A Look At Your Unicameral
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History of a Unicameral

"There is no more reason for a two-house legislature in any of our states than there is for a bank to have two boards of directors or for a city to have two separate boards of aldermen. Indeed there is no more use for a two-branch legislature than there is for two governors."

— George Norris

Nebraska’s legislature is unique among all state legislatures in the nation because it has a single house. It wasn’t always a unicameral, however. The state had a senate and a house of representatives for 68 years before Nebraskans voted to get rid of half of their state legislature in 1934.

The change did not come easily. Nebraskans rejected similar proposals several times before interest in reining in state spending heightened because of the Great Depression. The cause was also helped by a zealous petition campaign led by the prestigious U.S. Sen. George W Norris and the fact that two other popular proposals were on the ballot that year: local option on prohibition and legalized pari-mutuel betting. The vote was 286,086 for and 193,152 against a unicameral system.

Norris, a “New Deal Republican” who settled in McCook, wore out two sets of automobile tires while he drove throughout the state campaigning for the measure. He said the two-house system was outdated, inefficient and unnecessary.

The bicameral system was modeled after the British Parliament, Norris said, which is made up of the House of Commons, with representatives elected by the people, and the House of Lords, with its aristocratic members appointed by the king.

"...The constitutions of our various states are built upon the idea that there is but one class. If this be true, there is no sense or reason in having the same thing done twice, especially if it is to be done by two bodies of men elected in the same way and having the same jurisdiction."

The one-house system differs little from most city, county and school district governing bodies. Most Canadian provinces operate with single-house systems.

Immediate results

Implementation of the unicameral legislature in 1937 cut government costs for obvious reasons. Legislative membership went from 133 in the bicameral to 43 in the new single house — nearly a 70 percent reduction.

Also, the one-house system was more efficient than its predecessor. The number of committees was pared down from 61 to 18, and 581 bills were introduced in 1937 as opposed to twice that many the previous session. The last bicameral session in 1935 ran 110 days, passed 192 bills and cost $202,593. The first unicameral session two years later ran 98 days, passed 214 bills and cost $103,445.

Checks and balances

A common question regarding unicameralism was how to preserve checks and balances to prevent abuse of power. Norris argued there would be checks and balances without a second house. The Supreme Court and the governor would rule on or veto measures deemed improper, he said.

More importantly, the people would serve as a check upon the possible abuse of power by their elected officials with the right to vote and petition, Norris said. The Nebraska Unicameral would have easy-to-follow procedures and extend greater privileges to the press to allow for greater public awareness.

"Every act of the legislature and every act of each individual must be transacted in the spotlight of publicity," Norris said.

No conference committee

In a one-house legislature, Norris said, no actions could be concealed as was commonly done in the conference committee of bicameral legislatures. Conference committees resolve differences when bills passed in both houses vary in content. In Nebraska, the appointed six-member committee met in secret and members’ votes were not public record. Norris said these committees had too much power and could be influenced easily by lobbyists.

Once a bill came out of the conference committee, it could not be changed, only approved or rejected. If
rejected, another committee had to be formed to work out
the disagreements or the measure failed. Today in Nebraska,
lawmakers may propose amendments and debate them
outside of committee on the chamber floor.

Some say a two-house system with its conference
committee prevents hasty legislation. But the unicameral
system has safeguards against this possibility. With little
exception, bills must have public hearings; five days must
eclipse between a bill’s introduction and its passage; and bills
can contain only one subject.

Nonpartisanship

Another unique aspect of Nebraska’s legislature is its
nonpartisanship, which was included in the successful 1934
unicameral amendment. A nonpartisan body allows senators
to concentrate on local interests without being influenced by
national party lines. National party lines, Norris argued,
often have little to do with local government. A voter who
votes according to party lines might vote for a state
candidate who disagrees with him or her on matters over
which the senator will have jurisdiction.

Norris worked to eliminate partisanship in the
Legislature because he believed that elected officials would
stand on their own records. Nonpartisanship would allow
lawmakers to base their actions on their own convictions
and the needs of their districts, rather than according to
party dictates.

Nebraska a model

Movements for unicameralism have existed throughout
the United States since the nation’s independence. There were
several pro-unicameral movements in the state before one
finally succeeded. The same year Nebraska’s unicameral
legislature began operating, attempts in 21 other states to
become one-house legislatures failed.

