

Ag Committee Hearing on State Fair Park  
Friday, December 14, 2007  
9:30 a.m. – Room 1525 State Capitol  
Testimony of James B. Milliken, President, University of Nebraska

Good morning, I am J.B. Milliken, president of the University of Nebraska. I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee and to offer some thoughts on how I believe the university can help ensure that our state is able to provide the kinds of economic opportunity necessary to support a high quality of life for our citizens.

The University of Nebraska was created nearly 140 years ago by the state to serve the people of Nebraska. Our goal is to be better than any other public university in the country in how we do this. And the best yardstick for measuring our success is the impact we have on the people of Nebraska.

I take this responsibility seriously, and if I didn't think the University's proposal for State Fair Park was best for the people of our state, the University wouldn't be here today.

I believe we have an opportunity to not only provide educational opportunity for Nebraskans, but also to help ensure that when they graduate from college, there will be good, high-paying jobs available to them so that they will be able to stay in Nebraska to live, work, and raise their families.

This will not be easy. Every state, indeed every country, is facing the challenge of competitiveness in the global, knowledge-based economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is an environment in which we need to take full advantage of all the talent we have and leverage all our strengths.

To meet the challenge, every state is seeking new ways to build its talent pool, create a workforce with the education and skills needed for high paying jobs and grow and attract businesses that will provide opportunity.

In Nebraska, we need to employ a number of strategies to accomplish this:

First, we need to expand access to higher education to more Nebraskans, including populations that have been traditionally underrepresented in college. That's critical not only because we have an obligation to provide educational and economic opportunity, but because – as a state – we cannot afford to squander talent.

A second strategy is to continue to grow the research enterprise, which has proven throughout the world to be a catalyst for regional innovation-based economies. We have had great success in recent years, doubling the volume of sponsored research and growing our overall investment in R&D to competitive levels. Much of this research is in areas critical to Nebraska's future, such as the life sciences, biomedical research, agriculture, alternative energy, and water quality and quantity.

A related, third strategy is to leverage research and our research institutions to help generate growth in the innovation economy. We have a new opportunity, because of the University's recent success in research, to attract and grow businesses that depend on new knowledge and high levels of talent. This isn't a gamble, and we're not asking the state to take a risk.

The concept of an R&D campus has been successful in a number of areas, but the one with which I am most familiar—because of the six years I spent there—is North Carolina and its Centennial Campus. This fall, members of the Board of Regents visited Centennial Campus with me to learn more about how this model has worked.

North Carolina State University in Raleigh is an institution much like UNL; a land-grant university, with strengths in agriculture and engineering. In 1984, the state of North Carolina provided at no cost over 300 acres next door to the campus to create a public/private research and development campus called "Centennial Campus."

One of the lessons from Centennial is that place matters. The proximity to the NC State campus, and its faculty, students and resources, has allowed Centennial Campus to succeed beyond expectations. It has become an international model. It is now a 1,300 acre R&D campus that is home to 1,600 government and corporate employees in private businesses and USDA labs, as well as 3,400 students and 1,300 faculty and staff. And it's not finished.

The most recent development has been the development of a 250-acre Centennial Biomedical Campus, which is anchored by the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine. Here scientists, students and the private sector work together in the areas of animal health, food safety, genetics, pharmaceuticals and biosciences.

I know as well as anyone that Nebraska is not North Carolina, and that the Nebraska Innovation Campus won't be the same as Centennial. It doesn't need to be. We have our own strengths and our own opportunities. And we can be successful by creating our own initiatives.

But we should also be wise enough to learn what we can from others. We should be bold enough to think big. And we should be pragmatic enough to take advantage of the strengths we have. Nebraska is already a national leader in many areas and has the potential to be a leader in others. We can attract private partners who want to employ our graduates, collaborate or support research, and benefit from the resources of a research university.

We believe this is the right time to take advantage of the strengths of the University and invest in a public/private initiative that leverages our strengths for the benefit of Nebraska. The governor expressed it well the other day: there is a clear choice presented to Nebraskans on the use of State Fair Park. We think the choice is clear: the best use of State Fair Park is for the Nebraska Innovation Campus.

Now we ask all that we can ask of you—that you and your colleagues consider the choices and make the decision you believe is best for the future of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.