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Back to the Future: The University of Maine and its Land Grant/Sea Grant Tradition

Inaugural Address

November 21, 1997

Peter S. Hoff

President, University of Maine

Thank you, Chancellor MacTaggart; and thank you, President O'Neil, for that generous introduction, and thank you all for the gracious welcome.

Ms. Herman, Congressman Baldacci, Speaker Mitchell, Chancellor MacTaggart, Trustees, distinguished guests, students, colleagues, family, and friends: I am deeply humbled and genuinely honored to stand before you as the seventeenth president of the University of Maine. To lead such a wonderful university at this time in its history is the most demanding and the most welcome challenge of my professional life. It could never have been possible without the love and support of family members, some of whom traveled long distances to be here today. Nor could I think of undertaking the work without the partnership of my wife, Dianne, who is already well known to many of you and who has already become an important part of the Maine community.

It was especially important to me that we have a happy and successful inaugural convocation. Faculty members came to me this Summer asking if we could have an annual academic convocation, and I was happy to support such an idea. I hope that we will be able to sponsor a convocation every year with a distinguished speaker and an array of academic activities befitting our fine university. But if I have anything to say about it, this is the last presidential inauguration we will have for a long, long time. So please enjoy it.

Of all the opportunities available to me during the past year, the presidency of the University of Maine stood out as by far the most attractive and the most appropriate. Maine is very like my home state of Wisconsin in so many respects that I was instantly drawn by its geography, its culture, and its people. Both states have taken avant-garde approaches to self governance, as evidenced by the Progressive movement in Wisconsin and the self-reliant populism of Maine. The national leadership of statesmen like Margaret Chase Smith, Ed Muskie, Robert LaFollette, and Bill Proxmire have shown our nation how integrity and independent thinking can transcend politics. Maine's Latin motto, "Dirigo", is echoed in English by Wisconsin's "Forward." Both states seek to achieve high intellectual and social aspirations in spite of modest economic bases. Both blend modern metropolitan areas with broad expanses of forests and farmlands.

As a teenager growing up in Wisconsin and looking forward to college, I faced the same dilemma that many of our Maine high school students face. I was admitted to two prestigious out-of-state universities: Cornell and Stanford, as well as to my state university. My parents, though they were not wealthy, told me they would support whatever choice I made. I weighed all the factors of academic quality, campus life, and cost. And even though it was not considered "cool" by my peer group to attend the state school, it was an easy choice for me. I have never regretted my choice to attend my home state university, and I want to talk today about why many of today's high school students in Maine should think about making a similar choice. Making the case today will be a complex process, involving a century and a half of history. So I ask your indulgence while I take the long way around to explain.

The institution I chose in 1962 was, like the one I chose in 1997, a Land Grant and (later) a Sea Grant University. That is a fact of enormous significance. We often speak of the University of Maine's unique status as

it is important, and why we deserve public support because of what we mean to the state. But I am afraid people have lost track of all that. In order to understand the full significance of the University of Maine, we need to revisit its roots in the Land Grant tradition. And in order to envision clearly the future of this university, it will also prove valuable to understand its beginnings.

Although we usually credit Vermont Congressman Justin Morrill for initiating the Land Grant movement, the idea first percolated in the 1850's when Jonathan Turner of Illinois encouraged his state legislature to establish a college focusing on agriculture and the mechanic arts. Turner believed, like most educated people in his time, in studying the classics. But he also saw the importance of creating a college to address fundamental social problems such as feeding the population and helping launch an industrial revolution.

The idea of providing socially relevant college education to the working classes brought egalitarianism to the realm of higher education, where it had never existed before. In earlier centuries, the Protestant Reformation had democratized Christianity. The Enlightenment had spurred and diffused scientific thinking. The American revolution had asserted the equality of individual people and established self-government. Inspired by Thomas Jefferson's recognition that democracy could not thrive without universal education, Horace Mann had moved in the 1840's to promote that dream at the elementary and secondary level.