Such efforts waned until the 1960s when a Supreme
Court ruling revived the movement. It ruled that both houses
must be apportioned according to population, instead of one
house according to population and the other house according
to geographical lines.

The ruling raised doubts about the necessity of having
two houses based on population, stirring many states to
evaluate their own systems. Many states looked to Nebraska
as a model of an effective one-house legislature. Those states
included California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois,
Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, New York,
Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Texas. Nebraska
officials visited many states to spread the word about
unicameralism. Journalists and officials from other states also
visited Nebraska.

The Unicameral’s first clerk, Hugo Srb, predicted that
lawmakers in other states would not want to legislate their
own jobs out of existence. Despite the interest unicameralism
has received over the years, Nebraska remains the only state
with a unicameral legislature.

The Unicameral Chamber

The George W. Norris Legislative Chamber is on the
west side of the central second floor rotunda of the Capitol.
Before 1937, under the bicameral system, this chamber was
home to the House of Representatives.

The double doors to the chamber are covered in hand
tooled pigskin. The door design, conceived by Hildreth
Meiere, depicts “The Planting of the Tree of Life.” The man
with a spade and the woman with a watering pot are classical
Assyrian figures.

Since adopting the unicameral system, a portion of the
100 seats have been removed. The “floor” now seats 49
senators, two sergeants at arms, and a few extra seats for
persons attending special occasions. The senators’ desks are
crafted of North American walnut.

Both balconies, with a combined seating capacity of
more than 500, are fronted by a Spanish marble balustrade.
This same marble, in supporting columns below, accents
some Verde Antique and four other varieties of Italian
marble.

The Bedford limestone walls are partially paneled with
Guastavino Acoustlythe tile. The ceiling is constructed of
Nebraska walnut. The first cross beam, with Spanish lions and
castles, identifies our first landowners. The second beam, with
the Fleur-de-lis and Napoleonic Bees, documents that France
owned the Nebraska territory until the Louisiana Purchase.
The third beam documents our own influence with the
American shield and eagle. Everything pictured is solid gold
leaf applique.

The south panel beam depicts the Lewis and Clark, Sievr
DeBourgmund and Coronado expeditions. The north panel
shows the U.S. survey, cattlemen and homesteaders.

The voting panel, at the front of the chamber, has been
used since the building was completed in 1932. The
equipment was electronically redesigned in 1970 and
computerized in 1985, when large display panels that flank the
voting board were installed. The panels, designed to blend
with the limestone wall at the front of the chamber, tell
senators which bill is being considered, who sponsors it, and
the specific item under consideration. Each vote is tallied on a
computer printout, by the clerk, with speed and accuracy.
"Why should we not divorce the business of our state from partisan matters affecting only national legislation. . ."

- George Norris
Lawmaking Process

Bill Introduction

Committee Hearing
Hold
Kill
Advance

General File
Amend
Kill
Advance

Select File
Amend
Kill
Advance

Final Reading
Kill
Pass

GOVERNOR
Vetoes
Signs
Does not sign
Becomes law
Veto sustained
Veto Override
Becomes law

Laws of Nebraska
Most bills become law three calendar months after Legislature adjourns.
An idea...

The lawmaking process in Nebraska officially begins when a senator or a committee introduces a bill into the Legislature, which convenes each January. But the process actually begins much earlier — when a senator first begins to formulate ideas for new laws. An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies or the governor. The idea must be introduced by a senator or a committee to be formally considered by the Legislature. Committees debate and propose amendments to bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times before its final passage. Senators may propose amendments to alter the bill as it moves through the legislative process.

Here are the steps a bill must take before becoming a Nebraska state law:

I. Research

First, a senator and his or her staff research a problem and study possible legislative remedies. A senator may introduce a bill to create a new law or to repeal or change an existing law. Legislators have staff available to them to help with their research projects. Much of the research is done during the period between sessions called the interim. During this time, legislative committees study a variety of issues that have been outlined in interim study resolutions passed by the Legislature.

II. Drafting

A senator brings his or her idea for a new law to a bill drafter, who works with the senator to transform the idea into the proper legal form for a bill. Unlike some states, bills introduced in Nebraska may contain only one subject.

III. Introduction

Most bills are introduced during the first 10 days of the legislative session, which begins each January. In order to introduce a bill, a senator files it with the clerk of the Legislature. The clerk reads the title of the bill into the record, assigns it a number and prints copies of it for public and legislative use.

