

NEBRASKANS FIRST NEWSLETTER



Legislative Update and Current Events Report

Volume 13, No. 1 • Cornhusker Plaza, #401 • 301 South Thirteenth Street • Lincoln, NE 68508 • Telephone: (402) 434-2938

February 2007

NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL EMBARKS ON LONG SESSION

New Senators Offer Hope

On January 3, 2007, the Nebraska legislature convened for a long ninety working day session. On that day, history was made because never before had there been such a huge turnover of lawmakers. Twenty-two new senators took their rightful seats to serve out of a total of forty-nine. Twenty of the 22 new senators were elected to seats that were vacated due to the term limits law adopted by voters in 2000.

This influx of fresh new blood into the lawmaking arena has shaken up the old guard and business as usual approach. The difference is palpable and really refreshing. New senators typically come to Lincoln with a sense of independence, idealism and innocence. In their campaign for election they spent countless hours listening to and talking with the people—a process that attunes the new senator to the various real-life concerns of Nebraskans in their districts. This close connection to the people stays on with some senators. As the years pass by, many remain true to their convictions and always remember and appreciate the people back home who they are supposed to represent. Unfortunately, there are those senators who, over time, get consumed by the “big city”

politics and media exposure they receive in Lincoln. They want and need to be popular in the capital city and the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers who cover the legislature every day and publish editorial opinion pieces that praise or criticize the senator on a wide range of issues as they are debated. This constant, close scrutiny generates pressure to go along and get along with the powers that be and the “in crowd.” What matters back home tends to fade under this pressure. It is not unusual for senators to turn to lobbyists for “aid and comfort.” Big time fundraising by top lobbyists soothes and feeds the psyches of some lawmakers. The tie between the two becomes stronger, and the one-time independent-thinking idealistic senator changes. Over the years there have been some notable exceptions to this syndrome and these lawmakers stand out as beacons of light among the crowd and deserve our highest respect and support.

We hope that most of the twenty-two new senators remain true to themselves and the folks back home who got them elected. We start a new era with new blood, new perspectives and challenges. We have good feelings about the new senators and trust they will serve the state well.

NEBRASKANS FIRST DIRECTOR MARK CHRISTENSEN IS NOW SENATOR OF THE 44TH DISTRICT

Mark Christensen of Imperial has been a Nebraskans First board member for ten years. He has come to Lincoln on numerous occasions when called upon to testify on behalf of Nebraskans First before the Natural Resources Committee on key irrigation related bills. In his campaign for election to District 44 (Perkins, Chase, Hayes, Frontier, Dundy, Hitchcock, and Red Willow),

Mark made water a number one issue. Being from the embattled Republican River Basin, Mark knows that if irrigation is not protected there the local tax bases and communities will surely be adversely impacted. His opponent, an attorney, was well funded and attacked Mark for being too pro-groundwater irrigation.

continued on page 3...