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Peter S. Hoff

University of Maine

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Remarks of Peter S. Hoff

President, University of Maine

The State of the University of Maine

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Minsky Recital Hall, Class of 1944 Hall

The University of Maine

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking time to join me for a discussion of our present and our future.

I doubt you realized it, but yesterday was an anniversary date for the University. One hundred thirty one years ago, on September 21, 1868, this institution opened its doors for the first time. Twelve students showed up that day. All were male, and all were from Maine. They came here to help themselves become more self-reliant, more appreciative of their heritage and culture, and better able to engage in the operation of their farms, their communities, and commerce.

While the new students who arrived on campus two weeks ago share many of the same reasons for enrolling, today's University of Maine students are much different. There are nearly 1,700 more of them. They come from all parts of the state, most parts of the country, and many parts of the globe. They are better educated and far more sophisticated in their understanding of the world. Today's students are studying subjects unheard of in 1868, using techniques and technologies beyond the imagination 130 years ago. And while today's students -- like their 19th century counterparts -- are here to become more self-reliant, more knowledgeable, and better prepared for economic and community life, the "community" and economy for which they are preparing is now truly global in nature.

As students have changed, so has the university. And there is every reason to expect -- and to make sure -- that it continues to change over the next 130 years.

The purpose of this speech today is to assess the current state of the University; to examine the condition of our institution, and to outline plans to ensure its value and vibrancy in the years ahead. When I finish this afternoon, my hope is that you will have a better sense of the University as I see it, and as I would like to see it become. As we discuss this subject over the days and weeks to come, I hope the dialectic will lead us to a shared vision of the university's future.

As we begin this examination of the state of the university, it's instructive to reflect a bit on what we were doing and talking about two years ago, the point at which I assumed the University's presidency.

- We were struggling with low student enrollments. We previously had made the wise and courageous decision to transfer our two-year programs elsewhere within the state university system, and we had agreed to maintain higher admissions standards. In the fall of 1997, we were feeling the financial pain of those decisions, but most disturbing was the general perception of the University as a place low on the priority list of prospective students; a place some cynics viewed as "a dying campus."
- We were suffering with yet another year of underfunding by the state, still receiving less money from the state than we had received at the beginning of the decade, despite increased costs. We also were dealing with the consequences of underfunding, which necessitated the AFFIRM plan and early retirement incentives.

- We were beginning a series of thoughtful and constructive discussions related to the condition of the University and its prospects for the future. Those discussions soon evolved into a draft planning document called BearWorks 1.1, which was discussed widely across campus -- in face-to-face and electronic forms - - during the spring of 1998.
- We were facing major changes in senior administrative positions, both within the central administration and at the college level, the result of planned and unexpected departures and retirements.
- We were talking with cautious optimism and excitement about something called JumpStart 2000, a proposed economic improvement strategy for Maine built around this university's research potential in science and engineering.
- We were preparing to tear down an aging landmark on campus, sooner than we expected, and planning to replace it with a more functional, impressive, and privately funded multi-purpose sports complex.

Two years later, thanks in part to many people within and outside the University community, things are remarkably better -- in ways even the most optimistic UMaine booster would not have predicted.