IV. Fiscal Note

The Legislative Fiscal Office prepares budget statements estimating the anticipated change in state, county, or municipal expenses or revenue under the provisions of each bill. These statements are called fiscal notes. Each fiscal note contains three estimates. One estimate is calculated by the fiscal office staff; another is prepared by the governor's budget office; and a third is prepared by the affected state agency. In addition, the fiscal office prepares appropriation bills ("A" bills), which accompany bills that have a fiscal impact.

V. Committee Hearing

With the exception of a few technical bills, most bills introduced into the Legislature must receive a public hearing by a legislative committee. A nine-member Reference Committee determines which bills will be heard by each of 14 standing committees. At hearings, citizens have a chance to express their opinions to committee members. Testimony is recorded, transcribed and made part of the official committee record. After the hearing, committees may vote to send the bill to General File with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone (kill) the bill or take no action on it.

VI. General File

General File is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on bills. At this stage, senators consider amendments, which may be proposed by committees and by individual senators. Many people consider General File to be the most crucial stage of the legislative process because it is where most compromises are worked out through debate and amendment. It takes a majority vote of the Legislature (25 votes) to adopt amendments, and to move a bill from General File to the next stage of consideration.
VII. Enrollment and Review

Commonly referred to as “E&R,” enrollment and review is a process by which previously adopted amendments are incorporated into a bill, and the bill is checked for technical and grammatical accuracy.

VIII. Select File

Select File is the second debating and voting stage. This step allows another opportunity for amendment, compromise and reflection. Bills on Select File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to the next stage. After Select File, bills are sent to E&R again to be rechecked. Bills then are reprinted for Final Reading.

IX. Final Reading

The Nebraska Constitution requires that before final passage, all bills must be read aloud in their entirety by the clerk of the Legislature, unless three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature votes to waive the requirement.

A bill may not be amended or debated on Final Reading, but it may be returned to Select File for a specific amendment. Bills may not be voted on for final passage until at least five legislative days after the bill is introduced, and one legislative day after it is placed on Final Reading.

A proposed constitutional amendment requires a three-fifths vote of the elected members (30) to place it on the general election ballot and a four-fifths vote (40) to place it on a primary or special election ballot. All other bills without the emergency clause require a simple majority vote before going to the governor. A bill with an emergency clause (see “Effective Date” below) requires a vote of two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

X. Governor

After the Legislature passes a bill on Final Reading, it goes to the governor for consideration. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to decide what to do with a bill. If the governor signs a bill or declines to act on it, the bill becomes a state law. The governor may veto a bill, and has the authority to strike specific budget appropriations (line-item veto). The Legislature may override any gubernatorial veto, although it takes a vote of 30 senators to do so.

XI. Effective Date

Most bills passed and approved by the governor become law three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns. However, bills may take effect before that date if they contain an emergency clause or a specified operative date.

...becomes a law.

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Legislative Divisions

I. Clerk of the Legislature

The Clerk of the Legislature, elected by the Legislature, assists in the administrative operation of the Legislature. The clerk oversees the preservation of daily floor debate and the official papers and communications of the Legislature. The clerk publishes the daily and permanent Legislative Journal, compiles the Laws of Nebraska after each session, handles lobby registration, distributes bills to senators and the public, supervises sessional employees and oversees the use of legislative space.

II. Revisor of Statutes

The Revisor of Statutes is also the bill drafter. The revisor prepares all bills and most amendments and is responsible for form and craftsmanship. Following each legislative session, the Revisor of Statutes incorporates all enacted legislation into the Nebraska Statutes.

III. Legislative Fiscal Analyst

The Legislative Fiscal Analyst provides fiscal and management information and assistance to the Legislature and the Appropriations Committee. The work involves examining the state agencies’ management and finances to improve efficiency and services.

IV. Director of Research

The Director of Research is selected by the Legislative Council to assist with legislative studies and research. In addition, the Director of Research is responsible for maintaining a reference library where a collection of materials is maintained for use by legislators and staff, and he or she conducts reviews of agencies and programs pursuant to the Legislative Performance Audit Act.

