

Testimony of Kent Schroeder
Chairman, University of Nebraska Board of Regents
Appropriations Committee – March 3, 2009

Chairman Heidemann and members of the Committee, my name is Kent Schroeder and I am chairman of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today, on behalf of the board, in support of the budget request submitted by the university.

Since 2005, the work of the Board of Regents has been guided by a strategic framework – a document that establishes goals for the university and specific performance measurements that allow us to track our progress in achieving those goals. The strategic framework has created a new level of accountability in the governance and management of the university – with goals established and performance measured in every key area, including enrollment, timely graduation, academic quality, research growth, workforce development, engagement with the citizens of Nebraska, and public accountability and transparency.

So when I come to this committee and tell you that the university is strong and healthy, that it is providing a high quality education to our young people, that it is conducting research that is important to Nebraska and beyond our borders, and that its fiscal management is sound, I can do so with confidence. I have been a member of the Board since 1998, and I believe that today we have the best leadership, the strongest administrative team, the highest quality of students and faculty, and the greatest

commitment to serving the public that I have seen during my tenure on the board.

I'd like to briefly review the six overarching goals of the strategic framework and tell you how I feel they are impacted by the actions of this committee and the full legislature.

The first goal is affordable access to a high quality education. We measure our success in achieving that goal by enrollment, tuition levels, graduation and retention rates, the availability of need-based aid, and our ability to secure adequate state resources to provide excellent academic programs. Without a stable level of state support, we risk higher tuition, lower enrollment, less opportunity for students who need financial assistance, and a reduction in academic programs.

The second goal is to build high quality academic programs with an emphasis on excellent teaching. Success is measured in large part by our ability to recruit and retain outstanding faculty in an increasingly competitive environment. President Milliken will address the concerns we have with regard to faculty salaries and especially our obligations at UNO and UNK. It is a long-standing goal of the board that our faculty salaries are comparable to those of our peers; we still lag behind our peers, and this is an area in which we are at risk of falling even further behind, which has long-term implications for the quality of the university.

The third goal is workforce development and stemming the out-migration of talented students from the state. We have done an excellent job of keeping

top students in Nebraska – but our continued success depends on maintaining an affordable cost of attendance, and keeping excellent academic programs and top faculty. The students we want to attract, from within and outside the state, must view the University of Nebraska as not just an affordable choice, but as an excellent education that will prepare them to be successful in the 21st century workforce. To do that, we can't stand still – we must continue investing in our academic programs and faculty.

A fourth goal relates to expanding our research enterprise. While our success in this arena depends in large part on federal support, we must have the proper infrastructure and equipment to support research, and we must be competitive for the faculty who bring in major grants. This is an area that pays major dividends to the state in creation of new knowledge and new jobs. Research at the University of Nebraska supports more than 10,000 Nebraska jobs.

The fifth goal is outreach to Nebraskans – providing programs, education and services to citizens, communities, agriculture, businesses and other educational institutions. The university has a presence and a role in every county in Nebraska, and is helping Nebraskans start their own companies, increase the productivity and profitability of their farms, ranches and businesses, and enjoy a better quality of life. It is difficult to put a price tag on the value that the university adds to the lives of our citizens.

The final goal is accountability to the citizens of Nebraska and cost-effectiveness in our operations. This includes careful management of our

funds from all sources, implementing business efficiencies to save money, and using technology effectively to support our mission. One of our major initiatives is the new student information system, which provides a better and more cost-effective system for managing all student records for both the university and the state colleges. The system had to be replaced, and its implementation is costly – but it is an important and necessary long-term investment.

I fully appreciate the challenges of today's economic climate, but I urge you to consider the role that a strong university can play in economic recovery. I would ask that you provide funding at a level that allows the university to meet its obligations and continue effectively serving the people of Nebraska.

Thank you.