- We recently welcomed the Class of 2003 -- 1,675 students, the largest entering class in ten years; 15 percent larger than last year's class and 42 percent larger than the group of students who arrived two years ago. The new students arrived with an average SAT score of 1,087 -- essentially the same score as in 1997 and 1998. Fifty-eight of our new students were the valedictorian or salutatorian of their high school class. Three out of every four new students reported that UMaine was their first choice of schools.
- The tide appears to have turned for state funding. Earlier this year the Legislature and Governor agreed to a 3.4 percent increase for the University of Maine System for each of the next two years. In dollars, that represents an additional \$15 million in general fund support for the University System over a two year period, with almost half of that money allocated by the Trustees to this university.
- In addition, policymakers approved a separate funding package to support university-based research, an action that evolved from the original JumpStart 2000 proposal. The state appropriated the most money it has ever channeled into research activity -- \$36 million over two years for UMaine alone. Add to that the \$10.8 million bond package overwhelmingly approved by voters last November, and the total state dollars available to our university rises to a remarkable \$47 million. That's the largest infusion of state money since 1988. And with that money, we will attract many more millions of dollars in federal research grants and contracts, immediately expanding our research capacity and, within a few years, helping strengthening Maine's economy.
- We have realized progress and successes as a result of BearWorks 2.0, a revised and more detailed iteration of the original plan. BearWorks 2.0 set forward a comprehensive set of actions and assignments designed to create a strong and dynamic university, one fully engaged with our students, our state, and our fellow citizens. The BearWorks action plan provided significant benefits, producing a number of improvements affecting the condition of campus and the quality of the University. We now find ourselves preparing for BearWorks 3.0, a more strategic vision, which I will discuss momentarily.
- Harold Alfond Sports Stadium and Morse Field have lived up to everyone's hopes, becoming more than simply an athletics and recreation facility. The complex has become a symbol of University pride and resurgence, as well as an impressive and attractive addition to the aesthetics of our campus.

And of course, our students continue to make us proud, with many receiving national recognition for their creativity and success in their fields of study:

- One group of engineering students won several categories of awards in a recent solar vehicle competition, while other engineering students built a seaworthy paper kayak which won a \$10,000 first prize in a national competition.
- One of our graduate students received international media coverage for his research on the benefits of blueberries and cranberries as a food additive to preserve the freshness and flavor of beef.
- A group of theater students deservedly earned praise and recognition for being selected to perform in the prestigious American College Theater Festival.
- Students in the College of Education & Human Development received national recognition for a set of peer-education videos they produced, 700 of which were purchased for distribution to colleges around the

country.

- Yet another student received national media attention, this time for his creative idea of putting a TV camera inside a lobster trap and posting the images on the Internet. At one point the LobsterCam web site received 10,000 hits a day!
- Throughout Maine, people are still relishing the success of two other high-profile groups of students: our women's basketball team's rise in national stature, as a result of a fifth straight trip to the NCAA tournament and a memorable win; and the outstanding achievement of our men's ice hockey team, which persevered despite major setbacks a few years ago, responding in 1999 with a hard-fought, well-earned national championship.

Yes, there is a lot to be pleased with and excited about. And as a result, many of you sense the renewed energy that exists on campus. It's evident in students, faculty, and staff alike. A renaissance of spirit and purpose now exists, influenced by many factors -- increased enrollment, better financial support from policy leaders and supporters, the research partnership with the state, the success of our students, and the physical appearance of campus, to name just a few factors.

We all like good news, and lately we have had our fair share of it. It has resulted from the hard work and patience of literally thousands of people within the University community. And it has generated results. We are in an exciting, forward-looking time here at UMaine -- a time when the University is growing its enrollment, showcasing its excellence, serving the public, and demonstrating its value to the people of Maine.

Many people outside the University see it as well. During the last academic year, we underwent a ten-year re-accreditation review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, also known as NEASC. Based on the preliminary report of an independent review team that scrutinized our operation, UMaine is in good shape -- in many ways because of the initiatives we undertook during the past two years as part of BearWorks. The NEASC board will consider our re-accreditation request within a few weeks. We are confident and optimistic about the decision. But even with all that good news, we know we have plenty more to do. As we enter this new academic year and prepare for the 21st century, we assume our responsibilities by pursuing four simple but challenging objectives:

- to serve the needs of Maine and its people;
- to generate and disseminate new knowledge;
- to use our resources wisely, in the best interests of the people of Maine;
- and most of all, to prepare our students for life, careers, citizenship, and change in the 21st century.

To achieve those goals, we need to address several issues and questions covering all aspects of our institution:

- What are we doing to ensure that our academic programs are strategically aligned with the needs of the state's people, its society, and its economy?
- To what extent is this University going to continue its emphasis on educating full-time, traditional-age students, and how will our residential nature and academic offerings enrich their learning experience?
- What is the future of our research enterprise, and how does graduate education fit into it?
- Is this university ready to transform itself from one that simply serves the public to one that actually engages it?
- What kind of University do we want to be five or ten years from now? And what will it take to achieve that?

