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WEATHER:

Today - Mostly sunny & warmer. West wind 10 to 20 mph.

Tonight - Partly cloudy & mild. Low 25 to 30.

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Jay Calderon/DN

Governor Ben Nelson takes time during the State of the State address Thursday to applaud Jimmy Wilson Sr., father of the Omaha officer who was shot in the line of duty last year.

Nelson delivers State address

By Ted Taylor
Senior Reporter

Gov. Ben Nelson urged Nebraskans to turn challenges into opportunities during his annual State of the State address Thursday morning at the State Capitol.

"We are still one Nebraska," Nelson told more than 120 people in the Legislature's West Chamber. "And we must strive to do what is in the best interest of all."

In the address, Nelson introduced his 1996-97 budget proposal and touted crime measures and his property tax relief plan.

He praised Nebraskans and what he called the "tremendous amount of positive change" that had occurred in the state.

"We have delivered on promises," the governor said. "We have made a difference."

But he asked that citizens not stand still.

"Now we can build on our achievements," Nelson said. "The new challenges we face present even more opportunities for positive change."

Nelson asked lawmakers to remember that the state's successes have come from the fiscal integrity of the state. He called his role as "steward of the budget" his top priority.

Nelson's proposed budget bill

"We must establish that our priority is saving, rather than spending, our general fund dollars."

BEN NELSON
Nebraska governor

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would transfer \$21.5 million to the cash reserve fund in the current fiscal year, and \$17.3 million next year.

"Action to strengthen our cash reserve is necessary and critical," he said. "We must establish that our priority is saving, rather than spending, our general fund dollars."

Nelson called budgeting the state government a balancing act where he was "avoiding uncontrolled growth while still meeting the important needs of Nebraskans."

And with property tax issues on the front burner, Nelson asked senators to consider his proposed property tax relief effort.

Nelson called his Local Control Property Taxpayer Relief Act a

common-sense solution to the problem.

"Others want to spell relief s-h-i-f-t," he said. "I spell it c-u-t. It is only with spending cuts that we can achieve true property tax relief."

Nelson also urged senators to look at the broader picture and how property tax relief would affect not only themselves, but their families, neighbors, communities and the state.

Another challenge Nebraska faces — crime and the increase of violent crime — is one of the most difficult, Nelson said.

He pointed to retired Omaha police officer Jimmy Wilson Sr., whose son was gunned down in the line of duty Aug. 20, 1995, as an example of the challenges Nebraska faced.

"As we mourned the loss of this young Nebraskan," he said, "we also continue to be outraged by the increasing level of violence in our state."

This level of violence, Nelson said, brings up another taxing problem.

"Overcrowding in the state's correctional system has reached the crisis point," he said. "If we fail to deal with this overcrowding problem today, the courts will intervene and tell us what we have to do."

See NELSON on 3

Blank top choice for chairmanship

By Julie Sobczyk
and Matthew Waite

Senior Reporter and Senior Editor

Regent Don Blank of McCook will be the next chairperson of the NU Board of Regents, according to an informal poll of regents.

"If my name is put up, I'll probably be chair," Blank said Thursday. "Let's just wait and see what happens on Saturday. If the majority of the regents want me to be chair, then I'll be chair."

"Let's just wait and see who's nominated."

The regents will elect a new chairperson and vice-chairperson at Saturday's monthly meeting.

In a phone poll of the regents, four said they supported Blank: Regents John Payne of Kearney, Nancy O'Brien of Waterloo, Chuck Hassebrook of Walthill and Charles

Wilson of Lincoln.

Regent Robert Allen of Hastings said he would not support Blank, Regent Rosemary Skrupa said she would not support anyone until Saturday and Regent Drew Miller is out of the country.

Hassebrook will be elected vice-chairman, according to the poll.

"I think I've got a good grasp of what the university does," he said. "I have a grasp of the issue of how to keep the university affordable to people of modest means. I have a good grasp for representing the needs of ordinary folks out there."

Hassebrook said he and Blank have a good chance of being appointed, but added, "nothing's certain."

