

Spence questions Nelson's record at debate

By DeDra Janssen
Senior Reporter

Sparks flew this weekend at the first gubernatorial debate of the year, as Republican Gene Spence challenged incumbent Ben Nelson for his leadership on issues ranging from spending to crime to low-level waste.

Spence, who during the debate on Friday often challenged the governor's record, called Nelson hypocritical on spending and irresponsible on low-level waste.

"I just don't see your leadership, Ben," Spence told the governor during the debate in the Open Air Auditorium at the Nebraska State Fair. "If I were in your shoes, I would have trouble looking people in the eye."

Nelson defended his record on all issues addressed during the debate.

"I'm proud of my record as governor of the state of Nebraska," Nelson said. "Since you elected me as gover-

nor four years ago, I have made promises, and, yes, I have kept those promises."

Spence began by questioning Nelson's record on spending. Since Nelson has been governor, Spence said, state spending had increased 25 percent.

"I don't know that we're 25 percent better off," he said.

But Nelson, referring to a chart, said spending had gone down since he became governor. Nelson said spending in the 1994 fiscal year had decreased .15 percent.

Spence also said Nelson increased bonuses given to state employees during a time of budget crises.

"I find that hypocritical," Spence said.

Nelson responded by saying bonuses had, in fact, decreased by 10 percent.

Bonuses given to his administration had been eliminated, Nelson said,

and bonuses given to other state employees were well-deserved and based on work performance.

Spence criticized the governor for his failure to get an adult crime bill passed through the Nebraska Legislature.

"If Ben had worked half as hard on the adult crime bill as he had on the lottery, we'd have had an adult crime bill," Spence said.

Spence also criticized the state parole board.

"After four years of Ben and his parole board, we continue to release violent criminals," he said.

Spence said the parole board should be abolished, and the governor should review personally the cases of violent criminals who were eligible for parole.

Nelson called that proposal impractical.

"You can't become the parole board," Nelson said. "You've got to work with the system that's there."

Nelson proposed two changes for the parole board.

First, the governor should be able to hire and fire members of the parole board for any reason, he said. Second, the governor should have the authority to overrule decisions made by the parole board, Nelson said.

Another key issue during the debate was low-level radioactive waste.

Spence said Nelson had a responsibility to see that a low-level radioactive waste repository was built in the state in a timely fashion.

Several years ago, the state was contracted to house the repository for five states, including Nebraska. Boyd County was selected as the site for the repository, which has not been built yet.

"The governor has been irresponsible by not going ahead with low-level waste," he said. "When will it be housed, Ben?"

Nelson said the repository would

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SPENCE

Republican gubernatorial candidate

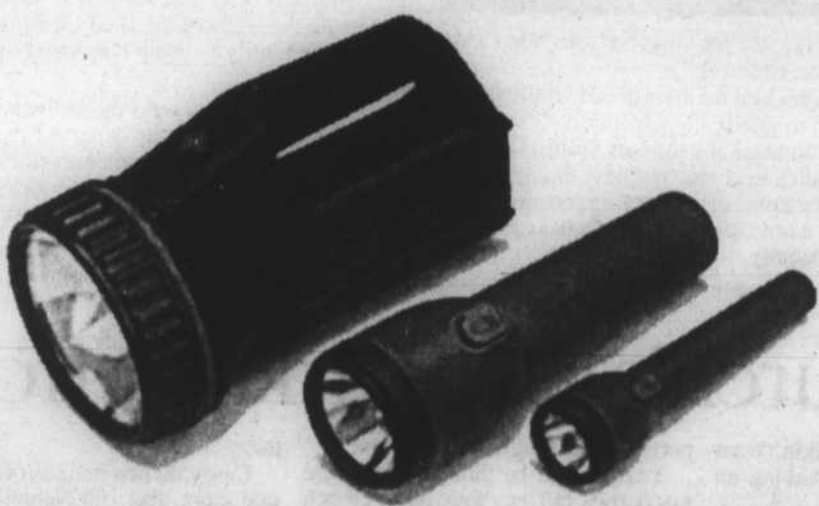
be built only when it had received community consent and only if it was absolutely safe.

The state is trying to get community consent, Nelson said.

"You can't spend too much time being too safe," he said.

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