

# rarefield air | Legislature: work ahead

By Dick Piersol

This column today and on future Mondays, will be dedicated to—or if you can't swallow that, display a sometimes aggravating preoccupation with—state and national politics and that venerable body, the Nebraska Unicameral.

None of these subjects will be taken lightly, of course, except when they deserve it.

The Legislature's members really have their work cut out for them this session. Recent years have not seen such an amalgam of important and controversial issues.

State spending, as usual, is the priority item. And NU, the most expensive state agency, alternately will be lauded and kicked about more than any other.

University administrators have asked for \$100 million in tax money. The Appropriations Committee has recommended \$88 million.

Before anyone complains about the Legislature being tight-fisted or otherwise with any state agency, check the budget recommendations of only four years ago. The Appropriations Committee university budget proposal in 1972 was \$46.3 million. The committee's recommended budget this year for UNL alone is \$47.3 million. The total

state budget recommendation brought to the floor in 1972 was \$196.5 million. This year, what committee chairman Sen. Richard Marvel of Hastings called a "bare bones" budget bill will be about \$359 million. State agency requests for fiscal 1976-77 totals \$405 million.

Clearly, inflation has taken more of a toll on state government services than the lawmakers' parsimony.

At equal issue with the level of university appropriations is to what extent, if any, the NU Board of Regents will be allowed to exercise flexibility in spending those tax dollars. Appropriations Committee hearings last month seemed to point to some flexibility, possibly with campus-by-campus appropriations. The possibility depends upon university administrators developing an accountability plan to the legislators. The Legislature will not give up easily its prerogative to legislate program by program university functions.

Add to tax dollar-stretching problems the senators' other ambitious plans. They want to deal decisively with a potentially dangerous medical malpractice situation.

The coal slurry pipeline proposal promises to be one of the most heavily lobbied issues in Nebraska history. A

generous increase in state aid to education, raising the state's load to 40 per cent support over the next few years, and legislation reducing the number of school districts also are in the works. The Nebraska State School Boards Association is supporting a bill requiring Class I districts (those with kindergarten and six or eight grades), to merge with a larger district by 1980.

The Judiciary Committee will concentrate on revamping the state criminal code.

This session's agenda seems to be an even larger load considering 24 of the 49 seats are up for reelection. One wonders about the timing of a bill to provide senators travel expenses while in session as a supplement their measly \$100 monthly salary.

It also is worth noting what the senators, for whatever reason, probably will not do. Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Roland Luedtke of Lincoln has predicted senators will take no action on the subject of court-ordered limits on trial news coverage. He said any action could be overruled by the courts themselves but the issue might be approached next year.

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