If we, as a university community, are going to understand what's ahead, we need to give some thought to these questions.

Our array of academic offerings continues to be the best and the broadest available anywhere in Maine. I am proud of that. But we have to ask ourselves: Would we be as boastful if, under closer scrutiny, we find that what

we are offering is out of synch with what our state and our students truly need? This is an important question, one that should factor into any honest assessment of how well this university is fulfilling its obligations.

As Maine's flagship university, we must always ensure a proper set of academic programs strategically aligned with the needs of the state's population, its society, and its economy. We must also provide the learning tools and opportunities necessary to success -- things like state-of-the-art library services, top-of-the-line technology, and classroom instruction that involves both teaching about new discoveries and actually engaging the student in uncovering them. We must continuously pursue the academic qualities that distinguish land-grant universities from other institutions in higher education -- consistently rigorous, constantly on the cutting-edge, and focused on both intellectual and practical value.

A good example of that caliber of academic offerings can be found in our Laboratory for Surface Science and Technology. There, students, faculty, and staff are working together to develop button-size sensors to detect the presence of chemical and biological agents in the environment. Their work is advancing so rapidly that a few months ago the U.S. Navy awarded Professor Bob Lad and others involved in the research a \$10 million grant. That effort is a good example of the kind of academic engagement that should be taking place across the University: intellectually demanding for both faculty and students; operating on the frontier of knowledge and expanding the frontier; and advancing science through both theoretical and practical applications.

Given those expectations, we must thoroughly scrutinize our academic offerings to make sure we are living up to our treasured status as Maine's flagship university. That's a big job, one being tackled by Provost Don Zillman, Vice Provost Doug Gelinas, and the deans of our academic colleges and programs. And of course, the work has to be done on both the undergraduate and graduate fronts. Here are some of the areas I have asked them to explore as part of our long-term planning:

First, we must encourage active modes of teaching and learning, where students have hands-on opportunities to learn through doing. Research opportunities, both at the undergraduate and graduate-student levels, clearly are one way to provide these opportunities. I'm counting on our academic officers to make sure that research opportunities, co-operative learning experiences, and internship opportunities abound in the undergraduate and graduate curriculum.

We also must take the steps necessary to enhance the learning process by appropriate application of the best technology that can be brought to bear. We are attempting to provide the best teaching possible by creating a Center for Teaching Excellence. While we are fortunate to have a faculty composed of hundreds of talented teachers, this new center will help professors perfect their talents and become aware of new teaching techniques and technologies. The creation of this center was just one of many actions outlined last year at this time when we introduced BearWorks 2.0.

In addition, we need to make sure the undergraduate curriculum emphasizes broad development of skills that will prepare and position students for life, work, and citizenship in a diverse global society. And we must do so in an intellectual environment, one that places top value on education as a means of becoming a more complete and learned person, as opposed to placing institutional emphasis just on job training and technical skills as our preeminent reason for being.

A second major concern we need to address this year is the future of our research enterprise. As I noted earlier, the University of Maine serves as the foundation of the state's research-based economic improvement strategy. It's a strategy based on opportunities and potential in five targeted research areas -- advanced materials, biotechnology, information technologies, forestry, and agriculture.

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State of the University of Maine

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Entering this academic year, the University of Maine's research effort is in a growth mode, thanks in large part to the Governor and State Legislature, who have taken the first steps in building research into the State's economic equation. Dan Dwyer, our Vice President for Research, has led that effort on behalf of the University and has played an important part in our success to date. Many others have as well.