Taking the suggestion of the Illinois legislature that all states should be provided with a parcel of Federal land as a nest egg for a public university, Vermont congressman Justin Morrill became a forceful advocate, introducing into Congress a bill in 1857. It faced many obstacles. Some objected to the very populism on which it was based. Some argued that the proposed 30,000 acre grant was too large, some that it was too small. Easterners wanted chunks of Western land, since they had none of their own. Westerners did not want to share. Southerners, arguing for states' rights, and finding themselves on the brink of secession, argued that the bill was unconstitutional. That was exactly what President Buchanan suggested when he vetoed an early version of the Morrill Act.

It was no coincidence that the bill eventually passed in 1862, when Southern opposition had disappeared through secession, and that the President who signed it was, like Jonathan Turner, from Illinois: Abraham Lincoln.

Maine was well represented at the time. Hannibal Hamlin was Vice President, and therefore president of the Senate. Our senators were from Portland and Augusta and our representatives from Rockland, South Berwick, Calais, Auburn, Foxcroft, and Readfield. In other words, a statewide effort helped create our university. It was expected to make a statewide impact; it did so and continues to do so; and today a statewide effort is required to sustain it.

Consider the extraordinary vision of the lawmakers who passed the First Morrill Act. In the darkest hours of a Civil War that threatened the country's very existence and that eventually claimed the lives of more than 600,000 men, most of them at or close to college age themselves, Congress passed what turned out to be the most momentous act in the history of higher education. In doing so, they taught us to be relentlessly optimistic, that current challenges, however enormous, can be overcome, and that our best times lie ahead -- if we plan and work for them.

The legislators passing the Morrill Act embraced democracy, utility, and commitment to intellectual discovery in their vision of higher education, what the Wisconsin Regents would come to call "that fearless and continual sifting and winnowing through which alone the truth may be known."

They also taught us to act in good faith, and to set aside differences to achieve the common good. In the difficult times our university has faced during the past decade, many have been tempted to hunker down and protect narrow departmental interests. Now more than ever we need to emerge from our bunkers and silos and work together in the interest of the entire university-which in turn works for the good of the entire state. We need to

Our university, first called the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, was founded in 1865 as a result of the Morrill Act. It opened its doors in 1868 with two professors and twelve students. In a few short years the college had grown enormously, adding women students and expanding the curriculum.

In 1887, the Hatch Act gave Land Grant universities another boost, providing funds to establish agricultural experiment stations. This was part of the movement that made our universities centers of research and discovery. Although the Land Grant Colleges were expected from the beginning to teach the application of science to agriculture, the mechanic arts, and other occupations, it soon became apparent that the scientific principles underlying such application were not well understood. Consequently the faculty (themselves largely educated in the classics, not the sciences) had to resort to experimentation and research to identify these principles.

In 1897 we adopted our present name, the University of Maine, consistent with the steadily expanding mission of the Land Grant university. That makes this year, 1997, our 100th anniversary as the University of Maine. And it makes it all the more appropriate that we take steps now to move our university into a new century, without waiting for the millennium.

The robust history of change and growth in this university during the twentieth century could become the subject of yet another convocation. It includes the establishment of co-operative extension, teacher education, a host of new academic disciplines, a generation of nontraditional GI Bill students who transformed the classroom forever, and skyrocketing graduate enrollments. Federal funding for science rose sharply to support the successful conclusion of two world wars and wage a long Cold War. Students arrived from all across the country and (currently) 73 nations. Our Land Grant University grew to national stature as a doctoral-level research university, and became what we proudly call the state's center of learning, discovery, and service to the public.

The meaning and relevance of that concise slogan needs to be more fully understood and appreciated. Packed into that short phrase is a world of meaning, opportunity, and significance to the State of Maine. In those eleven words-the state's center of learning, discovery, and service to the public-lie the aspirations and dreams of our citizens and our state. In America today, largely because of what the Land Grant/Sea Grant universities have brought to their respective states, no state can achieve true greatness, prosperity, and quality of life without a great university. No Land Grant university can hope to be great without a close and abiding relationship with the people and government of the state.

