

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

UNO is set to move ahead

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, and the forward momentum is continuing.

In his State of the University address this week, UNO Chancellor John Christensen looked back at the recent growth and accomplishments, then set out a thoughtful, strategic vision for the school's future.

The central goal he described is the right one: To make UNO nationally known as a top-flight metropolitan university. That means a campus that sets high academic standards and builds close connections to its community.

UNO has taken some huge steps toward that goal. Here are just a few examples: Through its dormitory construction, UNO is shifting from a commuter-campus persona. The HPER building, with its array of exercise space and equipment, exemplifies UNO's commitment to boosting student amenities. Individual departments have shown bursts of ambition supported by new construction or building renovations for the College of Public Affairs and Community Service, the College of Business Administration and the College of Education.

As Christensen noted, the point isn't to pursue construction for construction's sake. Rather, new facilities need to open up new academic opportunities and strengthen educational quality.

Academic strides forward include the national accreditation of numerous programs as well as UNO's winning three NU-wide awards.

In looking to the future, Christensen called for UNO to grow over the next nine years to an enrollment of 20,000, up from the current 15,400. That plan incorporates dorm construction on the south campus as well as stepped-up marketing efforts not only in Nebraska but also in western Iowa.

Christensen also has made community engagement a key goal for UNO, and last year UNO won a national award for the quality of its civic involvement. The chancellor's strategic plan calls for continued focus on that goal. The planned Community Engagement Center, for example, would open up new opportunities for UNO to host public discussions and solution-seeking on a wide array of community issues.

Also on the to-do list is completion of a long-range plan for UNO's athletic facilities, due this fall.

Christensen was straightforward in saying that UNO departments must designate a few key academic offerings as priorities and concentrate resources on key goals. "The financial realities now and into the future for public institutions," he said, "will require that new and reallocated resources directly support campus priorities."

That's easily said but not so easy to implement, of course, given the multiple demands and expectations from faculty and donors.

After all is said and done, the overarching priority for UNO needs to be this: strong academic quality.

Build up that quality, and a university is better able to attract more students. It's better able to solicit donations. Better able to gain local respect. And better able to burnish its reputation on the national stage.

Christensen's plan can help UNO move in that direction. A joint effort is needed to make it happen.



THE PUBLIC PULSE

Railroad is better than pipeline

As a loyal American and combat veteran who has given his blood, sweat and tears for America, I implore consideration for what I have to say. I am a retired switchman and conductor for the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. I know more than most people about moving America's commerce.

The cheapest and safest way to move oil across the state of Nebraska would be with a train, not a pipeline. I know Warren Buffett would have great influence with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad taking on the pipeline industry and proving to America that a railroad would be the best way to deliver oil from Canada to Texas.

Even if more railroad track had to be laid, it would still be cheaper than a pipeline and much safer to our future.

William H. Prieto, Omaha

Pipeline efficiency is hard to top

I write neither in favor of nor against the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, but I do have a question for the growing number of people who have suggested the solution is to build a refinery somewhere so the nasty crude oil wouldn't have to be piped across the Ogallala Aquifer.

Once we've built an ultramodern, high-efficiency, ecologically friendly, high-capacity refinery, how would we get the gasoline and other refined products efficiently to the markets that would consume them?

I know, how about a pipeline? We certainly wouldn't want to have those big energy-burning trucks hauling those dangerous chemicals over our roads, would we?

John V. Morey, Omaha

Let parent decide pupil absence

I'm gravely concerned about Nebraska's truancy law and its ramifications on our students. By eliminating the distinction between truancy and absence,

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The other side, as noted in a Sept. 14 news story, is the perception and too often the reality of the mass warehousing, corporate confinement facilities that epitomize horrible conditions and barbaric treatment to maximize a return on investment.

Some might think the latter is fine, parroting the mantra that these animals are not human. My only reply would be that those who don't believe animals feel pain, terror or panic either know nothing about animals or don't care about inflicting pain and terror.

Jim Sullivan, Emmet, Neb.

Be careful with our health care

A proposal is due Nov. 23 from the Deficit Reduction Super Committee regarding budget recommendations. A bipartisan letter from U.S. Reps. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., and Tom Cole, R-Okla., is currently circulating and will be presented to the committee.

STEVE JOBS DIES