Over the next two years, the University of Maine will have almost \$47 million of State money available to it for research purposes (\$31 million for capital facilities and equipment, \$16 million for operating expenses). Let me review the sources:

- Nearly \$11 million is available as a result of the R&D bond issue, approved by voters last November.
- About \$16 million is available through the Maine Economic Improvement Fund, a pool of money funded by the legislature and managed by the University System Board of Trustees. That fund started just two years ago with only \$400,000 set aside for us.
- Another \$20 million will be available to us sometime next year as a result of a unique capital funding arrangement approved by the Legislature, specifically addressing our research needs. The Legislature authorized the University System to borrow money on its own for capital construction or improvements in the five targeted areas I just mentioned. As part of the plan, the State itself budgeted the funds necessary to cover debt service on those projects.

The very existence of R&D funds for these purposes is in great part the result of the tireless efforts of several people -- most notably, Professor George Jacobson, who, four years ago, initiated a statewide education effort to raise public awareness of the potential of, and need for, R&D investment. The success is also attributable to legislative champions of the cause like State Senator Mary Cathcart and Representative Kassie Stevens. Thanks to them and many others who rallied to support, the state has finally recognized the importance of university-based R&D to its economic future.

Over the next few years construction or renovations will take place, benefiting several research areas: in biotechnology; food science; aquaculture and marine science; and in engineering and computer sciences. In fact, one exciting proposal currently being explored is the creation of an Engineering Research complex on campus. That proposal would involve renovating existing engineering space as well as providing a certain amount of new construction.

In addition to capital improvements, we will use some of the state-provided research money to invest in related operational needs. The goal is to get the maximum return on the dollars available, and to put all resources to work to create and utilize knowledge for the good of our state.

Please be aware that the growth of our research enterprise should not be confined to the five targeted areas. Nor should it be viewed as a substitute for adequate support for teaching, scholarship, and outreach. Additional resources are needed to support other critical learning areas, such as the liberal arts, the many professional degree programs, Fogler Library, and science activity not directly benefiting from the R&D funds, among others. We need help from both the public and private sectors to fund the facilities, equipment, and programs needed in order to provide a full and enriching learning experience, one that prepares our students for the challenges of career, culture, and citizenship that lie ahead. Just as our own "Faculty Five" put science and engineering on the public agenda, we need to find a way to alert people to other aspects of a strong and dynamic University of Maine.

Our University Advancement division has been assigned a leadership role in helping achieve that end. That division, under Vice President Susan Reardon's leadership, will have to make a coordinated and comprehensive appeal that will inspire donors, alumni, policy makers, and citizens to invest in the University of Maine itself, and not just in certain areas where direct economic return appears to be more immediate.

To reach our goals related to research and scholarship, we have to work hard and have high aspirations. We also have to set realistic targets. My hope is that within a few years, the university will have increased and enhanced its research programs to achieve Research II status under the Carnegie classifications, and will be on a trajectory eventually to arrive at Research I status. The research will cover a broad spectrum of fields, not just the ones to which I just referred. Over time, University research will be widely credited with having greatly elevated and enhanced Maine's economy -- not just by supporting existing and traditional Maine business and industry, but through promoting transformations of the entire economic base.

Another priority for this year is continuing to improve the culture of the University community. This is an objective designed to benefit our students, both those who live on campus and those who commute, and others who spend time on campus or are drawn to it -- employees, visitors, potential students and their families, alumni and supporters, to name a few. A special Blue Ribbon Panel I appointed eighteen months ago as part of BearWorks explored the issue from a student perspective and responded with numerous suggestions, several of which we have already implemented. The recommendations covered a wide range of topics -- academic advising, scheduling, food service, residential housing needs, campus-based programs, transportation, and parking, to name just a few. Students were a major part of this process, and should feel a sense of satisfaction about helping address immediate needs and shaping the University's future.

Other improvements to the campus community and culture are already in the planning or pre-construction stage. One major project is the expansion of Memorial Union, the physical and social center of the campus community. The expanded Union will be a great asset for the campus community and a real attraction to visitors and residents of this region of the state. It will play a major role in influencing the sense of community we want for this university.

