



Nebraska—Leading the New Frontier in the Global Bioeconomy

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Swanson Gallery
801 S 10th Street
Omaha, NE 68108

Speaker Biographies

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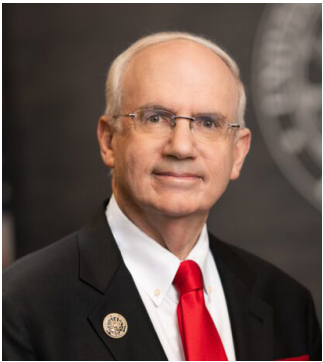
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Our Hosts

Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold

President

University of Nebraska System



Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., became the ninth president of the University of Nebraska System on July 1, 2024, following a national search by the Board of Regents.

As president, Gold leads a four-campus university system that enrolls nearly 50,000 students and

employs 16,000 faculty and staff on campuses in Lincoln, Omaha and Kearney, plus academic divisions and research and extension centers across the state. He serves as chief spokesman and chief executive officer for the system, which operates on a \$3 billion annual budget and includes a flagship Big Ten institution, a world-renowned academic health sciences center, Division I athletics programs, and preeminent institutes focused on water and agriculture, national security and defense, infectious disease and early childhood education.

He is a nationally recognized higher education and health care leader and advocate. He was the chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) and board chair for the Nebraska Medicine Health System from 2014 to 2024. As UNMC's chief operating officer, Dr. Gold was responsible for all aspects of campus leadership program quality and operation—including 7 colleges, 37 institutes and centers, 5,429 faculty and staff and 4,700 health professions students.

In July 2021, Dr. Gold was named the Provost and Executive Vice President of the University of Nebraska System in addition to his ongoing UNMC/Nebraska Medicine responsibilities. In this role, he

served as the chief academic officer of the University of Nebraska System and liaison to the Board of Regents for academic affairs. From May 2017 through June 2021, Dr. Gold served as the chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the state's only public metropolitan university—a role he held concurrently with being UNMC's chancellor.

He holds tenured faculty appointments in UNMC's College of Medicine and in the College of Public Health, where his research interests in health care policy, population health and epidemiology are concentrated. He has authored over 200 peer-reviewed manuscripts, 350 national presentations, 40 books and chapters and engaged in over 300 invited professorships and keynote presentations.

Dr. Gold is a first-generation student; he graduated from the Cornell University College of Engineering with a bachelor's degree in Theoretical and Applied Mechanics. He earned his M.D. from the Weill Cornell College of Medicine and completed his general surgery residency at The New York–Presbyterian Hospital and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He completed his cardiothoracic surgical fellowship training at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, with additional training in pediatric cardiac surgery at the Boston Children's Hospital, both of the Harvard Medical School.

He has been certified by the American Board of Surgery and by the American Board of Thoracic Surgery, specializing in adult and pediatric cardiac surgery. Dr. Gold is licensed in Nebraska, Ohio, New York and New Jersey.

Dr. Gold leads several key economic development boards for the State and the University System, including the Greater Omaha Chamber, University Tech Development Corp, the University Tech Transfer Corp, and UNeTech Corp. His national leadership roles have included more than 50 national professional committees and more than 100 national orga-

nizations, volunteer boards, government and public health councils. He has worked extensively with national- and state-level elected and appointed governing and administrative bodies as an advisor and trusted resource in the areas of higher education, research and clinical care.

Dr. Gold has been married for more than forty years to a medical school classmate. They have two adult children and two grandchildren.

The Hon. Deborah Wince-Smith

President and CEO
Council on Competitiveness



The Honorable Deborah L. Wince-Smith is the President & CEO of the Council on Competitiveness, a non-partisan leadership coalition of CEO's, University Presidents, Labor Union Leaders, and National Laboratory Directors, all committed to developing policy solutions and national initiatives to drive future productivity growth, prosperity for all Americans, and the global success of American Businesses.

tions and national initiatives to drive future productivity growth, prosperity for all Americans, and the global success of American Businesses.

Ms. Wince-Smith assumed the leadership role of the Council on Competitiveness after a distinguished career as a senior U.S. Government official. She began her career as a program director for the National Science Foundation, where she managed U.S. research programs with Eastern European countries and U.S. universities. She served as the Assistant Director for International Affairs in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy for the Reagan Administration. She was the first Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy in the U.S. Department of Commerce in the Administration of President George H.W. Bush, overseeing federal technology transfer policy, implementation of the Bayh-Dole Act, and the White House National Technology Initiative. Ms. Wince-Smith was the architect of the landmark 1988 Head of Government Science and Technology Agreement with Japan, and developed ministerial bilateral collaborations with China, India and Latin America.

Ms. Wince-Smith developed President Reagan's 1988 Competitiveness Initiative and led the implementation of executive orders and new laws that transformed federal technology transfer policy for U.S. industries, national laboratories and universities. Following her government tenure, Ms. Wince-Smith became active in the governance of various national scientific laboratories and provided strategic counsel to several FORTUNE 100 companies.

An internationally renowned, leading voice and expert on competitiveness policy, innovation strategy, science and technology and international economic policy, Ms. Wince-Smith has recharged the national debate on America's competitiveness future, strategic commitment to global leadership in innovation and economic transformations underway on energy systems, advanced manufacturing and the future of work. Ms. Wince-Smith is frequently called upon to testify in front of the U.S. Congress and appears regularly on global television news networks including Bloomberg, BBC, CNBC, CNN and Fox News.

Ms. Wince-Smith spearheaded the National Innovation Initiative (NII) that played a pivotal role in shaping the 2006 Bipartisan National Competes Act. Ms. Wince-Smith helped catalyze a national "innovation movement" launching regional and state innovation initiatives and stimulating a new global focus on competitiveness strategy and policies to optimize innovation-based growth, the production of high value goods, global experts, and skilled job creation. Ms. Wince-Smith leads the Council's Energy and Advanced Manufacturing Initiatives to accelerate energy innovation and advanced manufacturing as twin pillars of U.S. productivity growth, skilled job creation, and global exports.

Building upon the thought leadership and policy import of the NII, the Council's Energy and Manufacturing Initiative, and Technology Leadership Forum of Chief Technology Officers, Ms. Wince-Smith conceived and initiated the Council's newly launched "National Commission on Innovation and Competitiveness Frontiers." The Commissioners will focus on emerging challenges and opportunities and develop a future oriented policy roadmap to jumpstart flagging productivity, respond to new global competitors and address the impacts of ever accelerating technology driven transformation.

Since 2009, Ms. Wince-Smith has served as President and Founder of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), engaging leaders from over thirty competitiveness organizations from around the globe. The GFCC is the first global network devoted exclusively to the exchange of knowledge and practice related to competitiveness policies and strategies; and, it is the first international, public-private mechanism to promote global economic growth through collaboration in innovation.

Ms. Wince-Smith is a member of corporate and non-profit Boards of Directors, Advisory Committees, and philanthropic organizations. She served as a Senate confirmed member of the Oversight Board of the Internal Revenue Service from 2006–2012, serving under the Administrations of President George W. Bush and President Barack H. Obama. She served as Chairman of the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Competitiveness, and as a Public Director of NASDAQ-OMX from 2005–2012. She previously served on the Smithsonian National Board, the Secretary of State’s Committee on International Economic Policy, the U.S. Naval Academy Foundation and the Board of Governors of Argonne National Laboratory. She also served on the Advisory Committee of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) and UNICEF.

As a long-standing leader in the national laboratory system, Ms. Wince-Smith served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. She previously served on the University of California President’s Council overseeing Los Alamos, Lawrence Berkeley and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories. She served two terms of service on the University of Chicago’s Board of Governors for Argonne National Laboratory, and as a trustee of Lehigh University. She served as a member of Purdue University’s Strategic Research Advisory Council (SRAC) and as a member of Marquette University’s External Advisory Board for Corporate Engagement, as a member of the Queen’s University International Advisory Committee for the Management School, as a member of UNICEF’s Advisory Group, as a member of the Advisory Board of the Delphi Economic Forum, and as an Independent Advisor to Delos Living, LLC.

On behalf of former Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, she chaired the Secretary’s National Advisory Committee on Strengthening America’s Communities producing the first comprehensive assessment of U.S. Government Economic Development Strategy and Program.