In his 1993 inaugural address, President Fred Hutchinson stated, "My purpose today is to share my vision of where we should go for the remainder of this century. I will leave it to others to worry about the next century" He knew that conditions would change; and they have. Along with them has changed the list of needs that society brings to the university. The Cold War has ended, transforming our national priorities from confrontation and military defense to the pursuit of economic and social prosperity. The focal point has shifted from a national one to one that is simultaneously local and global. The state's economy has turned for the better, and we seek to improve it more by learning to function in a worldwide economy. That very point is illustrated by Governor King's absence today. He could not be with us because he is in South America on a trade mission. On top of those changes, the composition of the nation is becoming vastly more diverse, even in Maine, where Portland for example is now home to speakers of about 50 different languages. The digital electronic information age is transforming everything that we do. We have become a knowledge-based society and ours is a knowledge-based economy. It is therefore vital that we transform and reposition the University of Maine to serve the needs of those who will live out their lives in a society where musclepower has given way to brainpower.

From its inception, the Land Grant University was unique and powerful for two reasons: access and engagement. It made possible for the first time higher education for all who could benefit, without regard to wealth and status. And for the first time, universities were created with an express mission of discovering new knowledge that

the land grant roots and tradition of the university. By being true to our roots, we can reorient the university to make it the university of the future. How can this apparent paradox be true? Very simple: access and engagement-the very things that made us what we are-are the keys to a vital future. Our challenge is to redefine access and engagement in ways that address the current and future needs of Maine.

Access means making sure that the educational needs of Maine's citizens are met. As a state, we have made progress in raising the educational and professional aspirations of our young people. Where just a decade ago, only 37% of our high school graduates went on to college or university, today the number is 46%. But some questions remain about where Mainers are getting their college education. While only a decade ago 60% of those high school graduates who went on to college did so in Maine, now fewer than half go to college in their home state. In spite of the fact that the University of Maine offers an array of academic programs as good and as extensive as any in New England, our entering class this Fall represented only about 14% of the total Maine high school graduates who went on to college. Those numbers tell me that we are not providing access in a way that works to the state's advantage.

We need to make sure people know the resource that exists for them here in Orono. We have over 84,000 living alumni: loyal, partisan, enthusiastic graduates who tell me every chance they get about the wonderful education UMaine provided them. But that knowledge and that enthusiasm has not spread to all the high schools. Our high school students need to learn about the world of opportunity and educational benefits that awaits them here. They need to learn, for example:

€ That the seniors in our business school consistently finish in the top 20% in the country in independent nationwide testing. In the international component of those tests, our students placed in the top five percent nationally.

€ That our college of engineering students have a 95% pass rate on the nationally standardized exam they take upon completing their studies. That 95% compares to a 72% pass rate nationally.

€ That our Forestry program ranks among the top five in the nation, ahead of Yale, Berkeley, and Penn State.

€ That our liberal arts and professional graduates hold positions of leadership in engineering and high tech firms, banks, paper companies, telecommunications, public utilities. They serve in congress and the legislature, teach and administrate the schools, and run the hospitals, city governments, and major state agencies.

In other words, UMaine educates leaders. We do it by offering academic programs second to none, in a comprehensive array of academic fields. Whatever you are seeking to learn, you can find it at UMaine, and you can be sure that it will be top-quality.

Too many young people in Maine seem to believe that it is necessary to go out of state to get this kind of high quality education. On an individual case by case basis, I can understand the reasons a high school graduate might have for seeking a collegiate experience away from Maine. But on a collective basis, this hurts our state in serious ways. Every time students go away to college and remain away for the rest of their lives, the state loses more of its most valuable resource: its best and brightest people. Maine loses their ideas, their industriousness, their energy, their contributions to their communities, their earnings and spendings, and their tax dollars. The collective weight of losing thousands of bright young citizens each year is one of the chief drags on the state's economy and its quality of life.

I realize that educating our young citizens in-state, taken in isolation, is not the answer. There must be jobs and opportunities waiting for them when they graduate. Maine's economy and society must be a magnet to hold them here as well. Fortunately, that is where the other half of the university's mission comes into play. We are also responsible for promoting the social and economic well being of the state through our research and our outreach.

This university has a 132-year-old track record of meeting those expectations. Across the state, the proof of our success is evident.