Another project related to this objective is the construction of at least one new residence hall, to be located in the southwest side of our campus, near Chadbourne and Balentine halls. We believe that we can improve the campus culture and, in the process, better the student experience by expanding the residential nature of the campus and enhancing the appeal of living on campus.

Both the Union project and the plan to add residential units to the current inventory reflect a long-term vision for UMaine -- a vision based on the continued emphasis on the education of full-time traditional-age students in a residential setting, one enriched by opportunities for social interaction and extracurricular activity. No, we will not ignore the needs of non-traditional students in the region; in fact, we must plan to increase appropriate and non-duplicative services to a statewide clientele of non-traditional students, through the Division of Lifelong Learning, Cooperative Extension, and other academic and outreach programs. But our primary focus as a community will remain on those who can take advantage of the complete residential university learning experience.

It's my firm belief that the experience of four years of virtual education in the confines of one's room is no substitute for the complete, rich, and stimulating residential college experience that has proven so meaningful for so long for so many young adults. No matter how hardwired or wireless the world gets, no matter how much we advance as a society of lifelong learners, there will continue to be a demand for campus-based, residential academic communities that primarily serve young adults.

And as we strive to enhance the student experience, we also must redouble our efforts to enrich overall learning experience by fostering a more diverse university community. If we are to truly educate our students, we need to involve them in the world of ideas, cultures, and peoples. Simple exposure to that world is not enough. We need to involve them in a global, multi-cultural community, one that better reflects the human realities and relationships of today and tomorrow. We have no right to call our institution a university in its truest sense of the term if we fail to meet this educational imperative.

If we plan and act wisely, within a few years the total collegiate experience of our students, in and out of the classroom, will have undergone a transformation. The lessons will be plenty, and will take place in classrooms, the library, the playing fields and courts, in computer clusters, residence halls, dining commons, and just about every other place where students gather to learn, socialize, and think. The new approach will emphasize the

development of the whole person, and prepare students for life, work, and citizenship in a society characterized by diversity. Vice President Richard Chapman has been asked to take a lead role in accomplishing this challenge, but understands that just about every one of us on campus is in a position to help create the culture I just described.

Along with the priorities I've shared this afternoon is a fourth one -- a broad goal of becoming more effectively engaged with our many external audiences: potential students and their families; our public schools; clients of our programs and services; business and industry; government officials and agencies; taxpayers; and alumni and supporters.

You have heard me use the term "engagement" already several times today. For good reason. To me, "engagement" better describes the way this land-grant university ought to interact with the people it serves: as a two-way street, drawing on public assets as well as university expertise to solve problems, meet needs, and seize opportunities. The term "engagement" not only redefines the relationship between the university and its many diverse clienteles, it also signals a change in that relationship -- an institutional shift from delivery of teaching, research, and public service outreach to an interactive and collaborative participation in the process of learning and discovery.

My interest in promoting this transformation has been percolating for some time. I have the good fortune and honor to serve on the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-grant Universities. It consists of 24 presidents and chancellors of universities from around the country. For more than two years we have been working on this challenge. In a report we issued earlier this year, we promoted the theory and practice of engagement as I've explained it here today. While more universities are moving in this direction, I want the University of Maine to be one of the leaders in making this transition.

Engagement is a tool as well as an objective. Our gathering here today is another form of engagement. Our students, faculty, and staff are important stakeholders in the success of the University; we welcome your opinions on how we best fulfill our mission.

I recently sent you a memo, inviting all students, faculty, and staff to take part in one of a series of campus conversations, to be held during the next few months. The purpose of these gatherings is to help us all take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and ideas held by members of the university community. People from the external community have been invited to participate as well. The information we gather and exchange will help us prepare for the future, and will be used as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process, the next stage in BearWorks.

BearWorks 1 and 2 were good beginnings. They produced a set of immediate actions that helped plug a leaky ship, righted the vessel, and got it moving in the right direction. As a result of the BearWorks initiatives, we increased our enrollment, attracted more resources, provided better management of those resources, and reinvigorated the student experience. But there is much more to be done.