O'Brien, who is the current regents chairperson, said she didn't want to run again.

Skrupa and Allen agreed it would

See REGENTS on 6

Chewing tobacco law has ambiguous meaning

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Reporter

The difference between a \$500 fine for promotional distribution of smokeless tobacco and a legal tobacco discount all depend on the interpretation of Nebraska's law.

The ambiguous wording of the statute has led a deputy attorney general and one of the law's writers to disagree on whether tobacco sellers should be allowed to honor coupons discounting smokeless tobacco.

The law states that manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers are prohibited from distributing smokeless tobacco for promotional purposes.

The discussion follows a Daily Nebraskan investigation in which Lincoln retailers honored a coupon for a \$1.50 discount on Skoal tobacco. The coupon was void in Nebraska because of the laws against discounting smokeless tobacco.

Laurie Camp, deputy attorney general, said retailers who honored the coupon did not violate the law because they didn't necessarily distribute for promotional purposes and they did not give the coupon out.

"I couldn't conclude there was a violation, only a mistake," Camp said.

The mistake made by store cashiers in honoring the void coupon would not bring a fine, but only a loss of profit, she said.

The manufacturer will not reimburse Nebraska retailers \$1.50 per

Law prohibiting promotional distribution of smokeless tobacco

● Distribute shall mean to give smokeless tobacco products to the general public at no cost or at nominal cost or to give coupons or rebate offers with the products.

● Manufacturers, wholesalers, or retailers, or their representatives, of smokeless tobacco products shall not distribute for promotional purposes.

— taken from sections 69-1902 and 69-1903

coupon because they should not have given the discount for a void coupon, Camp said.

Camp said Nebraska retailers would be violating the law only under one of the three conditions:

- If retailers issued their own store coupon.
- If retailers gave away free

See TOBACCO on 6

New residence hall could ease overcrowding

By Julie Sobczyk
Senior Reporter

Plans for a new residence hall to house 400 honors program students is in the works, a UNL official said Thursday.

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, brought the proposal before the Academic Planning Committee on Wednesday.

Griesen tentatively set the project's cost at \$12 million and said the money would be well-spent if it helped alleviate overcrowding in the residence halls.

"For the past two fall semesters, students have been living in lounges

and in three-person triple rooms," Griesen said. "We're not meeting the demand for students, especially those who want single rooms."

Last year, about 200 requests for single rooms from upperclassmen could not be granted, he said. That number does not include any freshmen who may have wanted their own room.

A new hall also would help create a sense of community among honors program students, Griesen said.

A special community for students can help them feel more at home at UNL and can build a stable environment, he said.

Other community environments,

such as engineering student floors and floors for health and wellness, have been attractive to students, he said. The Freshman Learning Community, a pilot program this year, also has been successful.

"We want to be flexible with students and accommodate their special interests," Griesen said.

And the best way to alleviate the housing crunch, yet remain flexible to students, would be to create an honors program residence hall, he said.

The honors program has grown each year, and the floors set aside for honors students in the Neihardt Residence Complex are reaching capacity.

"They need more computer space, more space for honors seminars and more space for the director's office," Griesen said.

The new building would be more modern than the other residence halls, he said, and have suites consisting of two rooms and an adjoining bathroom.

So far, two possible sites have been pinpointed. They are: north of Cather Residence Hall and south of Bancroft Hall.

The parking lot south of Bancroft would have to be removed, but Griesen said he did not want the issue to spark a new parking debate.

"Whenever you build something, you have to disrupt something else,"

he said. "You have to look at parking as a big picture."

Griesen said removing the lot would not add to the parking problem because a proposed plan to build a parking garage west of Memorial Stadium would increase the amount of available parking on campus.

Griesen said the proposed sites are near cafeterias, and a new dining hall would not have to be built.

The proposal is still in its early stages, but Griesen said he already had heard opposition to the plan.

"We're not trying to set the honors kids apart as elites," he said. "There have always been talented and gifted students in all of the halls."