Ms. Wince-Smith currently serves as a Commissioner on the Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property. She is a member of the Council of Japan’s Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum, she serves as a Board of Trustees of the Hevolution Foundation US, and as a member of the Strategic Research Advisory Board of Oklahoma University. She also serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the College Year in Athens, she serves on the Board of Directors of the Mycenaean Foundation, and as a Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of the American College of Greece (ACG). As an expert in technology commercialization, Ms. Wince-Smith serves on the Board of Directors of Aerolase, Inc., and Q-Net Security, Inc. As a member of The Explorers Club, Ms. Wince-Smith is committed to advancing its mission of global exploration, scientific discovery, and protection of the planet.

Ms. Wince-Smith graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Vassar College and earned a master’s degree in Classical Archaeology from King’s College, Cambridge University. She received an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities from Michigan State University, an Honorary Doctorate of Public Administration from the University of Toledo, an Honorary Doctorate of Law honoris causa from the Queens University Belfast, an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters honoris causa from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service from the University of South Carolina, and the European University of Tirana, and, most recently, an honorary doctorate from University of Pittsburgh.

Ms. Wince-Smith resides in McLean, Virginia. Her two sons are graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy.

Speakers

Dr. Kenneth W. Bayles

Vice Chancellor for Research
University of Nebraska Medical Center



Dr. Kenneth W. Bayles received his training in bacterial genetics at Kansas State University where he earned his Ph.D. degree in 1989 for his studies of toxin production by the Gram-positive pathogen, *Staphylococcus aureus*. He then performed post-doctoral

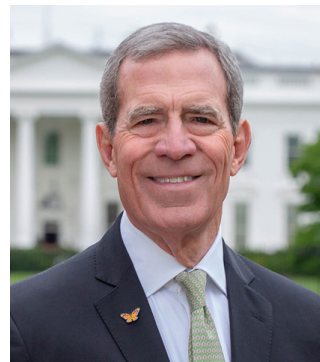
research at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, examining the regulatory response to DNA damage in *Bacillus subtilis* and *S. aureus*. After nine years as a faculty member at the University of Idaho, he moved to the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) where he became the founding Director of the Center for Staphylococcal Research (CSR) and combined the talents of several investigators to focus on the role of staphylococcal biofilm in the development of disease. In 2011, Dr. Bayles was promoted to Associate Vice Chancellor for Basic Science Research for the University where he supports several campus-wide efforts to enhance the productivity of its research faculty. He then served as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Research before assuming his current role as Vice Chancellor for Research.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bayles' research interests have been funded by multiple NIH grants and have remained focused on elucidating the regulation of bacterial cell death and defining their roles in biofilm development. This research has led to greater than 120 publications, many of which having expanded the boundaries of bacterial physiology to include the concept of bacterial programmed cell death and the hypothesis that the molecular control of this process is conserved in plants and animals.

In addition, his studies have led to the discovery that bacterial biofilm is a complex developmental process that includes many functions previously thought to be reserved for more complex organisms. In more recent years, his research interests expanded to Department of Defense-related activities including work on countermeasures against weapons of mass destruction such as therapeutics and vaccines to protect against select agents and toxins, as well as compounds to protect against radiation exposure.

The Hon. John Bode

CEO and President
Corn Refiners Association



John Bode is President & CEO of the Corn Refiners Association, the trade association representing the corn milling industry. He has been involved in every significant change in federal food law since the 1981 Farm Bill.

In private practice, Bode counseled leading food and agriculture trade associations and companies regarding legislative and regulatory policy advocacy, regulatory compliance and congressional investigations. He has served as lead counsel for several of the nation's largest food recalls and general counsel for leading food trade associations.

Bode served in three Presidential appointments at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services. Before joining the USDA in 1981, he was on the staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and served on the staff of then-Governor of Oklahoma David L. Boren.

Born in Oklahoma City, John was educated at the United States Naval Academy and the University of Oklahoma, receiving his B.A. in 1977. He received his J.D. from George Mason University School of Law in 1983.

Mr. Veronica Breckenridge

Founder and Managing Partner
First Bight Ventures



With over two decades of experience scaling global technology, Veronica Breckenridge is a seasoned operator and investor specializing in the commercialization of deep tech. Her career includes executive leadership roles at Apple, Tesla, where she was responsible for scal-

ing business operations and sales in the Asia-Pacific region. Transitioning into venture capital in 2015, she previously served as a lead investor and founding partner of CSC Upshot Fund based in Silicon Valley, where she managed a high-volume portfolio of over 300 companies and established the top unicorn per AUM Fund in the world.

Today, Veronica is the Founder and Managing Partner of First Bight Ventures, a firm dedicated to the “Century of Biology.” Based in Houston, she focuses on bridging the gap between lab-scale innovation and industrial-scale reality. By leveraging her background in complex manufacturing and global supply chains, she is building a biomanufacturing ecosystem that transforms scientific breakthroughs into profitable, sustainable alternatives for the \$6 trillion chemical and materials industries.

Mr. Kelly Brunkhorst

Executive Director
Nebraska Corn Board and Nebraska Corn Growers Association



Kelly Brunkhorst was raised on a diversified grain and livestock operation that is still within the family south of Wauneta, NE. Following graduation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Kelly began his career in agriculture by managing a feed mill, becoming a district sales manager and working with an elevator and feed association, before joining the staff of the Nebraska Corn Board. Kelly held the position of Director of Research for ten years prior to his current role as the Executive Director of both the Nebraska Corn Board and Nebraska Corn Growers Association.

Kelly serves on the board of A-FAN and the Lincoln YMCA, and has past served on the 4-H Foundation board and as chairman of the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council.

Kelly and his wife Carey, a registered nurse, have two sons, three grandchildren and reside in Lincoln.

Mr. Carlos Cabrera

Executive Chairman
Genomatica



Carlos A. Cabrera is an independent consultant based in the greater Chicago Area.

His fields of Expertise include Energy, Fuels, Chemicals, Leadership, Strategy and General Management. He is a recognized world expert in the Oil and Gas and

Petrochemical Industries. Mr. Cabrera has served on several US and foreign-based Corporate Boards for both private and public companies.

Mr. Cabrera is the Executive Chairman of Genomatica, a San Diego based Biotechnology firm. He serves as Chairman of the BOD of Elessent.

Mr. Cabrera is a Distinguished Associate to the World Energy Consultancy FACTS.

He serves on the Board of Directors of Encina Development Group (“Encina”), a company that produces chemicals from waste plastics.

He was previously the President/CEO and then Chairman of UOP, the founding President and CEO of the National Institute of Low Carbon and Clean Energy (NICE) based in Beijing, China, and the Executive Chairman of Ivanhoe Energy.

Mr. Cabrera is a member of the Advisory Board of the Chemical Engineering Department at the Illinois Institute of Technology and a Board member of the Loker Institute at the University of Southern California. He was a member of the Global Advisory Board of the University of the Chicago Booth School of Business (2009-2019).

Granted nine patents by the U.S. Patent Office, Mr. Cabrera was inducted to the University of Kentucky Engineering Hall Of Distinction and honored with the Honeywell Corporation 2008 Senior Leadership Award. In 2007, he was awarded the Fuels and Petrochemicals Division Leadership Award by The American Institute of Chemical Engineers in recognition of outstanding contributions to the advancement of the fuels and petrochemical industry, among several other distinctions.

Elected to the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) in Feb of 2021. Election to the National Academy of Engineering is among the highest professional distinctions accorded to an engineer.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree with High Distinction degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Kentucky and a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Chicago.

Mr. Bruce Carpenter

Senior Vice President
HDR



Bruce has over 40 years of extensive experience in the planning and design of numerous architectural projects of varying scope and size, leading the Civic program’s efforts in the Central Region. Bruce’s work reinforces the ideal that strong communities are America’s corner-

stone; his career is distinguished by contributions to the built environment to improve the quality of life for a community and its citizens. He has been instrumental in the creation of arts centers, museums, parks, entertainment venues, community centers, hospitals and other public spaces that all enrich a thriving community. Bruce is especially talented at translating cultural sensitivities into the community’s most meaningful projects. His work reinforces the ideal that all projects are enhanced through a collaborative process, an ideal freely shared with architects locally, regionally and nationally.

