO. And finally, and most importantly, to truly own the O, to live the Maverick spirit. To embody the well-defined culture of bold innovation, creativity and hard work, of dedication and tenacity, of openness to new thought and to embrace the future. To respect and maintain a solid grounding in our legacy but at the same time to strengthen a bold and forward-looking spirit, the Maverick spirit. And to this end, I hope that you will take the 2017-2018 “Know the O” materials and to take the “Points of Pride booklet,” both of which are highlighting the Maverick Momentum. Learn more about our university. Embrace the unlimited potential that is alive and well at UNO. This is how you will know the O, show the O, and again, most importantly, own the O.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you again for being here today and for being a part of the Maverick family. I very much look forward to our continued journey together, as we together serve as the “guardians of her destiny.” Thank you very much.