EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: **Baesu, Eklund, Gorman, Gruverman, Lewis, Pierobon, Reimer, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas**

Absent: **Bearnes, Leiter**

Date: **Tuesday, September 23, 2025**

Location: **201 Canfield Administration Building**

Note: These are not verbatim minutes. They are a summary of the discussions at the Executive Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

1.0 Call *(Shrader)*
Shrader called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett
Shrader thanked the Chancellor for meeting with the Executive Committee and stated that he would like to ask a question. He noted that the Chancellor is in the final year of his contract and asked if he has heard from the President or the Board of Regents about an extension of his contract and asked what the Chancellor expects. Chancellor Bennett reported that he has not been recruited away and neither has he applied to any other institution. He noted that President Gold conducted an evaluation on him, and he stated that the evaluation was very positive and that President Gold stated that he looks forward to many more years of working with him as Chancellor. He pointed out that President Gold also had a 360 review of his performance conducted and he has his last interview with the consultant on Friday. He stated that he is hopeful that his reappointment as Chancellor will occur at the October or December Board of Regents meeting noting that a lot of good work has been done while he has been here, but more good work needs to be done.

2.1 What effects do you think the budget reductions will have on students and on the teaching and research mission of the university?
Chancellor Bennett stated that he did not want to say much about the impact the reductions will have on the university because the shared governance process of the Academic Planning Committee is currently underway, and he does not want to compromise where we are in the process. He pointed out that there were some people who thought that he, as Chancellor, should have just come back to the campus and implement the reductions without enacting the Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reallocation and Reductions. He stated that he was against this because he felt that the APC should do its work and would submit its recommendations to him on the proposed budget reductions.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that we are still in the draft phase of the budget reduction plan and it is subject to review and could possibly be revised. He noted that there is an online feedback portal and the public hearings will be live streamed (information can be found at https://apc.unl.edu/fall-2025-budget-reduction-feedback-form/ and the hearing schedule https://apc.unl.edu/fall-2025-budget-reduction-information/).

VanderPlas asked if the Chancellor asked if he would seriously take into account the APC's recommendations and whether he would come up with an alternate plan. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that if he was not willing to consider the APC's recommendations, he would not have invoked the Procedures and allowed the APC to do its work and would have instead made the budget reduction decisions without shared governance input.

VanderPlas noted that the APC process damages the programs proposed for elimination when the budget plan is made public. She reported that Statistics is already seeing damage in not being able to recruit graduate students. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that the APC process has been widely accepted by the campus community and Griffin noted that the process was approved by the APC, Faculty Senate, ASUN and accepted by the Chancellors over the years.

Shrader suggested that the process be reviewed after this current budget reduction process is finished to see if the process should be revised in any way.

2.2 Can you characterize what the additional $6.5 million reduction will be used for?

Chancellor Bennett stated that our actual structural deficit is $21 million but given the financial horizon, it was felt that we might have to address some deficit from the system level which is the reason for the additional $6.5 million. He stated that he did not know how much the system is going to take from the campuses' budgets, but he does know that the system is facing an approximate $20 million budget deficit. Shrader asked when the system level reduction would be passed on to the campuses. Chancellor Bennett reported that it would likely occur sometime after the start of the new year.

Pierobon asked if the $6.5 million would be a system-level mandate or is this a calculated prediction. Chancellor Bennett stated that historically UNL gets hit with half of the system budget deficit. He pointed out that if our share of the system budget reduction is slightly higher than the $6.5 million, we could cover that without invoking the procedures again.

Lewis pointed out that the University has some collections and other holdings that could possibly be sold off. She asked if there was any consideration to doing this to generate revenue. Chancellor Bennett reported that there are many people who have no sympathy for the university's financial difficulties and some people think that we should be cutting more than $27.5 million. He stated that some have the perception that the university has a lot of fat, but he has not seen this at all.

Chancellor Bennett stated that in consultation with the Executive Leadership Team, deans, and departments the topic is how we get through these reductions while still preserving some of our priorities. He noted high on the list of priorities is AAU membership and noted that part of the budget reduction plan was to preserve some of the indicators that AAU will consider for rejoining their membership.

2.3 What are your strategies to reach out to the campus community during the budget crisis?

Chancellor Bennett stated that once he receives the APC's recommendations, the budget reduction plan must go to the Board of Regents Academic Affairs Committee, and the Business and Finance Committee. He noted that the APC is to report to him by October 24 and we will have a better sense of where we stand in terms of what will be presented to the Board at that time.

2.4 Do you have any idea as to how we address any future budget shortfalls?

Chancellor Bennett stated that his goal is to have UNL operate without any budget deficit, but this will require us to grow our revenue in different ways. This can be done through more tuition revenue, making the case of additional state aid, and perhaps looking at a different budget allocation model to the campuses at the system level.