V. Ombudsman

The Office of the Ombudsman (technically known as the Office of Public Counsel) is an independent governmental office designed to receive and investigate miscellaneous complaints relating to administrative agencies of state government.
"There is no more reason for a two-house legislature in any of our states than there is for a bank to have two boards of directors or for a city to have two separate boards of aldermen. Indeed there is no more use for a two-branch legislature than there is for two governors."

- George Norris
Members of the Nebraska Legislature

There are 49 districts represented in the Nebraska Unicameral, each with approximately 35,000 people. Senators are elected to four-year terms and receive a salary of $12,000 a year. Sessions begin in January each year and consist of 90 working days in odd-numbered years and 60 working days in even-numbered years. Long sessions usually last until early June, and short sessions until mid-April. Special sessions may be held at the call of the governor or two-thirds of the Legislature.

During session, a typical day for a senator could include a meeting over breakfast, a working lunch, visits with constituents, committee hearings, research, floor debate and conferences. Senators also have obligations during the interim, including contact with constituents, interim studies with committees, and developing and researching bills they plan to sponsor in the upcoming session.

A senator is called to:
- represent the people and the best interests of his or her legislative district;
- appropriate funds to further the state’s progress and that of its citizens, protect property and persons; strengthen our productive capacity, and create new opportunities;
- keep a forum where people can be heard;
- provide a means of access for a private citizen through the maze of government;
- propose constitutional amendments to be submitted for a vote by the people;
- establish state policy by introducing bills to create new programs, modify existing programs and repeal laws that are no longer needed;
- study legislation carefully;
- exercise legislative power to the best of his or her ability

Norris Legislative Chamber Seating Chart

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<th>District</th>
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2006 Nebraska State Senators

Sen. Ray Aguilar
(District 35, Grand Island)
Home Address: 706 Grand Ave., Grand Island, NE 68801
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2617
Appointed to Nebraska Legislature: June 9, 1999, to replace Chris Peterson, who resigned; elected 2000, 2004
Occupation: Self-employed, Commercial Cleaning Services.

Sen. Tom Baker
(District 44, Trenton)
Home Address: HC 2, Box 140, Trenton, NE 69044
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2805
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002
Occupation: Self-employed.

Sen. Chris Beutler
(District 28, Lincoln)
Home Address: 3315 M St., Lincoln, NE 68510
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2633
Occupation: Development consultant.

Sen. Patrick Bourne
(District 8, Omaha)
Home Address: 5212 Erskine St., Omaha, NE 68104
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2722
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002
Occupation: Attorney.

Sen. Kermit A. Brashear
(District 4, Omaha)
Home Address: 216 N. 117th St., Omaha, NE 68154
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2621
Occupation: Lawyer.

Sen. Paul Brown
(District 6, Omaha)
Home Address: 525 N. 72nd Ave., Omaha, NE 68114
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2714
Occupation: Director of public affairs and corporate affairs for DiscoverWhy.

Sen. Carroll Burling
(District 33, Kanesaw)
Home Address: 4120 S. Shiloh Ave., Kanesaw, NE 68956
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2712
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2000, 2004
Occupation: Retired farmer.

Sen. Dennis Byars
(District 30, Beatrice)
Home Address: 823 N. Eighth St., Beatrice, NE 68310
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2620
Appointed to Nebraska Legislature: Dec. 19, 1988, to replace Patricia S. Morehead, who resigned; elected 1990; did not seek re-election in 1994; elected 1998, 2002
Occupation: Director of Beatrice Community Hospital Foundation.

Sen. Ernie Chambers
(District 11, Omaha)
Home Address: 3116 N. 24th St., Omaha, NE 68110
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2612

Sen. Jeanne Combs
(District 32, Milligan)
Home Address: P.O. Box 306, Milligan, NE 68406
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2711
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2002
Occupation: Registered nurse.
Sen. Matt Connealy  
(District 16, Decatur)  
Home Address: 2999 Old Highway 118, Decatur, NE 68020  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2728  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002

Sen. Abbie Cornett  
(District 45, Bellevue)  
Home Address: 2601 Alberta Ave., Bellevue, NE 68014  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2515  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004

Sen. Jim Cudaback  
(District 36, Riverdale)  
Home Address: P.O. Box 22, Riverdale, NE 68870  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2642  
Occupation: Rental property owner.

Sen. Doug Cunningham  
(District 40, Wausa)  
Home Address: 705 S. Lincoln, Box 160, Wausa, NE 68786  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2801  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2000, 2002  
Occupation: Consultant - Director, Hometown Merchants Association.