Just ask Maine's farmers. UMaine researchers discovered ways to sustain the freshness of potatoes and blueberries, as well as to cultivate broccoli and barley as major crops.

Ask Maine's food processors. UMaine researchers discovered new ways to grow and process fruits, shellfish, and other products for worldwide markets.

Ask Maine's marine-related industries. UMaine researchers saved millions of dollars by developing a sea lice-protection program to save the state's salmon industry, and they knocked out a deadly virus that threatened the lobster industry.

Ask our local, county, and state policymakers. UMaine researchers serve as consultants on subjects ranging from educational reform, to wildlife management, to intergovernmental relations, to bridge construction, to economic forecasting.

Ask the state's school superintendents. UMaine's College of Education professors have joined ranks with K-12 officials to establish the new standards for learning results that are transforming student performance on national and even internationally standardized tests.

Ask the state's manufacturing firms that use the engineering, computer software, and other techniques, technologies, and innovations developed by our researchers to create new products, new businesses, and new jobs.

Ask federal agencies. UMaine researchers attracted more than \$26 Million in grants last year alone to improve the lives of citizens through research and economic stimulation.

Whether it's developing ethical standards for Maine elections, intervention programs to reduce juvenile delinquency, or alternative treatments to help people overcome seasonal affect disorder, University of Maine researchers have taken on some of the state's most pressing needs, and succeeded.

Good as that record is, we need to do more. While the rest of the country is enjoying rapid economic growth and prosperity, Maine is moving in a positive direction, but more slowly. If we are to achieve the same sort of rebound that the country as a whole is enjoying, Maine needs new and expanded business, manufacturing, agriculture, technology, and marine industry; plus the new jobs that accompany such growth. UMaine's technology transfer efforts in marine sciences, agriculture, biotechnology, and small business assistance have demonstrated our ability to help create jobs. But we need to redouble our efforts. And the state needs to redouble its investment in that kind of growth formula.

I hope you see by now the basic logic of my argument. The Morrill Act was perhaps the greatest single event in the history of higher education because it extended access to all segments of society and because it provided for a university to function as an engine of economic growth, social progress, and quality of life. The University of Maine needs to turn and face the future not by abandoning that marvelous heritage but by embracing it in new ways that address today's pressing challenges.

We need to provide access by attracting the best and brightest students from all over to study here in Maine. We need to make sure they stay by helping the state develop a robust economy and overall quality of life that is irresistible. What will it take for us to achieve those things?

following questions:

Do we have the right programs for a flagship campus in Maine about to enter the 21st century? Do they meet the needs of our students? Are all academic majors up to date and streamlined so as to offer the best courses for their objectives and to be operating without unnecessary and duplicative requirements that simply increase costs and get in the way of student progress? Are all programs student-oriented in their outlook and in their operation? Do they focus on what students need to learn rather than on what we prefer to teach?

I am likewise calling on to our Vice Provost For Undergraduate Study to lead our faculty in reviewing our general education program with the same questions, and to help ensure that our faculty has the best technology and support in using the best approaches to teaching and learning. I want him to help develop a four-year pledge to our students: to guarantee that a student who wishes to graduate in four years, and who takes responsibility for choosing and completing the right courses, can be sure of graduating on time, or get the fifth year free.

I am calling on our Vice President for Student Affairs to lead a completely fresh look at the campus living-learning atmosphere. The experience of living as a student on our campus should be as pleasant, productive, and affordable as any in the world. Students from all backgrounds should feel welcome and fully included on our campus, and should feel that a full range of activities and opportunities exist that appeal to their interests and concerns.

I will personally lead an effort to ensure that we do everything possible to promote a diverse and harmonious learning community. Women and persons of difference must feel that the campus embraces and welcomes everyone, regardless of background. In our recruitment of students, staff, and faculty, we will never select a less qualified person to the exclusion of one better qualified, but we will go to extraordinary measures to attract a more diverse community, embrace their differences, and offer mentoring and support for persons with different backgrounds.