Bruce was the 2013 recipient of the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal for Architectural Excellence, the highest honor that the American Institute of Architects Nebraska bestows in recognition of the most distinguished achievement in service to the profession of architecture in the State of Nebraska.

Mr. Mike Cassling

Chairman of the Board
CQuence Health and Cassling



Mike Cassling serves as Chairman of the Board for CQuence Health and Cassling, two Omaha-based healthcare organizations he helped shape over nearly four decades. Mike joined Cassling in 1985 and advanced through leadership roles, becoming President

in 1996 and later Chairman. In 2011, he founded CQuence Health to accelerate healthcare innovation through strategic guidance, professional services, and investment capital. In 2025, Mike led the transition of both companies to 100% employee ownership through ESOPs, ensuring long-term independence and preserving their culture and mission. Today, he provides strategic oversight as Board Chair while focusing on governance and community leadership.

Mike also serves as Chairman of the Board of Governors for the Aksarben Foundation, Vice Chair for Omaha Performing Arts (OPA), and sits on the boards of The Salvation Army, CyncHealth, Bellevue University, and the Nebraska Health Information Initiative. He also serves on the Advisory Board for the Jeffrey S. Raikes School of Computer Science and Management at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Additionally, Mike is Founding Chair of the Nebraska Tech Collaborative. He holds a degree in accounting and marketing from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and completed the Graduate School of Sales and Marketing at Syracuse University.

Mr. Jim Clifton

Chairman
Gallup



Jim Clifton is the Chairman of Gallup, a global analytics and advice firm. Jim served as the organization's CEO from 1988 until 2022. Under his leadership as CEO, Gallup expanded from a predominantly U.S.-based company to a worldwide organization with 30 offices

in 20 countries and regions.

Jim is the creator of The Gallup Path, a metric-based economic model that establishes the linkages among human nature in the workplace, customer engagement and business outcomes. This model is used in performance management systems in more than 500 companies worldwide. Another of his innovations, the Gallup World Poll, gives the world's 7 billion citizens a voice on virtually all key global issues.

In June 2015, the Clifton Foundation and Gallup announced a \$30 million gift to the University of Nebraska to establish the Don Clifton Strengths Institute. The gift supports the early identification and accelerated development of thousands of gifted entrepreneurs and future business builders.

Jim is the author of *The Wall Street Journal* best-seller, *Culture Shock*. Released in 2023, the book offers Gallup's solution to the biggest leadership issue of our time. He is also author of *The Wall Street Journal* bestseller, *Wellbeing at Work*, as well as the *The Wall Street Journal* No. 1 bestseller, *It's the Manager*, the bestseller, *Born to Build*, and *The Coming Jobs War*. He has also authored many articles on global leadership. His blog appears regularly in the influencer section of LinkedIn and on the Gallup.com Chairman's Blog.

Jim serves on several boards, including the Council on Competitiveness. He is Chairman Emeritus of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and Chairman of the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Center for Social Justice. He has received honorary degrees from Medgar Evers, Jackson State and Bellevue Universities. He is also a distinguished visiting professor at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University. Mr. Clifton lives and works in Washington, D.C.

Gen. (Ret.) Anthony J. Cotton

Former Commander
United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM)



Anthony J. Cotton is a retired United States Air Force four-star general and senior national security leader with more than three decades of experience commanding and advising at the highest levels of the U.S. military and Department of Defense.

During a distinguished military career, General Cotton commanded forces at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, culminating as Commander of United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). In that role, he led the nation's strategic deterrence enterprise, overseeing global nuclear command and control operations, strategic forces readiness, and the integration of space, cyber, missile defense, and intelligence capabilities. He was responsible for ensuring continuous, credible deterrence while managing risk across multiple combatant commands and geopolitical theaters.

Earlier, as Commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, General Cotton was responsible for the organization, training, and equipping of the Air Force's bomber and intercontinental ballistic missile forces. He guided the command through modernization efforts critical to the future of U.S. deterrence, while sustaining around-the-clock operations and reinforcing a culture of accountability, safety, and mission excellence.

Throughout his career, he held senior operational and staff positions that placed him at the center of joint and interagency decision-making, advising senior civilian leaders, working closely with the

intelligence community, and coordinating with allies and partners. Across these roles, he was trusted with stewardship of the nation's most sensitive capabilities and missions.

Today, he brings this experience to advisory, consulting, and leadership roles, helping organizations navigate complexity, manage strategic risk, and lead decisively—when it matters most.

Dr. Kirk Dombrowski

Vice President for Research and Economic Development and Professor
University of Vermont



Kirk Dombrowski is a transformational public-university executive with a recognized record of advancing institutional stature, strengthening research and innovation enterprises, and aligning academic excellence with public mission. He currently serves as Vice

President for Research and Economic Development and University Distinguished Professor at the University of Vermont (UVM), where he provides executive leadership for research, innovation, community engagement, and economic development across the university, its academic health system, and affiliated research centers.

Since assuming this role in 2020, Dr. Dombrowski has led UVM through a period of historic growth and organizational transformation. Under his leadership, the university doubled annual research expenditures—from approximately \$135 million to nearly \$280 million—and achieved Carnegie R1 classification in 2025, placing UVM among the nation's highest-activity research universities. He rebuilt research governance and administrative systems, expanded faculty research development capacity, modernized compliance and integrity infrastructure, and strengthened financial stewardship across a \$260M+ research enterprise.

Dr. Dombrowski has also positioned UVM as a national model for modern land-grant engagement. He founded and scaled the Office of Engagement

and the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships, distributing more than \$6 million in competitive community-university partnership grants and resetting the institution's role in statewide economic and workforce development. He directed Vermont's EDA-designated Semiconductor Tech Hub (V-GaN) initiative, coordinating partnerships among state government, industry, and higher education and securing significant federal investment.

A cultural scholar by training and an institution-builder by practice, Dr. Dombrowski has held senior leadership roles at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and The City University of New York, combining deep experience in faculty governance, research administration, and interdisciplinary collaboration. He currently serves as Chair of the Board of Directors of the national EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation, representing research leadership from 25 states and advancing federal research competitiveness for under-resourced regions.

Across his career, Dr. Dombrowski's leadership philosophy has emphasized institutional trust, fiscal discipline, and long-term capacity building, grounded in the public mission of higher education and informed by sustained engagement with rural, Indigenous, and underserved communities.

Dr. Peter K. Dorhout

Vice President for Research and Professor of Chemistry
Iowa State University



Dr. Peter K. Dorhout serves as Professor of Chemistry and Vice President for Research at Iowa State University and an Ames National Laboratory Affiliate. Prior to coming to Iowa State, he served five years as Vice President for Research following four years as dean of the

College of Arts & Sciences at Kansas State University. He has served as the Interim Academic Vice President at Colorado State University-Pueblo (2011), preceded by 20 years at Colorado State University-Fort Collins as Vice Provost for Graduate Studies,

Assistant Vice President for Research, and Professor of Chemistry. He served as a collaborator at Los Alamos National Laboratory 1987–2011. He has led professional organizations and foundations as a member of the Boards of Directors for the American Chemical Society (President, 2018), the Research Corporation for Science Advancement (Board, 2003-present, Board Chair 2024-27), the Iowa State University Research Park, the Iowa Innovation Council, the Science Center of Iowa, and the Mid-Iowa Council Scouting America Executive Board. He has been a member of the Council on Competitiveness, Advisory Committee and Working Group Co-Chair (2019-2020) and the Technology Leadership & Strategy Initiatives group (2021-present).

Dr. Lee Ellen Drechsler

Senior Vice President
Corporate R&D
The Procter & Gamble Company



Lee Ellen Drechsler's career at Procter & Gamble spans technical leadership roles across Beauty Care, Baby Care and Corporate R&D, with responsibilities from upstream disruptive innovation to product supply. Lee Ellen leads Disruptive Platform Innovation for

the Company as well as critical disciplines including Analytical Sciences, Chemistry, Biosciences, Process, Packaging, and Connect + Develop. She is the global leader of sustainability innovation, delivering on the company's commitment to superior consumer products that are sustainable.