Sen. L. Patrick Engel  
(District 17, South Sioux City)  
Home Address: 401 E. 31st St., South Sioux City, NE 68776  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2716  
Occupation: Retired State Farm agent.

Sen. Philip Erdman  
(District 47, Bayard)  
Home Address: 511 Second Ave., P.O. Box 624, Bayard, NE 69334  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2616  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2000, 2004  
Occupation: Credit analyst and appraiser.

Sen. Deb Fischer  
(District 43, Valentine)  
Home Address: Box 54, Valentine, NE 69201  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2628  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004  
Occupation: Rancher.

Sen. Mike Flood  
(District 19, Norfolk)  
Home Address: 105 S. Second St., Norfolk, NE 68701  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2929  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004  
Occupation: Broadcaster/lawyer.

Sen. Mike Foley  
(District 29, Lincoln)  
Home Address: 6410 S. 41st St. Court, Lincoln, NE 68516  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2374  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2000, 2004  
Occupation: Registered appraiser.

Sen. Mike Friend  
(District 10, Omaha)  
Home Address: 4722 N. 81st St., Omaha, NE 68134  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2718  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2002  

Sen. Lavon Heidemann  
(District 1, Elk Creek)  
Home Address: 62058 719 Rd, Elk Creek, NE 68348  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2733  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004  
Occupation: Farmer.

Sen. Gwen Howard  
(District 3, Omaha)  
Home Address: 5512 Howard St., Omaha, NE 68106  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2723  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004  
Occupation: Social worker and adoption specialist.
Sen. Carol Hudkins
(District 21, Malcolm)
Home Address: 8600 N.W. 112th St., Malcolm, NE 68402
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2673
Occupation: Farmer and medical transcriptionist.

Sen. Ray Janssen
(District 15, Nickerson)
Home Address: 210 Cedar St., P.O. Box 159, Nickerson, NE 68044
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2625
Occupation: Grocer.

Sen. Jim Jensen
(District 20, Omaha)
Home Address: 10525 Mullen Road, Omaha, NE 68124
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2622
Occupation: Contractor.

Sen. Joel T. Johnson
(District 37, Kearney)
Home Address: 3216 19th Ave., Kearney, NE 68845
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2726
Appointed to Nebraska Legislature: July 1, 2002, to replace Doug Kristensen, who resigned; elected 2002, 2004
Occupation: Retired surgeon.

Sen. Gail Kopplin
(District 3, Gretna)
Home Address: 21760 Hilltop Ave., Gretna, NE 68028
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2627
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004
Occupation: Retired school administrator.

Sen. Bob Kremer
(District 34, Aurora)
Home Address: 186 Donegal Road, Aurora, NE 68818
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2630
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002
Occupation: Farmer and cattle feeder.

Sen. Lowen Kruse
(District 13, Omaha)
Home Address: 5404 N. 50th Ave., Omaha, NE 68104
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2727
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2000, 2004
Occupation: Retired pastor.

Sen. David Landis
(District 46, Lincoln)
Home Address: 408 Elk St., Schuyler, NE 68661
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2719
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004
Occupation: Real estate broker.

Sen. LeRoy J. Louden
(District 49, Ellsworth)
Home Address: P.O. Box 25, Ellsworth, NE 69340
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2725
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2002, 2004
Occupation: Rancher.

Sen. Vickie D. McDonald
(District 41, St. Paul)
Home Address: 1104 Westridge Lane, St. Paul, NE 68063
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2631
Appointed to Nebraska Legislature: Aug. 10, 2001, to replace Richard N. McDonald who died; elected 2002, 2004
Occupation: Account executive.

Sen. Mick Mines
(District 18, Blair)
Home Address: 636 Hillcrest Drive, Blair, NE 68008
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2618
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2002
Occupation: Vice president of external relations, HunTel Systems Inc.
Sen. Rich Pahls  
(District 31, Omaha)  
Home Address: 16550 Dorcas St., Omaha, NE 68130  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2327  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2004  
Occupation: Retired

Sen. Dwite Pedersen  
(District 39, Elkhorn)  
Home Address: 21440 Shamrock Road, Elkhorn, NE 68022  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2885  
Occupation: Substance abuse counselor.

Sen. Don Pederson  
(District 42, North Platte)  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 94604, State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2729  
Occupation: Attorney.

