



GOV. NELSON speaks to UNL students in the Selleck Hall cafeteria. Nelson will face Chuck Hagel in U.S. Senate race.

RYAN SODERLIN/DN

Senate race could affect governorship

By ERIN GIBSON
 Staff Reporter

For Nebraskans, more than a Senate seat is at stake in this election.

If Gov. Ben Nelson wins his race against Chuck Hagel, Lt. Gov. Kim Robak will inherit the governor's mansion and the statehouse until the 1998 election.

But Robak is no stranger to the Capitol, and she says she would enjoy the governorship.

She was appointed to office as lieutenant governor in October 1993, having served as Nelson's chief of staff since July 1992. As lieutenant governor, she presides over the Legislature and works closely with Nelson on several initiatives, often filling in for him at public events.

As governor, Robak said, she would continue many of the policies and initiatives started under Nelson's administration, including making public education a priority, working on economic development, cracking down on crime and making government more efficient.

But Chuck Sigerson, Nebraska's Republican Party chairman, said ethical questions could arise if Robak takes over the governor's mansion.

Robak's husband, William Mueller, has risen to the position as the highest-paid lobbyist in the state over the past few years, Sigerson said.

Sigerson said Robak's office could allow him access to insider government information.

Although he did not accuse either Robak or Mueller of unethical actions, "the appearance is certainly there," Sigerson said.

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But Robak said her office would not

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CHUCK SIGERSON
 Nebraska Republican Party chairman

change her husband's position as a lobbyist. In turn, his position would have no effect on her decisions in office.

"I'm a Democrat, and he's a Republican, so he obviously hasn't influenced me yet," she said.

"I took an oath of office to serve the people of Nebraska to the best of my ability, and I will continue to do that," Robak said.

Nelson echoed Robak's certainty that she would serve the people of Nebraska well, regardless of her husband's positions.

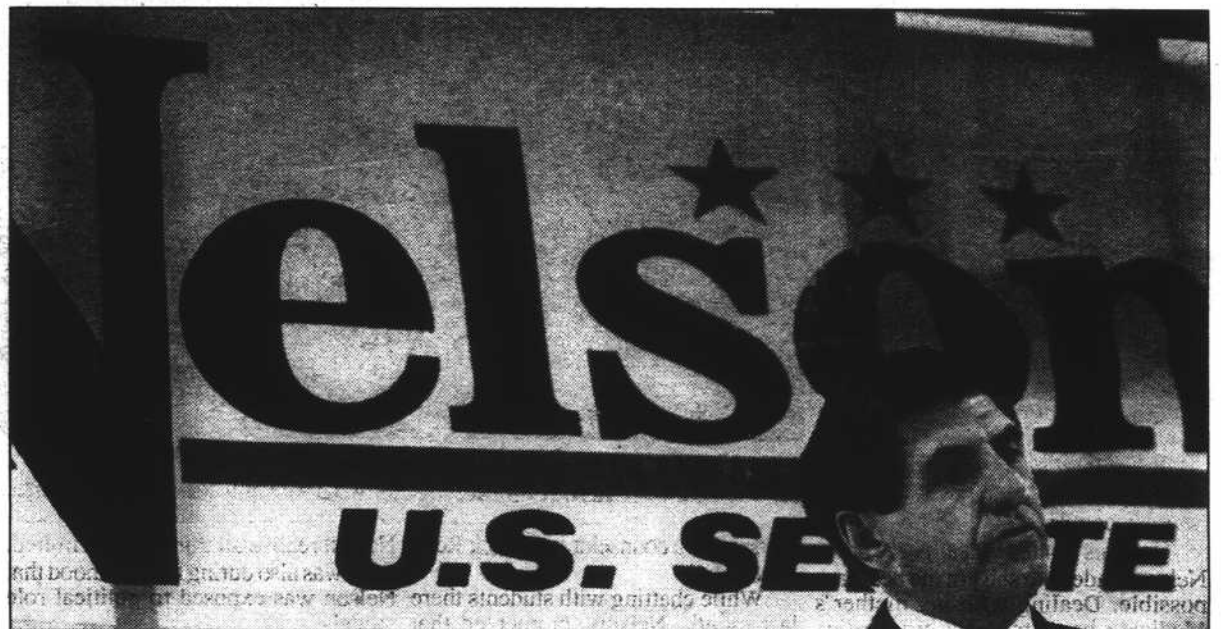
But Sigerson said if Nelson wins the election, Robak and her husband should make a difficult decision. One should step down to keep "a line of propriety" in the Nebraska State Capitol, he said.

And that could be a lot to ask from the two longtime Nebraskans.

Robak taught elementary school for four years in Nebraska after earning her bachelor's degree from UNL.

Robak and her husband both earned law degrees from UNL, Robak graduating with highest honors in 1985.

Should she become governor, Robak said she was unsure if she would seek reelection in 1998.



GOV. BEN NELSON speaks to seniors at the Underwood Towers in Omaha last week. Nelson was there touting his plan to protect social security and Medicare.

MATTHEW WAITE/DN



FILE PHOTO

"I grew up in the shadow of George Norris."

BEN NELSON

Governor remembers bipartisan hero

From The Associated Press

Democratic Gov. Ben Nelson didn't have to search far for a hero as a young boy in the western Nebraska town of McCook.

As a young boy, Nelson's Republican father took him on Memorial Day visits to George W. Norris' grave.

Norris has been the perfect role model for Nelson. Like the governor, Norris forged a career garnering support across party lines.

"He was so bipartisan that President (Franklin) Roosevelt came out to campaign for him," Nelson said.

Nelson has been a lifelong Democrat, except for his first voting experience in 1964. He registered as a Republican to vote against Barry Goldwater in the primary.

The father of Nebraska's nonpartisan one-house Legislature, Norris was the first independent elected in the U.S. Senate in 1936.

The progressive agenda that Norris supported led to the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Rural Electrification Administration. The programs so rankled Republican Party leaders that Norris left the GOP.

Norris' home in McCook is now a museum run by the Nebraska State Historical Society.