

The Investiture of Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., as the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha

Thursday, Sept. 5, 2019

Keynote Address from Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel

President Fritz, thank you. To all of our friends and leaders gathered here today, I first want to acknowledge that I am very honored to have this opportunity to participate in this occasion. It's meaningful. It comes at an important time in this institution's history and an important time in the world.

50 years ago, my brother Tom and I returned from Vietnam. We did what so many veterans had done and still do. We enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where we graduated. Because of the welcoming UNO family of professors, administrators, students, and the embracing people of the Omaha community, we received more than just a college degree. We received a complete education. Academics were only part of it. It was the culture of UNO, inclusive, welcoming, caring, and connected to the community and state. UNO's past leaders have all been champions of this complete education of values, standards, ethics, friendship, and academics.

The selection of Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold to be the next chancellor and leader of UNO follows the course and legacy of this institution's proud and impressive 110 years of providing quality education for thousands of future community leaders.

I first met Jeff Gold by way of a telephone call in late summer of 2014. The Ebola infectious disease crisis had erupted in western Africa and was spreading to a number of countries. I was the secretary of defense at the time and recalled my days in the Senate when we helped the University of Nebraska Medical Center get funding for its infectious disease center. In fact, only three medical schools in the country had infectious disease centers with the capability and capacity to deal with the scourge of Ebola.

I called Dr. Gold and asked for his help. He immediately agreed, came to Washington soon after our conversation, and met with me and the secretary of health and human services. This was the first of many trips that he would make to Washington. He offered the full support and resources of UNMC. Because of Jeff Gold's leadership and the quality of the doctors and staff of UNMC, we were able to help contain and stop the deadly Ebola virus. Unfortunately, as many of you are aware, it has returned to West Africa.

I tell this story, yes, because it's a tribute to Dr. Gold and to UNMC. But it also tells a story about the University of Nebraska system, which UNMC and UNO are both part of. It tells a story about the Nebraska way, its institutions, its people, and its purpose and about the goodness and the generosity of the people of Nebraska and its communities. I include many of Nebraska's most respected institutions, like Creighton University.

Jeff Gold's credentials are spectacularly impressive, his experience exceptional, but it's the complete person who has been chosen to lead University of Nebraska at Omaha. We're each products of our environment and our experiences, but it does not stop there. It's how we use

our God-given talents and abilities and for what purpose. It's how we learn from listening, how we learn and appreciate humility for mistakes and failure, how we are inspired every day by small acts of courage that we see all around us. Jeff Gold's record of not just accomplishments, but leadership has included that inventory of attributes.

Over the years as I've traveled around the world in many capacities, I would often be asked, "Where is Nebraska?" I would respond, "Well, you see, Nebraska is the center of the universe."

I would get various reactions to that answer. Then I would explain, Nebraska rests in the middle of America. Geography is always a defining reality in the development of any society and its future. Rural areas foster communal cooperation and people depending on and helping each other as well as a certain independence. The cultures and societies of an area are reflected by the institutions and people that build them.

The Strategic Air Command, now STRATCOM, was placed in Omaha after World War II because, yes, it was in the middle of the country, but also because of the attributes of the people of Nebraska. Important business and institutional decisions in and about Nebraska have been made over the years for the same reason, the people. Point is that UNO serves a very special role in an independent part of the country, the Omaha community of Nebraska. UNO has evolved into more than just a city university as it began more than 100 years ago. The vision of past leaders from the University of Omaha, UNO, and the University of Nebraska saw the evolving needs of future generations and an opportunity for one special state-wide system. That vision has benefited the Omaha community and communities all across Nebraska and the people and the students they serve.

A community will not grow without vision. That is what makes Jeff Gold's appointment as UNO's next chancellor so important. Dr. Gold has left every job, every position, and every community where he has held important leadership positions better than he found them. That is a result of vision. Nebraska has been blessed over the years with strong vision from its philanthropic, educational, religious, medical, and private and public sector leaders. Ladies and gentlemen, today, our country and the world cry out for common decency, respect for and understanding of each other, tolerance, and ethical behavior. Civility is the lubricant that makes a society work. It is the glue of successful cultures. These values have been the north star for UNO and Dr. Gold.

As Emerson wrote many years ago, "The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of an education." Congratulations to the Omaha community and people of Nebraska, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and Dr. Jeff Gold and his wife, Dr. Robyn Heyworth, we're very proud of all of you, very proud. Go, Mavericks. Thank you.