Sen. Don Preister  
(District 5, Bellevue)  
Mailing Address: 4522 Borman St., Omaha, NE 68157  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2710  
Occupation: Greeting card manufacturer, Joy Creations Co.

Sen. Marian Heiss Price  
(District 26, Lincoln)  
Home Address: 6735 Lexington Circle, Lincoln, NE 68505  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2610  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002  
Occupation: State senator/registered nurse.

Sen. Ron Raikes  
(District 25, Lincoln)  
Home Address: 3221 S. 76th St., Lincoln, NE 68506  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2731  
Occupation: Farmer.

Sen. Pam Redfield  
(District 12, Omaha)  
Home Address: 5036 S. 94th Ave., Omaha, NE 68127  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2623  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998; appointed Nov. 30, 1998, to replace Chris Abboud, who resigned; re-elected 2002

Sen. DiAnna R. Schimek  
(District 27, Lincoln)  
Home Address: 2321 Camelot Court, Lincoln, NE 68512  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2632  

Sen. Ed Schrock  
(District 38, Elm Creek)  
Home Address: 74274 K Road, Elm Creek, NE 68836  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2732  
Occupation: Farmer.

Sen. Adrian M. Smith  
(District 48, Gering)  
Mailing Address: 3321 Ave. I, Suite 6, Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2802  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 1998, 2002  
Occupation: Real estate agent.

Sen. Elaine Stuhr  
(District 24, Bradshaw)  
Home Address: 208 Road 18, Bradshaw, NE 68319  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2756  
Occupation: Farmer.

Sen. Arnie Stuthman  
(District 22, Platte Center)  
Home Address: 24160 310th St., Platte Center, NE 68653  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2715  
Elected to Nebraska Legislature: 2002  
Occupation: Farmer, livestock feeder.
Sen. John Synowiecki  
(District 7, Omaha)  
Home Address: 2451 S. 27th Ave., Omaha, NE 68105  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2721  
Occupation: Program director for government relations, Catholic Charities.

Sen. Nancy Thompson  
(District 14, La Vista)  
Home Address: 9406 Bayberry Court, La Vista, NE 68128  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2730  
Occupation: State senator.

Sen. Roger Wehrbein  
(District 2, Plattsmouth)  
Home Address: 5812 Highway 66, Plattsmouth, NE 68048  
Office: State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68509, phone (402) 471-2613  
Occupation: Farmer, livestock producer.

Term Limits

In 2000, the voters of Nebraska enacted by initiative petition a limit of two consecutive four-year terms on the service of state legislators. The first election at which legislators will be ineligible from continuing their service due to term limits will take place in 2006. Term-limited legislators will remain ineligible to serve in the Legislature until at least four years after leaving office.  
(Source: Nebraska Constitution, Article III, Section 12.)

Contacting Your Senator

Citizens need personal contact with legislators, and legislators need personal contact with citizens. The Nebraska Legislature is a very people-oriented institution, says Clerk of the Legislature Patrick O'Donnell.

As a concerned citizen, there are several ways in which you may communicate effectively with your senator in an attempt to suggest or influence legislation. Here are some important tips:

Identifying your senator: Contact your county clerk or county election commissioner to find out what district you may reside in or check the Unicameral Web site (www.unicam.state.ne.us) for district maps.

Face-to-face meetings: Face-to-face meetings work well because they allow senators to put faces with names. The best way to set up a meeting with a senator is to contact his or her legislative office and work with the staff member that handles the senator's schedule. When preparing for a meeting with a legislator, remember that his or her time may be limited. Try to have your thoughts gathered ahead of time so you can communicate your needs and positions clearly and concisely.

Phone calls: Phone calls are effective because they allow for direct contact between constituents and legislators and are often easier to schedule than face-to-face meetings. Having your thoughts prepared ahead of time is still a good idea. If it is not possible to talk directly with the legislator, communicate your thoughts to a member of the legislator's staff. Staff will see to it that your comments are forwarded to the senator.

Letters: Written letters are effective because they allow constituents to be complete and precise about their needs and positions. It is best to keep the letter focused on the main points you wish to make and to avoid rambling. Taking a constructive approach to the issue is more likely to receive attention. Letters that are written by you in your own words are much more effective than form letters.