This third stage is looking farther into the future and planning for it. To that end, some of us have been trying to envision what lies ahead for higher education, for the University of Maine, and for the state and society. The result of that brainstorming is the draft of a vision statement. We plan to circulate that draft, posting it on a web site, and seeking your reactions and suggestions. We also will share it with policymakers and community leaders around the state, engaging them in this process of envisioning Maine in the years ahead and preparing this university to play a major role in it. Once we have completed these campus and off-campus conversations, we will refine the draft and develop what we hope will be a broadly shared vision, one that will be the basis for a set of strategic directions, priorities, and actions.

So far my focus has been on the programmatic and cultural aspects of the future University of Maine. I haven't said much about finances. One cannot discuss the state of the university or its future without acknowledging that we are severely underfunded. By millions of dollars.

Two areas of underfunding concern me the most. The first deals with employee compensation. Compared to other flagship state research universities, our faculty salaries on average rank 44th in the nation out of the 50 states. The University is at a disadvantage when it comes to trying to attract or retain faculty members, since we routinely fall short of what other institutions can offer for salary and start-up resources.

Increasing compensation for our employees should be, and is, a strong priority for this university. The quality of education we offer and our ability to serve the state's economic, social, and educational needs will improve as we raise our ability to compensate employees at a competitive level. We also need to be able to reward staff and faculty members for outstanding performance, and to compensate them for the sacrifices they made during the past decade. The burden for leading an advocacy effort to address the compensation issue falls on my shoulders. It's a burden I willingly accept, even though I've been told that doing so is fraught with political dangers.

I also plan to try to raise support for addressing our deferred maintenance and physical plant needs -- not just the day-to-day care of our buildings and grounds, but major structural improvements to them, most notably in our learning facilities. Out of necessity, this institution had to absorb major cuts in its maintenance budgets. Dramatic increases in utility costs along with unfunded federal mandates did not help matters, either.

I am willing to do my part by making a compact with the people of Maine, one in which they are helped to understand the long-term benefits and cost-effectiveness of addressing the University's compensation and maintenance needs. The message is straightforward, and is one I hope you will embrace. It's this:

Invest the resources that we need to the job, and we will make you proud of this state university.

Provide the university with the money it needs to attract and retain a stellar faculty and to reward them for what they do for Maine.

Entrust us with the resources needed to create state-of-the-art facilities where you, your sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters can learn effectively, and we will give you graduates who will contribute to a state worthy of the motto, "Dirigo."

From what I have told you this afternoon, it should be obvious that we are preparing for a year of action and transformation. The essence of my thoughts today can be summed up as follows:

- This university will focus on providing a superior learning experience for our students, inside and outside the classroom, and will do so with an emphasis on the richness and diversity of that total experience.
- The State's investment of research dollars was a wise action, to which we must respond with equal wisdom, responsibility, accountability, and results.
- Along with the value of R&D to Maine's economy and quality of life, all scholarly work across the disciplines contributes to knowledge and the advancement of the human condition, and deserves much greater attention and appreciation.
- Our academic programs must be carefully synchronized with the needs and opportunities presented to Maine people, requiring diligence and periodic adjustments in order to maintain the proper calibration.
- We operate in a world where we must constantly seek ways and opportunities to engage with our constituents, always positioning ourselves in a way that conveys a sense of value and relevance to them and their needs.
- And finally, we must make sure we have in place the people and facilities necessary to produce the desired results. That takes an investment of resources from both the public and private sectors, and should not be a burden that is unduly borne by the students we are trying to serve.

When I came here two years ago, I hoped and believed we would begin to reverse the downward spiral we found ourselves in. Few of us would have dared predict that positive changes would have come so strong and so soon. Still we have only begun the task of pulling ourselves up to the levels of success and achievement we know we are capable of. I am looking forward to the challenge; I hope you are as well.

Thank you for the support, the spirit, the good humor, and the enthusiasm which you have brought to the two years we have spent together. I look forward to a mutually rewarding future full of challenges and satisfactions.

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