Through her technical expertise and deep understanding of P&G's business model, Lee Ellen is leading the identification of novel innovation opportunities and accelerating the way P&G delivers game-changing and sustainable products, packages, and services. Her teams leverage early in-market learning, proprietary and open-source datasets, and productive collaborations with world class academic and business partners to deliver consumer-preferred solutions—scientifically backed and robust at the scale required to reach billions of consumers around

the world. Several innovations initiated by her team are transforming industries beyond P&G via business partnerships across the supply chain.

Innovation highlights:

- Championed award-winning [global recycling initiatives](#), including efforts to enable recycling of packaging plastics, shaping the future of polymers
- Advocated for accelerating [collaborations with academia and startups](#), enabling the Connect + Develop approach to innovation at P&G
- Led the discovery and early industrialization of a new waterless product platform, now in market as [Tide EVO](#), Olay Melts, and [EC30](#) personal care products.
- Advocates for closer partnership between academic institutions, national laboratories, and corporations on STEM education at all academic levels, around the world. This includes work with the NSF and US National Academies, A*STAR Singapore, and several European public research systems.

The Hon. John W. Ewing Jr.

Mayor
City of Omaha



I am a proud son of Omaha, born and raised on the city's north side. I know personally the difference affordable housing can make and remember, age 15, when my parents were able to buy our first home. My initials are still in the cement at that house in north Omaha, and I'm

happy to say my parents still live there. I am the oldest of three children, the husband of Dr. Viv Ewing, and father of two wonderful daughters and a grandson.

I am a graduate of Northwest High School and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where I hold two degrees: a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and Business and a Master of Science in Urban Studies. I served the Omaha Police Department for 25 years, from 1981 to 2006, and retired at the rank of deputy chief. I am an associate minister with Salem Baptist Church. In 2006, I was elected five times to

the Douglas County Treasurer's Office and served the people of Douglas County for 18 years. I became the city of Omaha's 52nd mayor on June 9, 2025.

Mr. Dan Foy

Principal, Global Analytics
Gallup



Dan Foy is Gallup's U.S. business leader for global research. In that capacity, he focuses on fostering partnerships with thought leaders aiming to impact critical international issues across the government, nonprofit, and private sectors.

Dan is a longstanding champion for Gallup's wellbeing sciences, which he helps advance through community-based measurement and evaluation studies, organizational culture transformations, and collaborative research and development. He has also been deeply involved in developing and leading some of Gallup's most methodologically and analytically innovative projects.

Dan joined Gallup in 2008 and holds degrees in cultural anthropology from the University of Nebraska and the University of Missouri.

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Paul Friedrichs

Former Deputy Assistant to the President
and Former Director of the White House Office
of Pandemic Preparedness



Dr. Paul Friedrichs recently joined RAND as Senior Biopreparedness Fellow and is also a Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and an Adjunct Professor of Surgery at the Uniformed Services University. Previously, he served as the Deputy

Assistant to the President and inaugural Director of The White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy.

Paul also served as Senior Director for Global Health Security and Biodefense at the National Security Council. Before moving to the White House, he served as the Joint Staff Surgeon at the Pentagon, where he provided medical advice to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and coordinated military medical support across the Department. In addition to caring for patients in combat, Antarctica and other austere locations, he has led DOD's global medical evacuation system and assisted in multiple major domestic and international responses to natural disasters and biological outbreaks.

He was awarded the Bronze Star and is a Chevalier of the French Ordre National du Mérite. Paul's father served in the US Navy at the end of World War II and his mother fought in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. He is married to Dr. Rita Friedrichs, a former Army physician, and they are the proud parents of two children, one of whom is a Marine.

Dr. Sarah Glaven

Visiting Fellow
Princeton University



Dr. Sarah Glaven is a distinguished authority in biotechnology and biomanufacturing. Currently, Dr. Glaven is a Visiting Fellow with the Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment at Princeton University, as well as Founder and Principal of Marathon Bio where she is

advising startups focused on industrial biotech and national security. She is a former senior biologist at the United States Naval Research Laboratory where she pioneered a field called electromicrobiology, the study of the interaction between microbes and electronic devices. She has collaborated extensively with the private sector through cooperative research and development agreements and patent licensing.

From 2023–2025, Dr. Glaven served as Principal Assistant Director for Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. She led the National Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing Initiative by establishing and chairing the National Bioeconomy Board. In this

role she oversaw coordination and implementation of over \$15 billion in federal funding across the executive branch, including the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Science Foundation. She also worked with the Science Advisor to the President and the National Security Council to advise the President on all areas of the bioeconomy, including research and development, data, infrastructure, procurement, workforce, regulation, biosafety and biosecurity, international engagement, and national security.

Mr. Billy Hagstrom

Co-Founder and CEO
Bluestem



Billy Hagstrom is the Co-Founder and CEO of Bluestem, an Omaha-based company on a mission to transform the chemical industry using Midwest corn. Billy brings deep experience to this role, previously serving as the Executive Vice President of Strategy & Development at Green Plains, Inc. Before that, he spent

years in asset management as a Managing Director at Highbridge Capital Management and began his finance career in Natural Resources Investment Banking at J.P. Morgan in New York.

Mr. Rob Hanson

Co-Founder and CEO
Monolith Materials



Rob Hanson is the co-founder and chief executive officer of Nebraska-based Monolith, where he leads the development of next-generation technology to produce domestic, low-cost, low-emission carbon black—a critical material for the transportation

sector and broader manufacturing economy, used extensively in tires, rubber products, and plastics that support everyday mobility and industrial activity.

Prior to co-founding Monolith, Hanson served as Global Director of Product Management for AREVA Solar, the solar division of what was then the world's largest nuclear energy company, where he worked on advanced energy technologies at commercial scale.

Hanson holds a master's degree in mechanical engineering from Stanford University and has been a guest lecturer at Stanford, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Foothill College, and the University of Saskatchewan, speaking on topics ranging from thermodynamics and advanced manufacturing to entrepreneurship.

Dr. Tiffany Heng-Moss

Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR)
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Dr. Tiffany Heng-Moss currently serves as the Interim Harlan Vice Chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and as Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources for the University of

Nebraska system. In these roles, she provides strategic leadership for system-wide initiatives that advance agriculture, natural resources, and rural economic prosperity across Nebraska and beyond. Dr. Heng-Moss guides collaborative efforts spanning research, teaching, and Extension, working closely with campus partners, state and federal agencies, industry leaders, and stakeholders to strengthen the university's impact on food, agriculture, and natural resources innovation. Her leadership ensures that IANR remains a driving force for workforce development, community vitality, and the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Nebraska's agricultural and natural resource sectors.

From 2017 to 2025, Dr. Heng-Moss served as Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. As dean, she provided visionary leadership in advancing academic innovation, workforce development, and student success. She led the development and implementation of interdisciplinary academic credentials, a graduate education framework, Nebraska's first education compact, and a comprehensive student success roadmap aligned with UNL's N2025 Strategic Plan. Her efforts have positioned CASNR as a leader in preparing students to address the dynamic challenges facing agriculture and natural resources.

Dr. Heng-Moss joined the UNL faculty in 2001 and has been engaged across the tripartite mission of teaching and learning, research and discovery, and extension and engagement. She has authored or co-authored more than 100 peer-reviewed publications and has served as principal or co-investigator on over \$70 million in teaching and outreach grants and \$8 million in research funding. Dr. Heng-Moss has designed and led impactful extension programming, sharing her expertise with producers, industry professionals, and the broader community. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses and has mentored numerous graduate students and post-doctoral scholars—many of whom have gone on to assume leadership roles in academia, government, and industry.

Her contributions have been recognized with numerous honors, including the USDA National Award for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences, the University of Nebraska Outstanding Teaching and Instructional Creativity Award (OTICA), Nebraska Science Education Catalyst Award, Engler Inspiration Award, and Inductee into the Nebraska Hall of Agricultural Achievement.