I am calling on our deans to redouble our efforts to reach out and serve the entire state. Access to excellence must be statewide. Our university system was established to avoid the costly duplication that comes when multiple campuses establish expensive programs such as engineering and doctoral programs. In order to help our trustees resist pressure to establish duplicative and expensive programs, the University of Maine must reach out and provide those programs in accessible and cost-effective ways, in person and electronically, wherever they are needed.

I am calling on our Development Office to join with academic deans in a partnership for access to excellence. We will continue to press for maximum state support for all of our academic efforts. It is the best investment the state can make in its future economy and quality of life. But we recognize that the extra edge of excellence can only come through the generous gifts and bequests of the university's friends. We must begin working not just for more endowed professorships, but for entire endowed schools and colleges. I am pledging my energies to an effort to fund a enormous leap forward in our levels of academic excellence.

Along with excellent academic programs, we need appropriate space for them to operate. I am not as eager to erect new buildings as I am to make existing space fit for the twenty-first century. Therefore we are planning to launch a public-private partnership to sustain and enhance the beauty and functionality of this lovely campus. We will seek support to renovate our glorious and historic buildings, make them fully accessible to all persons, provide them with state-of-the art classrooms, study space, offices, and laboratories. And while we are at it, we will seek endowments to keep them that way.

Just as we update our definition of access to excellence, we must do the same with our commitment to engagement. Cutting edge research is the most distinctive thing we do at UMaine, and essential to the well being of the state. It is important that we conduct research across all academic disciplines, for each contributes in its

To that end I am calling on our Vice Provost For Research and Graduate Study to present an updated plan for research and technology transfer. This plan should acknowledge and provide for the importance of research across the entire university while simultaneously focusing our efforts on several important objectives: stimulating the economy; promoting the well being of existing business, industry, agriculture, and aquaculture; managing and protecting our environment; reinforcing the quality of K-12 education; and emphasizing work directed at technology transfer that promotes and attracts new economic ventures and creates new jobs. Furthermore, the plan should aim at enhancing societal values and the quality of life that comes from a culture enriched by the arts and humanities.

Besides calling on our students, staff, and faculty, I am calling on our friends across the state to help make all of this happen. I have been enormously impressed by the number of friends this university has - the alumni, the citizens, the parents, the businesspersons, everyone who knows of our university and what it means to the state. I am calling on all of you to help us carry out our mission.

Spread the word about the beauty, the friendliness, and the academic excellence of our campus.

Tell people what we are doing to make Maine a better place. Encourage young people to consider us among their college options, recognizing that nowhere on earth can they get such an array of high-quality academic programs at such an affordable price. Encourage learners of all ages to look to the university for their educational needs, from short courses to entire degree programs. Encourage businesspersons, agency heads, farmers, fishermen, manufacturers, everyone in economic sectors, to look to the university when they need help.

Encourage state agencies, cities, towns, and rural communities to remember that our brainpower and research capacity is also there to assist them.

Urge lawmakers and government officials to invest in the university as the best way of building a better future.

Remind those who have the means to make generous gifts that their beneficence is often the edge that turns the everyday into the excellent. Urge them to create a legacy that will literally immortalize them in the memory of the public.

Remember that you yourselves are collectively the university's most valuable resource, the ones who will literally decide how great your university and therefore your state will be, through your involvement and your generosity.

Finally I am calling on the students - literally the ones without whom there would be no university. Set your sights high. Nothing less than full progress to graduation with your very best effort will do. Through your achievements justify the sacrifices and the investment of all the persons I have already called on.

If we move forward in the ways that I have outlined, we will simultaneously have maintained a university that Justin Morrill and Abraham Lincoln would have been proud of, and created the institution that will help our state leap into the twenty-first century as a social and moral leader, a model of economic resurgence, and a place whose quality of life is the envy of the world.

I may not have fully known it at the time, but these motives were latent in my decision as a young man to remain in my home town and attend my state university. The values of democratic access to education, intellectual discovery, community, economic and social progress, and understanding across cultures were all imbedded in my choice. Moreover they were values that deepened during my years studying at a Land Grant university. I am sure those are values you share with me, and I hope you will join me in the effort to promote them as cornerstones of this wonderful university, the University of Maine.

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