Chancellor Bennett reported that we were only 38 students shy of being where we need to be for our tuition revenue. He pointed out that the loss of international students really impacted our revenue, but we did do better with our out-of-state undergraduate enrollment noting that the out-of-state students bring in more tuition revenue. He noted that there has been discussion about not having as many tuition remission programs. He stated that in addition to growing enrollment we should continually be reviewing our programs to see which ones are growing and which ones conduct more research.

VanderPlas pointed out that we have known about the demographic cliff coming for many years and asked if growing enrollment is really a long-term solution. Chancellor Bennett stated that he would never give up on growing enrollment and it still has a place for us with programs that are really growing but noted that we need to be careful in what programs we are focusing on. He pointed out that some departments have not been aggressive or willing to evolve into offering online programs. He stated that we will need to be creative with our programming.

Tschetter asked if there is any way we can get our international students back. Chancellor Bennett noted that graduate students and international students need to be a partner with our university's success. Pierobon asked about the faculty as well. He noted that when he was in China this summer, he was being told there were many opportunities for faculty there.

2.5 We have been told that the spiraling insurance costs have contributed to the university budget shortfall. Is the university doing anything to try and counteract these rising costs?

Chancellor Bennett stated that we need to think not only of ways to generate money, but also how to save and raise money. He pointed out that we have operating contracts that are not as favorable as they could be and insurance is a tremendous cost for the university. He stated that we need to try and rebid some of our contracts such as we did with Blue Cross/Blue Shield. He reported that we pay $11 million a year to LES, and we could consider looking at cheaper and renewable energy. He stated that we need to do a careful examination of what we are spending funds on.

Shrader asked if the university has invested in solar or wind power. Chancellor Bennett stated that he is not aware of this but reported that Senior Vice President Barnes has some unique and different ideas on how we could do some things differently to lower our costs.

Lewis noted that the University of Arizona uses some solar power and stated that there are committees looking at alternative renewable energy. She pointed out that the Board's decisions in the recent past to freeze our tuition have in part contributed to the university's deficit. Chancellor Bennett reported that one of our concerns is that while we have emergency backup power, we do not have the ability to power things, such as research equipment if there is a power outage. VanderPlas suggested the university work with Nebraska Power district pointing out that they have a consistent problem with being able to hire people with expertise in engineering and the university could set up a strategic partnership to provide engineering interns.

Chancellor Bennett stated that another area of our budget is the VSIP. He reported that the ELT calculated how many faculty members would need to sign up for it by the end of the month in order to reach the anticipated $5.5 million. He pointed out that there has been a tremendous amount of interest in it, but the applications must be approved by the Chancellor. He noted that not everyone who applies will get approval because it would depend on how the loss of the faculty member would impact a department. Reimer asked if other rubrics are under consideration such as phased retirement. Chancellor Bennett stated that all things are being kept on the table and there will be some flexibility to look at each person who applies.

Lewis noted that allowing people to retire can open up positions to allow the hiring of new people. She asked if there is a percentage of the VSIP funds that would be used for new hires. Chancellor Bennett stated that we would have to find ways to do some hiring to fill vacancies.

3.0 Announcement

3.1 UNL Police Assessment

Shrader reported that the UNL Police asked for a representative to speak with an assessor at the periodic assessment of the police department's performance. He noted that Vakilzadian has volunteered to participate in the assessment.

3.2 Staff Senate Anti-Bullying Document

Shrader reported that the Staff Senate has created an anti-bullying document and would like to have the Faculty Senate's input on it. Griffin noted that the Staff Senate President Brophy will be meeting with the Executive Committee next week.

3.3 Response from Regent Kenney

Shrader reported that he received a response from Regent Kenney, Chair of the Board of Regents, to the email that was sent to the Regents articulating the serious concerns the Executive Committee has about the reductions and their impact on the UNL campus and its people.

4.0 Approval of August 26, 2025, and September 9, 2025 Minutes

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the September 9, 2025, minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Vakilzadian moved for approval and seconded by Baesu. The motion was approved by the Executive Committee.

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the revised August 26th minutes. Hearing no further revisions he asked for a motion of approval. Gorman moved and Vanderplas seconded approval of the minutes. Motion was approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 President's Newsletter

Shrader stated that he is drafting the President's newsletter which will hopefully be sent out this week.

5.2 Response to Faculty Senate Resolution Calling for the Release of All of the Metrics

Shrader reported that he has not had a response from the ELT regarding the Senate's resolution calling for the release of the metrics and process for the budget reduction. Gorman noted that the ELT should not have said that they were going to be transparent with the budget reduction process if they didn't plan on providing the requested information.

5.0 New Business

No new business was discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:49 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, September 30, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.