

NU regents face challenges of the '80s

Women regents use capabilities to improve university education

By Suzanne Teten
Staff Reporter

Times have changed since the first woman became a regent in early 1974.

Back then, the NU Board of Regents concerned itself with residence hall issues; today, its members concentrate on academic excellence and budget restrictions.

Camille Elliott, 91, of Scottsbluff completed her husband Jack's term in 1974-75. And, she says, she loved the experience.

Even though she was the first and only woman on the job then, Mrs. Elliott said she was treated as an equal by the other regents. Before her husband's death, he had been a regent for about 20 years. The men on the board had been the couple's close friends, she said, so they accepted her as a member.

"I didn't agree with them and they didn't agree with me occasionally, but we got along fine," Mrs. Elliott said.

Mrs. Elliott said the men were "pretty smart." They respected people who offered differing opinions, she said.

Mrs. Elliott said she was concerned that the students living in residence halls were being given too much freedom. She wanted stricter curfews. And she also was opposed to men and women living in the same building.

"But then I was old-fashioned, you see," she said.

Mrs. Elliott graduated from NU in 1916 with a degree in English, drama and German. She taught English and

history, but never German. War broke out in Europe and the language wasn't permitted in schools anymore.

Attitudes and issues have changed quite a bit since Mrs. Elliott served on the board. Since her term ended in 1975, only two women have been elected to the board. Margaret Robinson of Norfolk and Nancy Hoch of Nebraska City were elected in 1982.

Robinson, president of the Norfolk Iron and Metal Co., said she has been fortunate to be accepted as a regent.

Nebraska always has been "forward-looking" in its attitudes toward women, Robinson said, and being a woman hasn't put any extra pressure on her. Nebraskans accept people for their abilities and talents rather than their sex, she said.

Being president of her company has helped her as a regent, because she is familiar with financial and bonding statements. Robinson's 15-year stint on the Norfolk School Board also has proved worthwhile.

As chairwoman of the planning committee, Robinson selects the board's agenda. She said she works about 10 hours each week on university business.

Robinson, 61, said she wouldn't change anything about the board's operation. She said she thinks the present board members work well together.

"We don't always agree, but we respect each other," she said.

Robinson said she favors keeping an elected board. Citizens must have a voice in their government, she said, especially since NU spends about 22

percent of the state's tax dollars. And now those dollars are melting away, putting the university in desperate financial straits.

Hoch, 48, said she is very concerned about the budget problems confronting the university. Necessary state appropriations haven't increased with the cost of living, she said.

"There have to be more funds or less university," said Hoch, a former candidate for U.S. Senate.

Hoch said the regents will have to make difficult program cuts. Such cuts can't always be made "across the board." The board can't "dilute" everything, Hoch said.

"I don't believe we (the university) can be everything to everybody," she said.

However, she said, eliminating entire departments from the university wouldn't be wise. Bringing them back would be more difficult than destroying them, she said.

But, if revenues continue to decline, Hoch said, the regents will have to make serious program cuts.

The regents' recent decision to form a cooperative veterinary school with another state may seem unwise now, but the effort to form such a school actually began several years ago. She said the recent decision to support a school merely gives the state the option for a school with another state.

Robinson offered another suggestion for reducing university spending.

She said the university must postpone its building plans for a few years until the state can afford the expense.

Despite the budget problems, Hoch said, the university need not have a negative outlook. She said it is important to plan for the future, not just to react to the present conditions.

Hoch said the regents have the responsibility to work for the highest quality of education the state can provide with available funds.

Robinson said academic excellence can be achieved only by improving faculty salaries because the "faculty makes the university."



Elliott

Hoch also said that maintaining faculty quality is important. The university must work hard to attract and keep good faculty members by paying them well, she said. The regents have tried to raise salaries to the mean level of NU's peer group, but that requires funding adjustments. The university must keep working until salaries reach that level, she said.

"I don't think we can abandon that ship," Hoch said.

