

Regent Hansen asked for trust fund explanation

By Jim Faddis

The Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission has sent a letter to NU Regent Kermit Hansen of Omaha asking him to specify property he has in a trust fund, and if the trust fund can benefit him financially.

In his statement of financial interests, in the section asking for stocks, bonds and government securities not listed elsewhere in the statement, Hansen wrote "1st Northwestern Trust company has all stocks, bonds, insurance policies and title to real property . . . under trust agreements."

Thomas Burke, executive director of the commission, said the law requires elected state officials to identify businesses they have financial interests in.

Burke said if Hansen's trust fund is one that he can derive financial benefits from, he must report what businesses he has stocks in and what type of bonds he has.

But if the trust is for one of Hansen's children or family that he can't get direct benefit from, Burke said he does not need to report it.

In a telephone interview Wednesday, Hansen said it was his understanding that he could not get any benefits from the trust fund, so he did not report it.

"But I will go back to the trust institute and check with them to make sure it is not of beneficial interest to me and then clear it with the commission," he said.

If it is decided that Hansen can't get any financial benefits from the trust fund, he won't have to do anything more, Burke said.

Burke said that there is no indication that Hansen is concealing anything or that he has done anything improper.

"But the way he reported the trust requires an explanation," he said.

Hansen reported the trust in the same way in 1979, but it did not come to the attention of the commission, Burke said.

He said the commission receives a large number of financial interest statements each year and that it does random audits of the statements. This year, Hansen's statement was audited.

The purpose of the law requiring elected officials to file a statement of financial interests is so that the public can see what private benefits a person might get from a position, Burke said.

"We are not trying to snoop or to pry into someone's private life," Burke said. "But we are trying to give the public a measuring stick to see how a public official carries out their official duties might be influenced by private benefits."

Lack of accountability decried

Task force: give governor increased control

By Steve Miller

Editor's Note: This is the fourth article in a five-part series on recommendations to make state government more efficient and more responsive to Nebraska residents.

The operation of Nebraska's executive branch of government leaves much to be desired, according to the findings of the governor's task force on government improvement.

The task force reported that while it is apparent that operation of individual agencies is "remarkably good," as a whole it is not well organized.

The task force described findings and made recommendations to improve the organization of state government after a five-month study.

It said the reason state government is not as effective as it should be is that the executive branch is not one but four branches, and no one person is in charge of three of them.

The report listed as the four branches the constitutional officers including the governor and five elected officials, constitutional boards and commissions, agencies under the governor's control and agencies that are not under the governor's control.

The report says the main fault is that 71 agencies are not accountable to a central authority "who can, in turn, be held accountable by the people of Nebraska."

The report went on to say a lack of responsiveness to the public stems from the lack of accountability.

Too many agencies

According to the report, state government also has too many agencies, because a new organization was created each time a new problem arose.

W.A. Hamilton, special consultant for the task force, explained that state government was organized to handle the recent demand for a multitude of services, especially with the push to manage these services, at the state level.

If Nebraska were a business, it would rank as a major corporation with the governor in charge, Hamilton said.

"But he doesn't have the authority to handle all that he is responsible for," Hamilton said. "In the business world, no one would take a job like that without total control of employees and the budget."

The task force report suggests that most of the operating agencies be under the governor's control. Some agencies attained their goals should be cut, and some should be combined into larger, more cost-efficient agencies, according to the report.

In trying to make the executive branch more accountable, more responsive, and trying to organize it in a way in which it can still be manageable, the task force recommended that certain agencies be organized into five executive offices.

Coordinate agencies

The five offices would not have large staffs, but would be designed merely to coordinate functions of agencies.

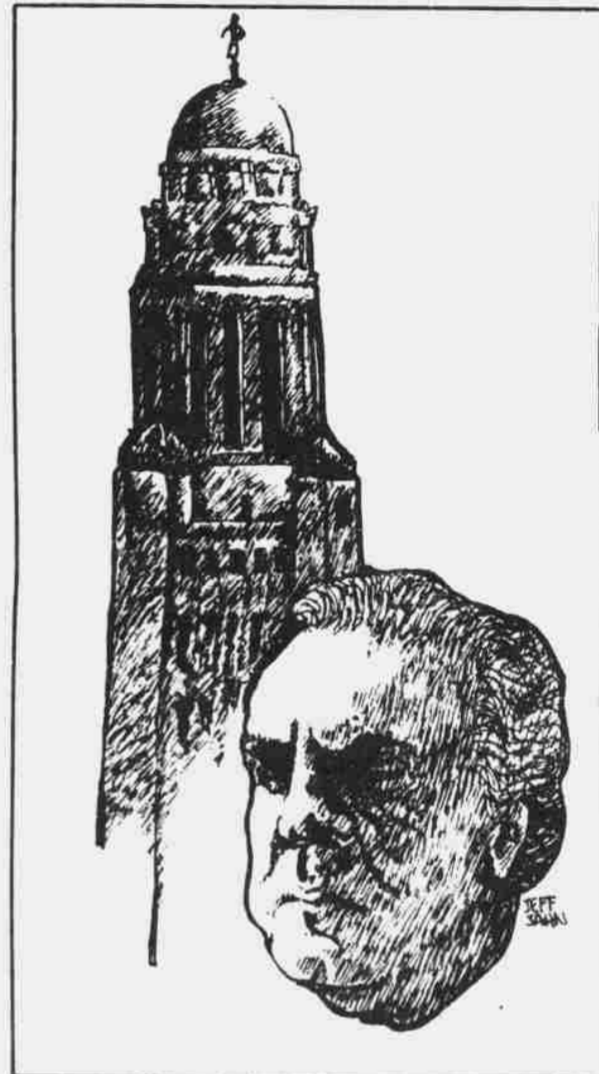
The five offices also would look for areas of duplication, coordinate activities of their offices and serve as the governor's special consultants.

