

Wish list

Commitment needed to improve NU

University of Nebraska President Martin Massengale described his dream for the institution of the 1990s Saturday to the NU Board of Regents.

Unfortunately, in the current economic climate, he'll have a nightmare of a time fulfilling the wish list.

Massengale listed a number of things he'd like to see in an improved, nationally competitive university. The changes he proposed include:

- Rewarding excellent teaching in new ways;
- Bringing the benefits of research to more students;
- Implementing changes in the basic curriculum;
- Providing better services for students, including registration and interaction with faculty members;
- Re-evaluating admissions standards;
- Bringing Nebraska into the top 35 research universities in the nation.

All are excellent goals. But you don't get something for nothing. If the state is to produce an "innovative national leader in quality education," as Massengale advocated, someone needs to pay the price.

Gov. Ben Nelson doesn't want to. He proposed a budget that, unless the Legislature changes it substantially, could force the university to cut programs and personnel.

In times of economic prosperity, such as the years during Gov. Kay Orr's administration when the university received double-digit funding increases, the words "role" and "mission" had abstract meanings. When everybody was feeding from the trough, it didn't matter who was first in line.

Under Nelson's budget, role and mission will determine how the university is "streamlined" to meet its budget restrictions.

Some of those changes could be positive. If the University of Nebraska-Lincoln raises academic standards, relegating remedial programs to state colleges and other university branches, it could save the state some money and serve its students better.

As Massengale said, "quality education does not so much reach down as it invites others to reach upward, to aspire."

But Massengale's other recommendations clearly will not be met without continued funding increases. Technology costs money. Teaching awards cost money. Good teachers cost money.

Research also is not accomplished with good intentions alone. Massengale wants NU to settle in with universities that are renowned for their research. But those schools also consistently are the ones with the largest research funding.

If the university is to make a jump in the national research standing, it needs to take advantage of any opportunities that come along.

One such opportunity is the proposed George W. Beadle Center for Genetics and Biomaterials. UNL already has received federal commitments for \$17.7 million of the projected cost of \$23.7 million for the center.

But up to \$12 million of the federal money is in matching funds. If the Legislature doesn't approve the remaining \$6 million to finance the center, the state, in effect, would lose a lot more than it would have put on the table.

Inspiration alone only can do so much in lean, sinewy economic times. NU's academic climate can be improved. But longstanding change in the university's national status won't come without commitment from taxpayers and elected officials.

—E.F.P.

Editor's Note: Nine paragraphs of Andrew Meyer's letter to the editor (DN, Feb 14) entitled "First Amendment freedoms precious but not absolute" were plagiarized verbatim from a Jan. 24 Omaha World-Herald editorial.

To avoid similar incidents in the future, the Daily Nebraskan no longer will print letters submitted by Meyer.

So long, Andrew. We hardly knew ya.

Airman waits to serve U.S.

Back in 1983, when I signed on the dotted line, even I could imagine being called to war. I signed the line to protect my country first, to make it to school second. I don't feel I was naive, just a little unsure of my future. My recruiter explained to me my wartime duty as a combat engineer, and I knew what I was going to be trained for.

During my three years of active duty, I did a lot of growing up at Fort Riley, Kan. I grew to realize what was important in my life—"Family, God, Country and Freedom." Living day to day with my friends, we grew as a family. We realized what it would take to help save lives, as well as take them. Many of my friends from Fort Riley are now in the Persian Gulf war, and I know that they are somewhere near the front readying to help troops move ahead.

"Bridge the gap," they called it, which could mean anything from blowing up mines to bridging heavy equipment over dangerous obstacles. It hurts inside to know that my friends are there and, until my current unit with the Nebraska Air Guard goes, I can't do my part.

If there is one thing I realized in three years active duty and my four years in the Nebraska Air Guard, it is that the freedom we stand for is freedom throughout the world. Why should we have a monopoly on it.

"Bridge the gap" will always be a part of me and so will my friends in the Persian Gulf. When my time comes, I will serve with honor and pride and remember the freedom back home.

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senior
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JANA PEDERSEN

Consider the wolf's point of view

"The True Story of the Three Little Pigs" takes a children's fairy tale we're all familiar with and tells it from a different, unique point of view—the wolf's. "Everybody knows the story of the Three Little Pigs," the wolf says, through author Jon Scieszka. "Or at least they think they do. ... (N)obody has ever heard my side of the story."

The wolf claims that the real story behind the porkers' deaths was ignored by the press, which turned the three little pigs into martyrs. Really, says the wolf, all he wanted was to borrow a cup of sugar from the three brothers pig. But journalists didn't think that detail was exciting enough, "So they jazzed up the story."

The rest, the wolf says, is history. Reading about the wolf makes me wonder how history will treat Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. He, too, claims the media is ignoring his side of the story, making him out to be the Big Bad Wolf of the Arab world.

The media reported that Iraq invaded Kuwait, raping and pillaging its people and countryside.

But wait, Saddam says. There was more to it than that. Really, Iraq had historical claims to the area. Really, the British and French were the bad guys for drawing Middle East borders in the 1920s that failed to give Iraq a port on the Persian Gulf.

The wolf, too, defends himself by spelling out the background of the swines' demise.

"I was making a birthday cake for my dear old granny. I had a terrible sneezing cold. I ran out of sugar," he says.

Really, the pigs' deaths had more to do with fits of sneezing than with naked aggression. While asking to borrow a cup of sugar at the doors of the homes made of straw and sticks, the wolf had to sneeze, thereby destroying the houses and their little pink owners. It really wasn't as bad as the press made it seem.

And Saddam said Kuwait itself was to blame for the invasion. Kuwait



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overproduced oil and hurt the economies of other Arab countries. Iraq warned Kuwait to stop overproduction, but Kuwait ignored the warnings. The U.S. ambassador to Iraq even said the United States would stand aside if Iraq launched an invasion.

And, the wolf asks, "Who in his right mind would build a house of straw?" Or of sticks, for that matter? Besides, the pigs didn't even answer the door when he knocked.

Both of the bad guys' arguments sound logical. But once the public reads between the lines, their reasoning seems a little puffed up.

The wolf, for example, reasons

away his taste for cute animals like bunnies and sheep and pigs with, "If cheeseburgers were cute, folks would probably think you were Big and Bad, too." His birthday cake batter has bunny ears poking out of it. He ate the pigs, he says, because "It seemed like a shame to leave a perfectly good ham dinner lying there."

Saddam dresses up workers in jackets that read, in English, "Baby Milk Factory," and claims allied bombs are doing more damage to Iraq than Iraq did to Kuwait. He pats frightened little boys on the head and prays in front of television cameras. He proposes impossible peace plans.

And that's too bad. It makes the history of the crisis easy to overlook. It makes it easy for us to call Saddam a madman and to justify the allied invasion by calling it a "liberation."

It makes it easy for us to twist the way we think of Iraq—in the wolf's words, "To think of it as a big cheeseburger just lying there." After all, cheeseburgers have no feelings.

Regardless of whether the allied attack on Iraq was justified, the important lesson to learn from the wolf's story is to consider the conflict from the other side's point of view.

Saddam may be the Big Bad Wolf from Americans' perspective, but Iraqis probably don't think so. Probably they think we're a little bit wolfish. And probably the press has a lot to do with the misconceptions we have about each other.

So the next time Cable News Network broadcasts still more reports on Iraqi civilian casualties, maybe Americans shouldn't flip the remote control channel changer.

It's probably a good idea for us to get a taste of what may or may not be Saddam's propaganda, if only to remind us there are more than just cheeseburgers on Iraq's side of this war.

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