Mr. Dan Hoffman

CEO
Invest Nebraska



Dan Hoffman is the CEO of Invest Nebraska, where he has collaborated with state partners to build the venture ecosystem in Nebraska. Since 2008, he has led Invest Nebraska, the state's Venture Development Organization that invests seed capital in the state's innovative startups,

advises entrepreneurs, and collaborates with public/private partners to build entrepreneurial infrastructure. Invest Nebraska was the most active venture capital seed investor in the Mountain and Midwest Region in 2025 according to Pitchbook. In 2022, Dan served as the Principal Investigator of the Heartland Robotics Cluster which was awarded a \$25M grant by the U.S. Department of Commerce—Economic Development Administration under the Build Back Better Regional Challenge. Before joining Invest Nebraska, Dan served as a Senior Policy Adviser to Governors Dave Heineman and Mike Johanns. He holds a M.A. in economics and a B.S. in Finance from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dan also serves on the Board of Directors for Nebraska Innovation Campus, the Board of Directors for the Nebraska Diplomats, the Advisory Board for the UNL College of Engineering, and President Gold's University of Nebraska Advisory Board of Excellence. In 2017, he was awarded the Entrepreneurship Advocate Award by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Entrepreneurship Center. Since 1999, Dan has taught economic courses at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, serving as Lecturer in the College of Business—Department of Economics.

The Hon. Dr. Scott H. Hutchins

Under Secretary for Research, Education, and
Economics Chief Scientist
U.S. Department of Agriculture



Dr. Scott Hutchins serves as Under Secretary for the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area of USDA. In addition, he is the Chief Scientist for USDA and serves on the USDA Leadership Cabinet. The REE Mission Area includes the Agricultural Research Service (ARS),

Economic Research Service (ERS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS).

Prior to this appointment, Dr. Hutchins served as the Deputy Under Secretary (2019-2021) for REE and led the creation of the USDA Science Blueprint and the U.S. Ag Innovation Strategy. Before joining USDA, Dr. Hutchins was the Global R&D Leader for Dow Agrosiences (now Corteva™ Agriscience). In his 31+ year career with the private sector, he was involved with the corporate innovation and business development functions in many roles, including leader of the seeds and crop protection portfolio/innovation management forums.

Dr. Hutchins received a B.S. in entomology from Auburn University, M.S. in entomology from Mississippi State University, and Ph.D. in entomology from Iowa State University. He is a Past President of the Entomological Society of America (ESA) and was elected as a Fellow and Honorary Member of the ESA. He is an Adjunct Professor with the Department of Entomology at the University of Nebraska.

Mr. Gregory Jaffe

President
Jaffe Policy Consulting



Gregory Jaffe is President of Jaffe Policy Consulting, which provides strategic advice on national and international policies and regulations involving agriculture and food, with specific expertise in sustainability, climate, bioeconomy, biotechnology, biofuels, sustainable

proteins, biomanufacturing, pesticides, PFAS, food safety, and food loss and waste. Greg also is the World Bioeconomy Association's (WBA) Ambassador for Bioeconomy Policies and Regulation as well as a member of the WBA's Board.

He recently worked as the Senior Advisor for Regulatory Affairs in USDA's Office of the Secretary. Greg was the Department's Chief Regulatory Officer responsible for managing the Department's regulatory agenda, interdepartmental review of all significant regulations, and engagement with EPA and FDA on their regulations and policies that impact USDA's programs. He was the Departmental lead responsible for managing and coordinating its programs, investments, and regulation involving bioeconomy, biotechnology, and biomanufacturing. He represented USDA on interdepartmental policy committees, including the National Bioeconomy Board.

Before joining USDA, Greg worked at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a non-profit consumer organization working on food and nutrition issues. He led CSPI's policy work involving innovative food products and was a member of the senior management team establishing CSPI's program priorities and designing advocacy strategies. He has a B.A. from Wesleyan University and a law degree from Harvard Law School.

The Hon. Joe Kelly

Lieutenant Governor
State of Nebraska



Lieutenant Governor Joe Kelly was sworn in as Nebraska's 42nd Lieutenant Governor on January 5, 2023.

Born and raised in Lexington, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Nebraska in 1978 and a Juris Doctor from the University of

Nebraska College of Law in 1981. Lieutenant Governor Kelly served as a criminal prosecutor in the Lancaster County Attorney's Office from 1981 to 1985.

From 1986 through 1990 he was an associate with Berniger, Berg, and Diver in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He returned to his career as a prosecutor with the Lancaster County Attorney's Office in 1990 and was subsequently elected County Attorney in 2010 and again in 2014.

In 2018, President Trump appointed him as the United States Attorney for Nebraska where he served until February 2021. Lieutenant Governor Kelly most recently served as the Criminal Bureau Chief for the Nebraska Attorney General. He and his wife of more than 30 years, Susan, have two children, Shannon and Tom. The Kellys live in Lincoln, where they attend St. Peter Catholic Church.

Mr. Tom Kent

President and CEO
Nebraska Public Power District



Mr. Thomas J. Kent was appointed President and CEO of Nebraska Public Power District in May 2020. Tom holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a master's degree in business administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has also

completed the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (“INPO”) reactor technology course for utility executives at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He joined the District in May 1990 as an engineer at Cooper Nuclear Station and has served in many positions at the District throughout his career. He was appointed Vice President & Chief Operating Officer in May 2011. Mr. Kent is a veteran of the United States Navy and is very active in the electric utility industry and his community. He served on the Southwest Power Pool Members Committee and is currently serving as a Board member of the Nebraska Power Association, Nuclear Energy Institute, Electric Power Research Institute, The Energy Authority, American Public Power Association, Large Public Power Council, and the Mid-America Council Boy Scouts of America. He and his wife, Dacia, live in rural Lancaster County, Nebraska, and they have two adult children.

Dr. Chris Kratochvil

Vice President, External Relations
University of Nebraska System



Chris Kratochvil, M.D., began his role as the Interim Vice President for External Relations at the University of Nebraska System in July 2024. As Interim Vice President for External Relations, Kratochvil serves on the president’s executive cabinet and is responsible for promoting positive relations and outcomes between the university and its constituents. As the senior member of the external relations team, Kratochvil oversees the unit responsible for communications, event planning, marketing and branding, and state and federal government relations. He is the university’s chief external relations officer.

He also serves in a dual role as Vice Chancellor of External Relations at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), focusing on government relations, alumni, strategic communications, rural, and community initiatives. Kratochvil is the Senior Advisor to the Global Center for Health Security and in 2021 was named the Inaugural Distinguished Chair for the Global Center for Health Security.

He also serves in a dual role as Vice Chancellor of External Relations at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), focusing on government relations, alumni, strategic communications, rural, and community initiatives. Kratochvil is the Senior Advisor to the Global Center for Health Security and in 2021 was named the Inaugural Distinguished Chair for the Global Center for Health Security.

Kratochvil is a Fellow of the National Strategic Research Institute and a Core Competency Advisor for Active and Passive Medical Defense against Weapons of Mass Destruction and Consequence Management for the National Strategic Research Institute. As the Medical Director of UNeHealth, which serves to support commercial clinical research, he oversees a team focused on commercial contracting and agreements.

Kratochvil is a Co-Principal Investigator of the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) National Center for Health Security and Bio-preparedness, which trains federal partners and provides quarantine services for the U.S. He previously served as Co-Principal Investigator of the federally funded National Emerging Special Pathogens Training and Education Center (NETEC) which supports research and preparedness nationally and helped launch the Special Pathogens Research Network. He is a member of the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit leadership team and from 2020–2021 served as Chair of the Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Dr. Kratochvil earned both his bachelor’s degree in psychology and his M.D. from Creighton University and completed residencies in psychiatry at Creighton University and in child-adolescent psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center. He and his wife, Dr. Jillyn Kratochvil, have three adult children.

Ms. Maureen Larsen

Director
Nebraska Department of Economic Development



Maureen Larsen is the Director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), having been appointed by Governor Jim Pillen in November 2025. Under her leadership, DED is reinforcing the competitive advantages that make The Good Life great for business. Director Larsen has prioritized strengthening the state’s workforce, supporting the development

Director Larsen has prioritized strengthening the state’s workforce, supporting the development

of innovative products and technologies by Nebraska-based startups, deepening public-private partnerships, and positioning Nebraska to lead the nation's bioeconomy.

Prior to joining DED, Larsen served as General Counsel to Governor Pillen and Deputy Director of the Governor's Policy Research Office. She has previously worked as a deputy county attorney for Lancaster County, Nebraska and as a law clerk for former Chief Justice Michael Heavican. She was also a small business owner and operator from 2004 to 2020, providing sign language interpretation services throughout the state.

Larsen completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Vermont and earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Nebraska College of Law. Larsen and her husband live in Gretna. They have three children and one grandchild.