Electronic mail: Many senators, but not all, have public e-mail addresses available through the Legislature's Web site. Because of the large volume of e-mail a senator's office receives, one should not expect to automatically receive a response to every message sent. It is best when contacting your senator by e-mail to treat it like a regular letter. You will have more credibility if you place your name and contact information at the bottom of the note. This will also allow the legislator the flexibility of responding either electronically or by regular mail.
The Warner Institute for Education in Democracy

The Warner Institute is an online civic education project of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature. The program is an Internet-based learning tool that features a number of individual projects available to teachers and students across the state to help students understand the complexity and importance of their state’s legislative process.

Named for the late Senator Jerome Warner, the project provides text and video streaming to enable students to listen directly to senators’ views on issues of representative democracy, learn about the history and government of the state of Nebraska and participate in the democratic process. The program was designed to help students gain a greater understanding and appreciation for representative democracy and its role in our society.

To learn more about programs of the Warner Institute, contact: Unicameral Information Office, Nebraska Legislature, P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509, (402) 471-2788, institute@unicam.state.ne.us, www.unicam.state.ne.us/institute.

Project Citizen (grades 5-9)

We the People: Project Citizen is an educational curriculum for fifth through ninth grade students that empowers young people to participate in local and state government. A national program of the Center for Civic Education, Project Citizen demonstrates how to monitor and influence public policy while teaching students to be responsible and active citizens in their communities. Free textbooks for students and teachers are provided to facilitate these exercises as they are available. Students present their projects in a district showcase before a panel of judges composed of regional officials. The winning teams then present at a state showcase and educational day held at the State Capitol, after which the state champion will submit
their work to the national showcase. The program was first used in 1995 and is now used by schools in every state. More than 8,300 teachers and 500,000 students have participated.

America's Legislators Back to School Program (all grade levels)

Throughout the year, state legislators from across the nation visit local classrooms to help students understand the legislative process and build links between schools and state government. America's Legislators Back to School Program, sponsored nationally by the National Conference of State Legislatures, focuses national attention on civic education.

Unicam Kids (grades 4-6)

Unicam Kids is an educational Web site for young students that contains information about the membership, history and processes of the Nebraska Legislature. The site also features a puzzle and a quiz that tests students’ knowledge of the material.

Unicam Kids - A Student Guide to the Nebraska Legislature (grades 4-6)

This booklet is a colorful guide for young students that teaches about the membership, history and processes of the Nebraska Legislature. The Student Guide also features puzzles and quizzes designed to test a student's knowledge of the material.

UniCAM Focus (grades 9-12)

UniCAM Focus uses the web and video streaming to provide teachers with lessons to use in helping students gain insight into various themes about representative democracy in our state. Each lesson is intended to supplement a teacher's civics curriculum and is accompanied by exercises and streamed videos that help explain the broad concepts of representative government.

The Nebraska Unicameral: A Citizen’s Legislature (grades 9-12)

A Citizen’s Legislature is a guide to the Nebraska Unicameral designed specifically for high school students. The brochure discusses the importance of citizen participation and offers suggestions on how to become involved in the process. The guide also offers educational information on the difference between unicameral and bicameral legislatures.

Appreciating Legislatures Lessons (teachers)

The National Conference of State Legislatures, along with the Alliance for Representative Democracy, is developing and disseminating high school lessons and curricular materials about representative democracy. This civic education project is based on the assumption that, as part of their representational responsibilities, legislatures must inform people in their states of how legislative institutions and processes work.

Nebraska Blue Book Online (all ages)

The Nebraska Blue Book, the state’s government resource manual, is available online so the public can have instant access to information about the government and culture of the state. Bound books also are available for purchase.

Glossary of Legislative Terms

**Appropriation Bill (“A” Bill)** - a bill to appropriate funds to finance another bill bearing the same number.

**Bracket** - to delay consideration of a bill.

**Call of the House** - a procedure used to compel attendance of unexcused senators in the chamber.

**Carry-over Legislation** - bills and resolutions introduced during the regular session in an odd-numbered year and held over for consideration during the regular session in an even-numbered year.

**Chair** - the presiding officer.

**Cloture** - a parliamentary action to cease debate on a bill and vote immediately on its advancement. A motion for cloture may be made after full and fair debate on a bill at a stage of consideration.

**Constitutional Amendment Resolution** - a proposal to amend the state constitution, ratify or reject an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, or petition Congress about amending the U.S. Constitution. State CA resolutions have the suffix “CA” by the resolution number, and they must be approved by the voters as well as the Legislature.

