

Gubernatorial challenger says he'll reform tax system

Spence says total redesign would be first agenda item

By Jeffrey Robb
Senior Editor

Republican candidate for governor Gene Spence continued his gubernatorial campaign with a rally Thursday evening in the Haymarket.

Spence criticized Gov. Ben Nelson on taxes, on crime, on the economy and even for living in Omaha instead of the governor's mansion.

Spence also announced his plan for changing Nebraska's state government, calling it "Forward Nebraska." Spence said the plan would do three things: redesign state government, redesign the state tax structure and maximize the power of the state's agricultural and economic base.

The state tax structure is the most immediate of the problems, Spence said. The tax system has been in a mess for a long time, Spence said, and is incomprehensible and universally unfair.

"As governor, the first item on my agenda will be the total redesign of the tax system in Nebraska," Spence said, "starting with no preconceived notions about what it should be."

For 100 years, the state has tried to patch together a solution, Spence said, but he would deal with the entire system instead of tinkering with its parts.

With the Nelson administration, Spence said, the mess has continued. "Governor Nelson and the tax commissioner have made it almost impossible for people to prepare their tax returns because 910,000 tax forms are wrong," he said.

Because of inefficiency in the tax system throughout Nelson's term, Spence said, people paid higher taxes, and schools didn't receive their full endowments.

Another part of Spence's plan would take care of inefficiency. Spence

said if elected, he eventually would redesign state government so that it provided its services better and more cheaply. Spence said he wouldn't throw money into current programs or create new ones.

"I give you my word, and I keep my word, that I will not hesitate to make these changes," Spence said. "And I will make the difficult decisions that truly will take Nebraska forward."

Spence also said crime must be dealt with today. Nelson has failed to deal effectively with the problem, he said.

Law enforcement is making the arrests, and the prosecutors are getting the convictions, Spence said, but after that the system breaks down.

Spence said Nelson should not let convicts free just because they kept out of trouble while in jail. Spence also blamed Nelson's appointed parole board for putting criminals back on the street.

"As governor, I will eliminate the politically-appointed parole board system as it exists today," Spence said. "As governor, I will accept responsibility for making parole decisions."

Nelson came out against this idea, Spence said, saying the governor doesn't have time to do that job himself. Spence said he would make time by living in the governor's mansion instead of in Omaha. Each day, Spence said, he would save two hours of travel time and could devote that to his work.

Equity

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"I see a lot of positive interaction between females and males in class," Thorp said. "Any casual observer would not get the idea of a chilly climate."

On the syllabus for his classes, he said, there is a statement that says CBA will not "tolerate sexual or racial harassment in the classroom."

He said about two-thirds of professors at CBA used the statement on their syllabuses.

"We do have some problems," Thorp said, "but the AAUP study greatly overplays the situation."

Thorp said the Gender and Minority Issues Committee had been looking for ways to address gender issues at CBA.

"The AAUP report sounds like we aren't doing anything," he said, "but we feel we are making progress."

For example, he said, five of the last six faculty members hired have been female.

And since more and more women will be hired as professors and recruited as students in CBA, he said, it is important to work out the gender differences among members of the college.

"We're trying to get male colleagues to sit up and take notice," Thorp said.

Regents

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tion of change in the college as "alarming and discouraging."

The report includes criticism of evaluation procedures, salary decisions and appointment to graduate or tenure positions.

In other business, the board will be asked to approve a motion to add the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis as a campus of the university.

Prior to 1986, the college was part of the NU system and was under control of the regents, but it was in danger of closing. The Legislature and then-Gov. Kay Orr decided to make it a separate college to keep it going.

After 1986, it was not part of the university system but under control of the Board of Regents.

The board also will be asked to approve an amendment to incoming President Dennis Smith's contract. The proposal would allow for Smith to retire before 10 years of university service.

Bill would raise probation officers' pay

Original pretrial diversions bill lacked support in Legislature

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

A state legislative bill that initially promoted pretrial diversions for first-time offenders was altered during debate Thursday to instead increase salaries for probation officers.

With the new provisions established in LB779, the salaries of probation officers would be increased to equal those of payroll officers.

The original provisions of LB779, involving pretrial diversions for those charged with driving while intoxicated, were scrapped because of a lack of votes, Sen. John Lindsay of Omaha said. The bill in its revised form moved on to final reading Thursday.

Lindsay, who sponsored the bill, said the probation officer issue had been a concern of the Judiciary Committee for the past few years.

"Probation officers are horribly paid right now," Lindsay said. "If probation can be done correctly, it can be much more cost-effective than prisons."

Lindsay said the current annual

salary for probation officers was \$19,000. Each officer supervises about 140 cases a year, he said. The yearly cost to maintain one prisoner can amount to \$20,000.

"For the same cost of keeping a person in prison, we can provide one-on-one supervision," he said. This individual attention would lead to better supervision and success with probation.

"We could have less people repeating criminal behavior and it would cost less," he said.

Lindsay said studies proved offenders were better controlled by experienced probation officers.

"This is the logical perspective," Lindsay said.

More individual attention by probation officers to offenders would deter future crimes, he said.

By increasing salaries, Lindsay said Nebraska would be able to retain more of its qualified officers. Omaha provides a training ground for probation officers, many of whom are going to Iowa or federal prisons instead of Nebraska, he said.

“We're preventing crime instead of punishing. If there's no crime, there's no victim.”

— Lindsay
state senator

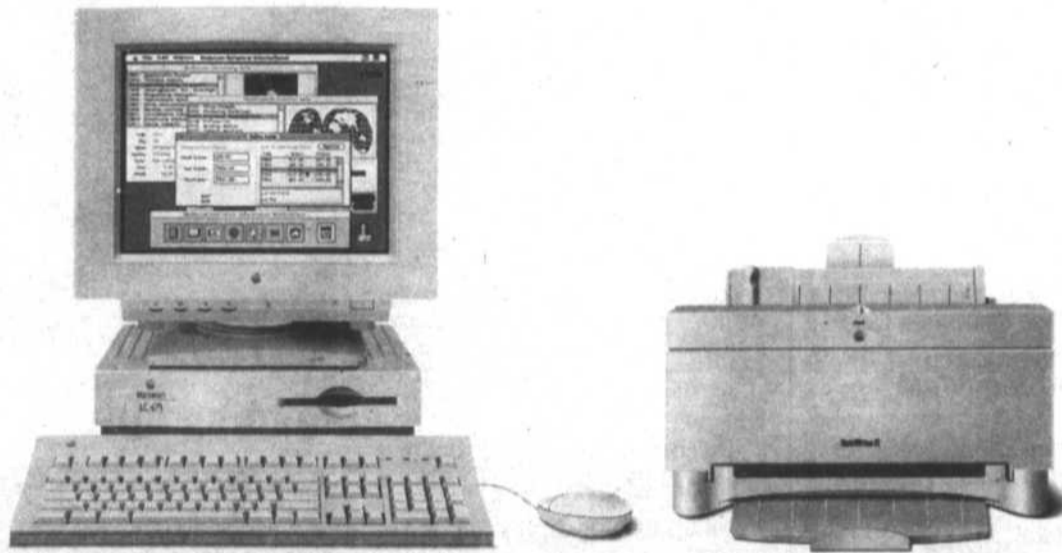
"What happens is we spend more to train these officers who end up going to another state," he said.

He said federal salaries started at 50 percent higher than those in Nebraska.

"We could retain some good, experienced officers," Lindsay said. "As time goes on, we will have more officers who will be able to get to know the offenders, know the families and know what kind of support services are necessary."

"We're preventing crime instead of punishing," he said. "If there's no crime, there's no victim."

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