Dr. James Lawler

Associate Director
International Programs and Innovation
Global Center for Health Security
University of Nebraska Medical Center



James Lawler, MD, MPH, FIDSA, is an infectious disease physician trained in tropical medicine and public health whose career has focused on emerging infectious diseases, pandemic threats, biodefense, and health system preparedness. He is Associate Director for

International Programs and Innovation for the Global Center for Health Security, Woody and Paula Varner Professor, Professor of Medicine in Infectious Disease, and Deputy Medical Director for the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). He is a Fellow of the National Strategic Research Institute of the University of Nebraska System.

Dr. Lawler is a recognized leader in health emergency preparedness and response, and he currently serves as Principal Investigator for the Region Seven Disaster Health Response Ecosystem. He twice served in health security positions at the White House within

the Homeland Security Council Biodefense Office and the National Security Council (NSC) Resilience Directorate, where he led development and coordination of national policy related to medical and public health preparedness, pandemic and public health emergency response, medical countermeasure R&D, biosurveillance, and clinical care for domestic and international health threats. While at NSC, he co-led White House activities to coordinate national policy in response to the 2009-H1N1 influenza pandemic.

As a research investigator at the US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), Dr. Lawler was one of the few uniformed physicians ever to become qualified in biosafety level-4 (BSL-4) laboratory operations, directing animal model research for multiple highly dangerous pathogens. He also initiated some of the first collaborative clinical research efforts for the DoD Cooperative Threat Reduction Program in the Caucasus.

Dr. Lawler later led development of BSL-3/4 laboratory safety systems and strategic research plans as Chief Medical Officer of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease Integrated Research Facility at Fort Detrick. He subsequently moved to Naval Medical Research Center, where he founded and led the Austere Environments Consortium for Enhanced Sepsis Outcomes (ACESO), an international network developing practical solutions for management of severe infectious diseases in resource-limited settings.

Dr. Lawler has responded to multiple infectious disease emergencies, including Ebola and Marburg in Africa and COVID-19 domestically and abroad. He is an authority on management of high-consequence infections and has consulted for multiple non-governmental organizations, national ministries of health, the World Health Organization, and the US Government. In 2014, he was the principal subject matter expert for the Pentagon's Joint Staff planning process for West Africa Ebola response (Operation United Assistance), advising the Chairman, Joint Chiefs, and senior Department of Defense (DoD) officials. He led development of DoD's domestic Ebola Medical Support Team and served as the team's principal technical expert. His operational medical experience includes duty as a Marine infantry battalion surgeon, in disaster relief operations aboard the hospital ship USNS Comfort, and with the NATO Role 3 Hospital in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

In early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Lawler assisted in leading a small team that deployed to Yokohama, Japan, to repatriate American citizens quarantined aboard the cruise ship Diamond Princess, coordinated quarantine and isolation care for some of the first cohorts of exposed/infected Americans returned from Wuhan and Yokohama, helped develop early management protocols for COVID-19, and characterized environmental contamination related to the care of COVID-19 patients. Dr. Lawler has advised local, state, and national leadership as well as a variety of entities in the public and private sectors on COVID-19 response. Dr. Lawler served as a key member of the COVID Crisis Group which published *Lessons From the COVID War: An Investigative Report* in 2023.

Dr. Lawler graduated from Georgetown University School of Medicine after receiving his undergraduate degree in biomedical engineering from Duke University. Before joining UNMC, he served 21 years active service in the US Navy Medical Corps.

Mr. Derek Leathers

Chairman and CEO
Werner



Derek J. Leathers is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Werner, serving as Chairman since May 2021 and CEO since May 2016. He was Vice Chairman in 2020–21 and President from 2011 to January 2024. Werner's Board appointed Leathers in May 2020 to fill a direc-

torship vacancy, and stockholders initially elected him to the Board in May 2021. Throughout his tenure at Werner, he has held integral roles in many facets of the organization, including the establishment of the Company's Mexico operations and oversight for all the asset operating groups.

Leathers has worked in the transportation and logistics industry for more than 30 years. Prior to joining the Company in 1999, he was employed by Schneider National for eight years, during which time he

was based out of Mexico City for several years and was one of the first foreign members of Mexico's trucking association (CANACAR).

Leathers holds an economic degree from Princeton University. He serves on the board of SkyWest Incorporated, a public airline company; as the board chair of the American Transportation Research Institute; as the board vice-chair of the American Trucking Associations; on the executive committees of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the United Way of the Midlands; and on the board of trustees for Creighton University. He is a founder and board member of the PlaySmart Leadership Academy, an Omaha non-profit for youth.

Dr. Gina Ligon

Director, National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE)
University of Nebraska at Omaha



Gina Ligon is the founder and director of the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE), which is the DHS Center of Excellence for Terrorism Prevention and Counterterrorism Research from 2020–2030. She is the Jack

and Stephanie Koraleski Professor for Collaboration Science in the College of Business at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Ligon has served on the Office of the Director of National Intelligence panels for the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. She regularly briefs the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and other federal organizations on terrorist leadership, organizational structure, and capacity for malevolent innovation.

She serves on the advisory board of CREST, the U.K.-based Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. Ligon has authored more than 80 peer-reviewed publications related to terrorist organizations, and she has had federal funding for her research since 2008. She is the co-editor of the forth-

coming *Handbook of the Psychology of Terrorism*, and she was the former editor of the scholarly journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide*.

Prior to joining the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she was a full-time psychology faculty member at Villanova University. She also worked as a director of leadership consulting at St. Louis-based Psychological Associates.

As a native Oklahoman and military wife, she is determined to use her training to degrade international and domestic threat actors from harming Americans.

Mr. Steve Marshall

Vice President
Process Innovation
Cargill



As Cargill's Process Innovation leader, Steve Marshall leads a group of global R&D professionals focused on creating value by converting fundamental science and engineering into real world innovative solutions. A key focus area of his team is to apply engineering fundamentals

and rapidly advancing AI data and analytics technologies to advance and optimize Cargill businesses, working to create more sustainable and secure food supply chains.

Steve spent the last 30 years focused on innovating across Cargill's global manufacturing supply chain for food and bio-industrial products. He has held a variety of positions across multiple geographies in engineering, operations management, and research and development—with a strong focus in industrial scale fermentation processes.

Dr. Jonathan McIntyre

Founding Partner
Nodl Advisors



Dr. Jonathan McIntyre is co-founder of Nodl Advisors, a consulting firm that works with early-stage founders and investors in Agriculture, Food and Climate technology. Nodl harness the knowledge and experience of seasoned executives with both large corporate and

start up experience to provide guidance and execution on strategy, finance, marketing and commercialization. Jonathan is an accomplished scientist, leader and entrepreneur with extensive experience leading large, multi-national corporations and early-stage startups. He has a strong track record of achievement as a CEO and CSO with deep knowledge of food, food ingredients, nutrition, consumer products, culinary design, biotechnology, packaging, bioprocess, fermentation, regulatory and quality assurance. Most importantly, he is a servant leader respected for building high-performing teams and developing talent.

Dr. McIntyre served as Chief Executive Officer and member of the board of directors at Motif FoodWorks from 2019-2022, a Boston-based food technology company unleashing the promise of plant-based foods by improving taste and nutrition. During Jon's tenure at Motif, the company raised \$345M from top-line investors. In just over three years, the company discovered, developed, and commercialized three novel ingredients and four fully optimized food products by pioneering a 'whole science' approach that combined design thinking and novel technologies to uncover insights benefiting consumers, customers and the planet.

Prior to joining Motif, Dr. McIntyre served as Head of Research and Development at Indigo Agriculture, Inc. In this capacity, Dr. McIntyre developed microbial seed treatments to replace or reduce chemical inputs and increase crop yields with desirable attributes during periods of biotic or abiotic stress.

Dr. McIntyre spent 9+ years as SVP of Research & Development at PepsiCo, innovating and developing products across global categories. As head of beverage R&D he transformed the product portfolio, redesigned packaging, launched new fountain equipment, and shifted to lower sugar formulations. As SVP of Global Snacks R&D, Dr. McIntyre advanced the development of compostable thin film packaging technology, reduced salt and fat in snacks, and introduced veggie and protein forward snacks.