**Consent Calendar** - a portion of the agenda in which relatively noncontroversial bills are considered and quickly advanced to the next legislative stage. Usually, a bill on consent calendar can be debated for no more than 15 minutes.

**Engrossment** - the process of preparing a bill for Final Reading by incorporating all adopted amendments.

**Enrollment and Review (E&R)** - the process of incorporating adopted amendments into a bill and reviewing the bill for technical and grammatical accuracy.

**Executive Session** - a closed meeting of a committee to
discuss and act on bills and resolutions. An executive session is open only to committee members and staff and the media.

**Final Reading** - the third and last stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. The clerk reads the entire bill aloud, unless final reading is waived, and senators vote without debate on whether to submit the bill to the governor.

**Fiscal Note** - a statement prepared by the Legislative Fiscal Office estimating the effect a bill would have on state and/or local expenditures and revenue.

**Floor** - the area of the legislative chamber where the senators sit. When a committee advances a bill “to the floor,” that means the bill is being sent to the full Legislature for consideration.

**General File** - the first stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. Bills on General File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Select File.

**Hearing** - a regularly scheduled committee meeting to receive public comment on proposed bills and resolutions.

**Indefinitely Postpone (IPP)** - to kill a bill.

**Interim** - the period between legislative sessions.

**Legislative Bill (LB)** - a proposal to create, change or delete one or more laws.

**Legislative History** - the committee and floor debate records for any bill. A history includes transcripts of the bill’s hearing and all floor debate.

**Legislative Journal** - official record of legislative floor action, including all motions, the number of yeas and nays on each vote, etc.

**Legislative Resolution (LR)** - a proposal to make a formal expression of opinion, intent or recognition; amend the state or federal constitution; or authorize an interim study of an issue.

**Line-Item Veto** - the power of the governor to make specific reductions in any part of a budget bill passed by the Legislature.

**Machine Vote** - a vote taken by electronic voting system. The voting board shows how each senator voted, but only vote totals are entered in the Legislative Journal.

**Major Proposal** - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution that the speaker designates as important enough for scheduling priority. Each session, up to five bills may be chosen as major proposals, all of which must be senator priority bills and must get the approval of two-thirds of the Executive Board.

**One-liner** - a one-line description of a bill or resolution.

**President** - the lieutenant governor. While senators address whoever is in the chair as Mr. or Madame President, the lieutenant governor alone holds that official title.

**Presiding Officer** - the president or the senator currently presiding over legislative proceedings.

**Priority Bill** - a bill that has priority status and generally is considered ahead of other bills in debate. Each senator may select one priority bill, each committee may select two priority bills, and the speaker may select up to 25 priority bills.

**Record Vote** - a vote on which a record is kept of how each senator voted. The vote is taken by electronic voting system, and the senators’ names and corresponding votes are then printed in the Legislative Journal.

**Regular Session** - the annual session that begins the first Wednesday after the first Monday each January.

**Roll Call Vote** - a vote during which the senators vote one at a time as the clerk reads their names. Senators cast their votes verbally, and their names and corresponding votes are printed in the Legislative Journal.

**Select Committee** - a permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to the administration of the Legislature.

**Select File** - the second stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. Bills on Select File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Final Reading.

**Sine Die** - without setting a future date for reconvening. When the Legislature adjourns sine die, the legislative session is finished for the year.

**Slip Law** - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution printed individually in its approved form after being enacted into law or submitted to voters.

**Speaker** - the officer of the Legislature, elected from among the senators, who prepares the daily agenda and the session calendar and who presides in the absence of the lieutenant governor.

**Special Committee** - a committee created by law for a specific reason. Except for the Executive Board, special committees have no jurisdiction over bills or resolutions.

**Special Session** - a limited legislative session called for a specific purpose by the governor or two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

**Standing Committee** - a permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to an area of public policy. Almost all bills and resolutions are referred to one of the 14 standing committees.

**Veto** - the power of the governor to reject bills passed by the Legislature. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to either sign or veto a bill. The Legislature then has an opportunity to override the veto.

**Veto Override** - the power of the Legislature to pass a bill over the governor’s veto. A veto override requires the approval of three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature.

**Voice Vote** - a vote in which senators cast their votes orally and no totals are recorded.