Hoch said she would like to see more emphasis on undergraduate education. She said UNL Chancellor Martin Masengale's commission to study the curriculum is a step forward. The administration is concentrating on excellence,

Hoch said, and that is where her hopes for the university lie.

Both women said they appreciate student input on university problems.

Robinson said she hopes more students continue to express their concerns to the regents as they have during this year's "Meet the Regents" sessions. She said student opinions put a different light on university problems.

Hoch said she is always pleased when students care enough to make their feelings known. She said she was impressed by last week's student march to the Capitol to protest a rumored 30-percent tuition increase.

"I hope the Legislature read that as a call for more funds," Hoch said.

Program cuts concern Fricke

By Gene Gentrup
Senior Reporter

NU Regent Don Fricke said he expects to be part of an NU Board of Regents that in the next few years will likely be cutting or eliminating entire programs in the university system.

Fricke, a Lincoln dentist and a new addition to the board, this week talked about his first few months as a regent. He defeated incumbent Ed Schwartzkopf in November's selection.

Fricke said he has "plenty to do" as a regent, including monthly meetings, appearing at banquets and university functions and putting in 40 hours a week at his dentistry job.

"My wife gets along and my kids understand," he said. "I'm spending a little more time away from the family, but I turn down a lot of engagements to stay home as well," he said.

Fricke said one thing he is not optimistic about is an increased budget during the next five years.

"It just isn't business as usual anymore — we're talking about definite changes," Fricke said, referring to some of the "weaker" programs at NU.

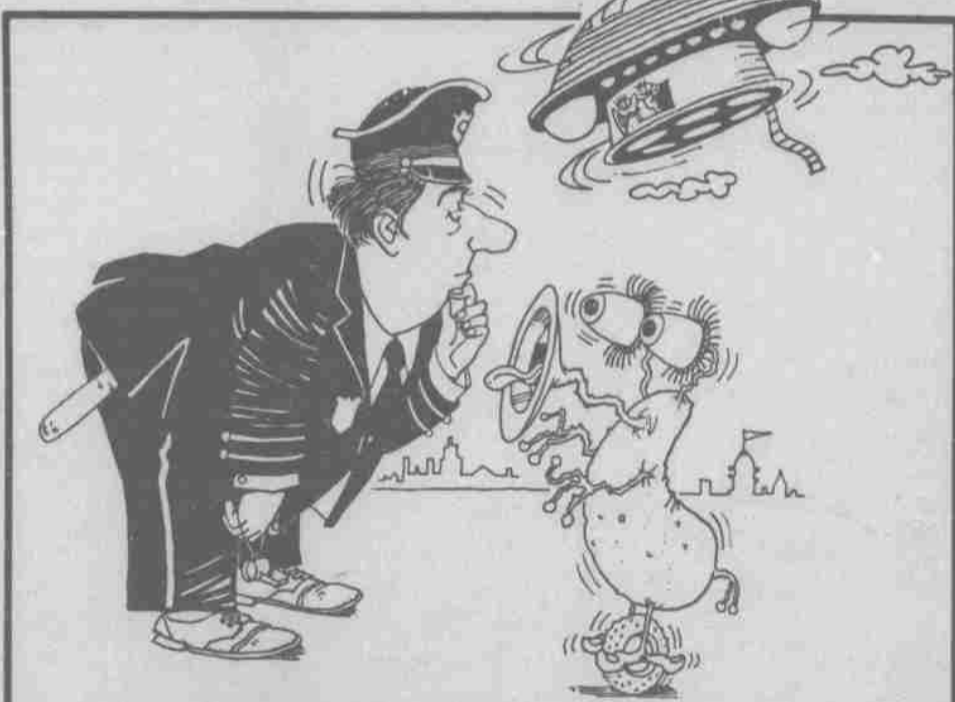
He declined to say what those weaker programs were, but said there will be a strong effort by the regents to maintain NU's "quality programs." The chancellor will make recommendations for program cuts later this year or next year, he said.

Continued on Page 11

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