Prior to PepsiCo, Dr. McIntyre served as SVP of Technology & Innovation at Solae LLC, a Bunge-DuPont JV selling soy-based ingredients for Foods & Nutrition. There, Jonathan led R&D, quality, regulatory and technology licensing for the world's largest plant protein company. He focused teams on building novel application, improving ingredient offerings and cost structures.

Dr. McIntyre previously served as the Chief of Development & Operations at Auxeris Therapeutics Inc. where he supported the development of its lead Biopharmaceutical monoclonal antibodies as candidates for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis and bone metastases. Early in his career, Dr. McIntyre served as Chief Scientist, Director of Product Development and Discovery Researcher for Monsanto Protein technologies, a business that utilized plants as hosts for the production of therapeutic monoclonal antibodies. Additionally, he held scientific leadership roles at other Monsanto business units including Searle Cardiovascular and Metabolic Discovery Research and NutraSweet Product Development.

Currently, Jonathan serves on the board of Primient LLC, a privately held company that is a leader in a corn processing and ingredient manufacturing. Jon also is a strategic advisor to Edlong Flavors, an innovative dairy flavors company.

In the past Jon has held board and advisory responsibilities at Kaleido Biosciences Inc., Anaptys Biosciences, and Kansas State University, College of Agriculture. Dr. McIntyre earned his B.S. in Chemistry from Grove City College and his Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. He completed post-doctoral training in Cell Biology at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

Mr. Heath Mello

President and CEO

Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce



Heath Mello, a former state senator and higher education executive, began his role as the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce President & CEO in August 2023.

As President & CEO, Mello is responsible for the overall day-to-day management of the Greater

Omaha Chamber, with a focus on economic development, public policy, workforce and community partnerships across an eight-county service region.

Mello currently serves as a gubernatorial appointee to the Nebraska Highway Commission and also serves as a member of the U.S. Strategic Command Consultation Committee and the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition Nebraska Advisory Committee. Mello also serves on numerous boards including the Business Ethics Alliance and Aksarben Foundation Board of Councilors.

For eight years, Mello served as a Nebraska State Senator representing South Omaha and spent four years as chairman of the Nebraska Legislature's Appropriations Committee. While in the Legislature, Mello also served on the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee, the Legislature's Planning Committee, and a number of select committees and task forces.

Prior to his time at the Greater Omaha Chamber, Mello previously served as the University of Nebraska System Vice President for External Relations, a nonprofit executive, and in various community affairs roles with Metropolitan Community College in Omaha. An Omaha native, Mello earned his bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Dr. Todd Pester

Vice President
Seed R&D
Corteva Agriscience



Todd Pester is Vice President for Seed R&D at Corteva Agriscience. He leads a team of Seed Pipeline Development Leaders responsible for driving the global strategy, development, and implementation of Corteva's world class seed pipeline. Todd grew up on a

crop production farm in northwestern Minnesota. He received his B.S. and M.S. in Agronomy and Plant Genetics from the University of Minnesota and his Ph.D. in Weed Science from Colorado State University. Todd has over 25 years of experience in the seed industry with roles in biotech regulatory, technology development, strategy, account management, and product management. He enjoys spending time outdoors and relaxing with family and friends.

Dr. Santosh Pitla

Professor of Biological Systems Engineering
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Co-Director
AI Institute
University of Nebraska System



Dr. Santosh Pitla is a Professor and Associate Department Head for Research and Innovation in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He also serves as Co-Director of the University of Nebraska System's AI Institute,

where he helps advance artificial intelligence research, education, and workforce development across four campuses.

Dr. Pitla leads the Machine Automation and Agricultural Robotics (MAARS) Lab, where his research focuses on AI-enabled robotics, autonomous agri-

cultural systems, digital agriculture, and intelligent machinery for sustainable and profitable farming systems. His work integrates artificial intelligence, sensing, and automation to develop next-generation technologies that improve agricultural productivity, resilience, and environmental stewardship.

He actively collaborates with industry, government, and academic partners to develop innovative solutions at the intersection of AI, robotics, and agriculture. Dr. Pitla is also deeply engaged in workforce development and education, designing new courses and experiential learning programs that prepare students and professionals for the rapidly evolving AI-driven economy. Through his research, leadership, and entrepreneurial initiatives, Dr. Pitla is helping position Nebraska and the Midwest as a global hub for AI, robotics, and digital agriculture innovation.

Dr. Todd Pray

Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory



Todd was appointed as Berkeley Lab's Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer (CSPO) and head of the Strategic Partnerships Office (SPO) in March 2019. Throughout his career, Todd has focused on developing transformative technologies that bolster innovation, national

security and economic prosperity across the pharmaceutical, food science, biomanufacturing, advanced energy and chemical R&D sectors.

In his role as CSPO, he is committed to catalyzing industry and academic partnerships and accelerating the lab-to-market deployment of breakthroughs in biomanufacturing, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, critical minerals, and other scientific research at the Lab.

Todd received a BS in Biological Chemistry from the University of Chicago, a PhD in Biophysics from UCSF and an MBA from UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

Ms. Sandra Reding

President
Aksarben Foundation



Sandra joined the Aksarben Foundation as President in spring 2017 and works alongside the Aksarben Board of Governors to develop and deploy action around business-led, outcome-oriented initiatives across the state of Nebraska, both by industry and by region. Sandra

oversees and implements the strategic direction of the Foundation and the entire Aksarben network.

With over twenty-five years in not-for-profit leadership, relationship cultivation, fundraising and vast experience in higher education and scholarship administration, Sandra brings a strong knowledge of leadership and has a proven track record of driving results, engagement, and activation. She develops and implements an annual fundraising plan at levels necessary to achieve the goals. Additionally, she ensures financial and other internal processes are documented and followed.

Sandra received her Bachelor's from Briar Cliff University and a Master's Degree from Iowa State. Sandra is a graduate of Leadership Nebraska—Class XI and a Trustee of the Business Ethics Alliance of Omaha.

Mr. Ben Rhodes

Executive Director
Nebraska Ethanol Board



Ben Rhodes is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Ethanol Board, an independent State of Nebraska government agency dedicated to the promotion and development of the renewable fuels industry.

Rhodes joined the NEB staff in 2022 as the Ethanol Program Manager. He was appointed NEB interim director in February 2025 and confirmed to the permanent position soon after.

Rhodes is from west Omaha and lives in Lincoln, Nebraska. He holds a B.A. and an MBA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The Hon. Neal Robbins

Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture



Neal Robbins is the Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where he helps lead the mission to strengthen the economy and improve the quality of life in rural America. In this role, he provides leadership across a portfolio of

over 80 loan, grant, and technical assistance programs supporting rural housing, utilities, infrastructure investment, broadband, community facilities, and business development.

Prior to joining the Trump Administration, Neal founded and served as publisher of the North State Journal, North Carolina's only statewide newspaper, where he built a network of local and regional publications dedicated to strengthening journalism in rural areas and improving access to quality news coverage across the state. As an attorney, Neal has advised clients and policymakers on complex legal, regulatory, and administrative issues in both private practice and government service. As an engineer, he has focused on manufacturing process efficiency and chemical processes.

Neal is a graduate of N.C. State University, a land-grant university, where he earned a degree in chemical engineering after receiving the Park Scholarship. He also holds a law degree and MBA from Wake Forest University.

His upbringing in rural North Carolina, training as an engineer and attorney, and experience in both public and private sectors give him a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing rural America.

Mr. Joe Sanders

Executive Director
Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute
University of Nebraska



Joe Sanders is the executive director of the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) at the University of Nebraska, where he leads the institute in delivering on its vision of a water and food secure world, building its partnerships and collaborations in Nebraska, nationally

in the US, and other key food producing regions in the world. Joe is a distinguished senior international development leader with more than 27 years of expertise in designing and managing complex, large-scale programs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He has led eight major USAID-funded initiatives with a total value exceeding \$330 million, consistently focusing on agricultural market systems, food security and climate resilience. Known for his collaborative talent and forward-thinking approach, Joe's work is rooted in institutional strengthening and locally led solutions, which have been instrumental in attracting more than \$240 million in leveraged resources through successful public-private partnerships.