The five coordinating agencies, according to the report, should be:

--The executive office of human services, to coordinate services provided by the departments of health, public institutions, social services and labor.

--The executive office of natural resources, which would coordinate the activities of the departments of environmental control and the environmental control council, natural resources implementation, water resources and the inter-agency water coordinating committee.

--the executive offices of energy policy, to join efforts toward energy solutions and coordinate activities of the department of



energy, the power review board, the oil and gas conservation commission, the gasoline committee, and those developing alternative energy resources.

--the executive office of public safety and protection, to oversee administrative aspects of 15 agencies including the departments of racing, athletics, parole and justice, liquor control and fire prevention.

--The executive office of surface transportation, an elevation of the state department of roads. The task force said the department should be raised to an executive office since it is also responsible for public transit, railroad and river transportation.

Write-in alternative not available on Nebraska presidential ballots

Although some people voting on Nov. 4 might prefer to write in the name of a presidential candidate other than the four offered on the Nebraska ballot, no such option is available.

Secretary of State Allen Beermann said there is no write-in space offered on any state's ballot and there never has been any such provision.

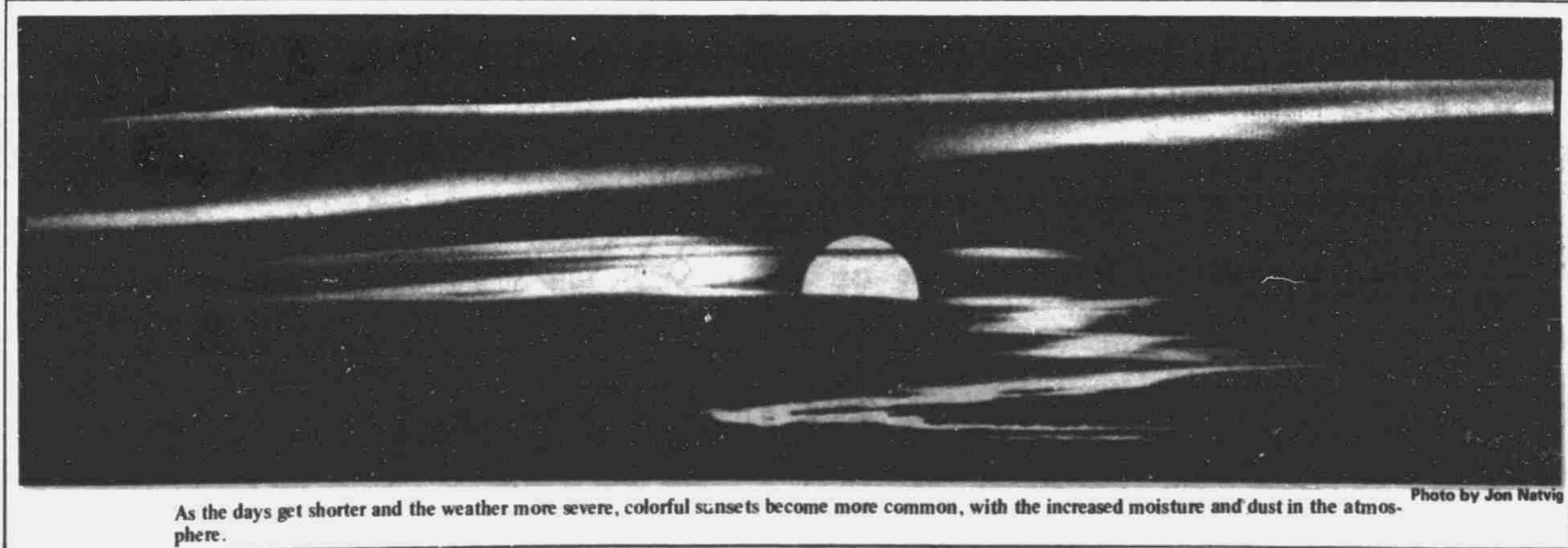
Beermann said that when voting, "you are technically not voting for the president, you are voting for the electoral college."

If such a space were provided, Beermann said, it would be necessary for voters to list not only their presidential choice, but also five presidential electors' names.

He also said for a candidate to be elected through a write-in provision it would be necessary for everyone writing in the candidate's name to also write in the same five electors.

The candidates offered on the Nebraska ballot are Democrat Jimmy Carter, Republican Ronald Reagan, Independent John Anderson and Libertarian Ed Clark.

Today is the last day to apply for an absentee ballot for the Nov. 4 election. Cards are available at a booth at the Nebraska Union, the East Campus Union and residence halls. Applications must be post-marked by today to be eligible for an absentee ballot.



As the days get shorter and the weather more severe, colorful sunsets become more common, with the increased moisture and dust in the atmosphere. Photo by Jon Natvig