

Sen. Wesely gears toward people

By Douglas Kircher

When freshman Sen. Don Wesely describes the legislative bills he introduced or played a major role in, his listener catches a common theme: all are people oriented.

He points to the "Older Nebraskans Act", aimed at expanding rights of and services to the aged.

And to the Certificate of Need bill, designed to hold down health costs while maintaining the quality of service.

And to a proposal to remove cancer-causing asbestos from schools and public buildings.

And to his support of district elections, saying that they bring city governments closer to the people.

"And one of the things I have always been interested in is how to draw more people into the political process," Wesely said.

Wesely, 25, Northeast Lincoln, mentioned the Lincoln breakfast meetings with the public and the forums he has with other north Lincoln public officials, school and business organizations as two current attempts to draw people into government.

"I hope I will continue to be able to come up with some of the more innovative ideas. That's really important to me. I felt sort of left behind in those years before I got actively involved. I think that it is the role of elected officials to not wait for people to come to them but to go to (the people) for ideas and opinions."

Active senator

The Nebraska native said, "I think I probably am one of the more active senators, involved in lots of legislation,

introducing many (bills) myself and getting involved in the energy issues.

I just think that the more you do, the better representative you are. I think that my part of town does not want someone who goes down there and votes and that's it. I think they want somebody who is actively working on their behalf."

He said he also is active in city and national politics and the Democratic party.

Wesely pointed out that if the people want a different kind of senator, they have that choice.

"But I am confident I am doing okay."

Six months ago in January, Wesely began his first session representing the people of northeast Lincoln. Although he said he was thinking about 20 bills for possible introduction, a limit of 10 bills per senator forced him to choose what he called the most important 10.

He said five passed and he had an important role in four or five bills from other senators.

The Legislature killed two of his bills and pulled three for interim study.

"I guess in terms of what I was able to accomplish in terms of legislation, I took a key leadership role on the Certificate of Need bill, LB 172."

Wesely described the Certificate of Need bill as a requirement for hospitals and nursing homes to go through a review process before building or spending any large amount of money. Unless the project or expenditure is needed, it isn't built or bought.

"Because right now we have a problem in Nebraska, especially in Omaha, where they are building hospital beds that will cost almost as much to maintain as if they

were used, which means the empty beds are an extra cost that is borne by everybody.

"And so hospital costs go up fanatically."

Freshmen sign bill

Wesely said the legislation's goal was to ensure that the state has the hospital care it needs but doesn't overbuild.

Four fellow freshmen co-signed Wesely's Interim Study Resolution. The bill's purpose was to study the work of the Legislature and suggest reforms.

"Now maybe nothing will come of it, but we are going to raise some issues

about the legislature. . . a question of whether we could do better."

Wesely said the legislature does an incredibly good job, much better than he realized during his campaign but he said it could still do better.

"Amongst the bills I introduced that were passed was the 'Older Nebraskans Act,'" he said. "That will help older people in the state in a number of ways."

The act would raise the mandatory retirement age and the anti-discrimination law to 70 years. It also provides for an annual comprehensive plan that he said

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