Joe's extensive experience includes spearheading major efforts in Kenya and the wider East Africa region to expand trade, strengthen agriculture and livestock markets, scale climate-smart technologies, and attract critical private sector investment. He has also previously overseen integrated water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition programs that reached more than a million people and directed initiatives to build post-disaster and climate resilience in countries like Zimbabwe, Nepal, Bolivia, and Afghanistan. Joe is highly regarded for his ability to build and manage high-performing, multi-stakeholder teams and for his close work with governments, civil society and the private sector in complex operational environments.

Joe holds an M.Sc. in Managing Rural Development from the University of London and a B.Sc. in Biology from Catholic University of America.

Mr. Gustavo Sergi

CEO
Sustainea



Gustavo Sergi is the CEO of Sustainea and former Director of Specialties and Renewable Chemicals at Braskem. Since joining Braskem in 2005, he has held leadership roles across investments, marketing, strategy, M&A, and operations, later becoming General Manager for

Renewable Chemicals and subsequently leading the Specialty Chemicals business.

Before Braskem, Gustavo worked at Credit Suisse and in the sugar and ethanol sector, contributing to the formation of Atvos. He holds a degree in Production Engineering from Instituto Mauá de Tecnologia (IMT), completed executive education programs at Harvard Business School and Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV), and earned an MBA from INSEAD.

Mr. Edward Shenderovich

Co-Founder and CEO
Roebling



Edward Shenderovich is the co-founder and CEO of Roebling, a company building modern AI-native tools for planning and developing industrial infrastructure across biomanufacturing, energy, and other process-heavy industries. Before Roebling, Edward founded

and led multiple technology and investment companies, including Knotel and Kite Ventures, and has built and scaled businesses across software, marketplaces, and infrastructure. Edward served on the board of directors of a number of successful companies, including Tradeshift, Delivery Hero, Plated, Domo, and others. He started his career as an Industry Analyst at Silicon Valley Bank and is a graduate of UC Berkeley.

Dr. Mark Stone

Professor of Biological Systems Engineering
 Director
 PRAIRIE Initiative
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Mark Stone is the Director of the PRAIRIE Initiative and Professor of Biological Systems Engineering at UNL. Through the PRAIRIE Initiative, he leads a college-wide effort to accelerate responsible AI adoption across research, education, and industry partnerships. Before

returning to Nebraska in 2023, he served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of New Mexico, where he co-founded the Resilience Institute and held the Regents' Lecturer distinction. His research applies AI and remote sensing to water resources, agriculture, and environmental systems. Stone is a Fulbright Scholar, NSF CAREER Award recipient, licensed Professional Engineer, and a 1998 UNL graduate. He holds a Ph.D. from Washington State University.

Mr. Jim Stutelberg

CEO
 Primient



Since 2022, Jim Stutelberg has been the Chief Executive Officer of Primient—a leading producer of food and industrial ingredients made from plant-based, renewable sources with manufacturing operations in the US, Mexico, and Brazil.

With over 30 years of leadership experience in large scale, global manufacturing businesses, Jim brings a strong focus on safety and operational excellence to Primient. Prior to the agriculture processing space, Jim spent decades

in the specialty chemicals industry (PPG and Dow Corning), where he held several commercial leadership and general management roles in the U.S., and China, where he lived with his family for 5 years.

Jim holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and earned his MBA from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.

Beyond his professional achievements, Jim is a proud husband and father of four daughters. Outside of work, he enjoys attending sporting events, spending time with his family, and staying intellectually challenged through reading and listening to leading podcasts on history, current events, and emerging trends in business and leadership.

Dr. Jason B. Thomas

CEO and Founder
 The Pennycress Company



Dr. Jason B. Thomas is the Founder and CEO of The Pennycress Company, where he is bioengineering high-yielding pennycress seeds to produce biofuels that help farmers and biorefineries increase profits while improving ecosystem health. A plant scientist by training, Dr.

Thomas earned his Ph.D. in Plant Biological Sciences from the University of Minnesota, where he used CRISPR to engineer pennycress plants with improved traits and received a Fulbright Fellowship to bring his research to France. He previously conducted post-doctoral research at the Carnegie Institution for Science at Stanford University studying drought biology and bioinformatics approaches in plants. Today, his work focuses on combining biotechnology, agriculture, and supply chain partnerships to build scalable solutions for the emerging bioeconomy.

Mr. Hunter Traynor

Executive Vice President
Legislation and Policy
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce



Hunter Traynor is the Executive Vice President of Legislation & Policy for the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce. In this role, Hunter leads policy research and analysis, as well as managing state and federal government affairs as the Nebraska Chamber's chief lobbyist.

Prior to joining the Nebraska Chamber, Hunter practiced law at Rembolt Ludtke LLP in Lincoln, NE, with practice areas focused on business services, estate planning and administration, real estate, and government. A life-long Nebraskan, Hunter was born and raised in Elkhorn and received a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln before graduating with highest distinction from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

Mr. Craig Uden

Craig Uden
Nebraska Cattlemen President
Central Nebraska Cattleman & Feedlot Owner



A fourth-generation cattleman from Johnson Lake, Nebraska, Craig Uden has always been active in helping shape the ever-challenging and changing beef industry. Craig is a partner in Darr Feedlot Inc., a commercial cattle feeding operation in central Nebraska. Craig

and his wife, Terri, also own and manage three commercial cow-calf operations. He believes in giving back to an industry that has been good to him, and while he has stepped aside from the day-to-day management, he still enjoys buying and selling cattle and his customer relations title, because it is the relationships that are built in the cattle industry that make this

business so rewarding. People work toward a common goal to improve and learn so that their industry is sustainable for future generations.

Craig and Terri have a daughter, Blair, who is involved in agribusiness and her and her husband own a registered Red Angus operation and help oversee the family cow-calf operation. His son, Andrew, and his wife reside in Seward, Nebraska, and Andrew works with his own high tech animal information company.

Craig graduated from the University of Nebraska. He has been involved with NCBA since the mid-1980s and has served on several committees throughout the organization. Craig served as NCBA President in 2017; he had previously served as the President-elect, Policy Division Chairman and Federation Division Chairman. He has been involved in a number of functions on a local and state basis, including past chairman and elder of Trinity Lutheran Church in Lexington, Nebraska, member and past chair of the Dawson County Cattlemen, and a 4-H leader. Along with serving on the Nebraska Beef Council, the Nebraska Cattlemen Research & Education Foundation, and the Nebraska Feedlot Council, Craig has served on the Nebraska Cattlemen Board of Directors as a committee chairman and vice chairman, and currently serves as NC President. Craig is also a member of Nebraska Ag Builders and sits on the Foundation Board of Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity.

Dr. Marty Vanier

Director
National Agricultural Biosecurity Center
Associate Director
Biosecurity Research Institute
Kansas State University



Dr. Vanier is one of the original members of K-State's National Agricultural Biosecurity Center (NABC) when it was created in 2003 and currently serves as Director. She serves as Principal Investigator for several Center projects and directs activities of the Center including coordination of research teams, monitoring legislative and Federal agency activities, and development of

relationships between NABC and state and federal agencies, industry groups, emergency management, law enforcement and the intelligence community.

In April of 2015 Dr. Vanier began an assignment as Director of Strategic Partnership Development for the National Bio- and Agrodefense Facility (NBAF) Program Executive Office. Her duties included engaging internal and external stakeholders, including government entities, production agriculture, the animal health industry, and educational institutions in creating new partnerships to advance the NBAF mission. At the end of her assignment in April 2019 she returned to NABC.

In addition to her duties at NABC, Dr. Vanier is also Associate Director of K-State's Biosecurity Research Institute (BRI). The BRI is a unique interdisciplinary research, education, and training facility with a focus on high consequence pathogens of humans, livestock, plants, and food. The BRI operates at the BSL-2, BSL-3, 3-Ag, and 3-E levels and has the capability to perform research on field crops, livestock, insect vectors, and pilot-scale meat processing.

Mr. Mark Warner

Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer
Liberation Bioindustries



Mark Warner is a chemical engineer and industrial biotechnology leader with decades of experience scaling novel technologies into commercial operations. He is a co-founder of Liberation Bioindustries, where he leads the development of modern, fit-for-purpose biomanufacturing

infrastructure to enable next-generation products. Over his career, Mark has worked with more than 100 biotechnology ventures, specializing in first-of-a-kind facility design, capital project delivery, and commercialization strategy. He is also the author of a widely referenced handbook on industrial biotechnology commercialization.