

Gov. Nelson plans visit to Argentina

■ The Buenos Aires trip will promote Nebraska products in the country.

By TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Gov. Ben Nelson will be watching the Legislature from afar next week as he leads a group of state officials and business professionals to Buenos Aires.

Nelson announced Wednesday plans for his second trip to the Argentine capital to promote Nebraska products in the country.

He will be accompanied by Larry Sitzman, director of the Department of Agriculture; Maxine Moul, director of the Department of Economic Development; and eight Nebraska business professionals.

"The purpose of the trade mission is to open doors for Nebraska businesses," Nelson said.

He said his administration would help strengthen current ties by meeting face-to-face with ministers of trade and finance.

According to a University of Massachusetts study, Nelson said, exports of Nebraska products to Argentina quadrupled from 1995 to 1996.

Nelson said Nebraska was "ahead of the game" and would continue to lead the nation in promoting new trade opportunities abroad.

"If we continue to maintain our efforts in the right direction, (other states) will have to play catch-up," Nelson said.

Nelson will leave Wednesday and will be joined by Sitzman, who will have completed a similar trip to Guadalajara, Mexico.

Nelson said he chose not to travel to Mexico because he wanted to keep an eye on the Legislature, but he said he was not surprised by current, heated discussion of economic development and tax reduction on the floor.

The legislative process was working well, he said, and he is not worried about what will happen while he is gone.

"I've proven that you can be out of the country during a snow storm and still be involved," Nelson said. "I'm in the position to know who's been naughty and who's been nice."

Investigation shows meter improvement

METERS from page 1

Also this year, three of the meters, which are valued at \$300, are missing, and one had the glass dome on top completely broken.

On the positive side, most of the extreme time and money discrepancies found last year, such as meters that registered only 10 minutes for a quarter, have been eliminated.

The problems found along R Street are not unique, Brage said.

"You could find this anywhere in the city," Brage said.

Some of the meter accuracy problems result from the mechanical operation of the devices.

The timing is regulated by a spring timer with gears much like an analog wristwatch, Brage said. When a coin is deposited and the dial is turned, it winds the spring.

Electronic meters, like those the university uses, eliminate some of the accuracy concerns, but they are costly to install, Brage said.

"We'd like to switch to electronic meters, but the city is tight on money and it is not a priority," Brage said.

So motorists will have to continue to deal with mechanical meters.

And with 2,000 parking meters and only one repairman, the city is forced to rely on reports of broken meters from citizens.

It is inevitable that meters will have problems, Brage said, but engineers can't act unless they know there is a problem.

Broken meters are reported to the Violations Bureau, which receives five to 10 complaints a day, supervisor Pat Waegli said.

The complaints are then forwarded to the city's serviceman the next day, and a week later the bureau receives a report on the condition of the meter, Waegli said.

If the meter was found to be broken when the serviceman evaluated it, Waegli said, the \$5 parking ticket would be dismissed.

But many of the meters are broken because of tampering, Lincoln Police Capt. Joy Citta said.

The city serviceman finds bent coins, plugs and even coins filed down to fit into the wrong slot jamming the city's meters, Brage said. Sometimes the meters are just full.

"We have to recognize that some of our citizens are not completely honest," Brage said.

But working or not, the police department's Public Service Officers will be out enforcing the meters' rulings.

In January, PSOs wrote 5,012 citations for \$35,046 in fines. During the month of February, 6,263 tickets were written for \$39,680 in fines.

Despite the money brought in through fines and meter money, parking meters are not installed as a revenue source, Brage said.

Meters are used to manage the limited number of parking spaces downtown, Brage said.

"Meters are necessary to free up spaces for customers," Brage said.

And with so many meters, one repairman and other uncontrollable variables, Brage believes the meters remain a good deal.

"You're still getting a good buy for your quarter."

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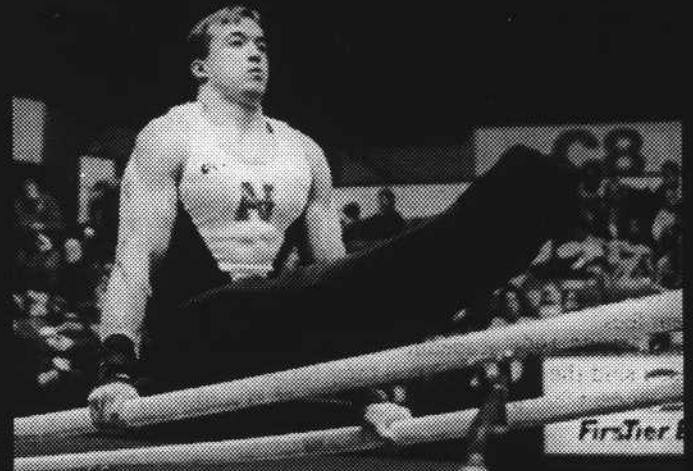
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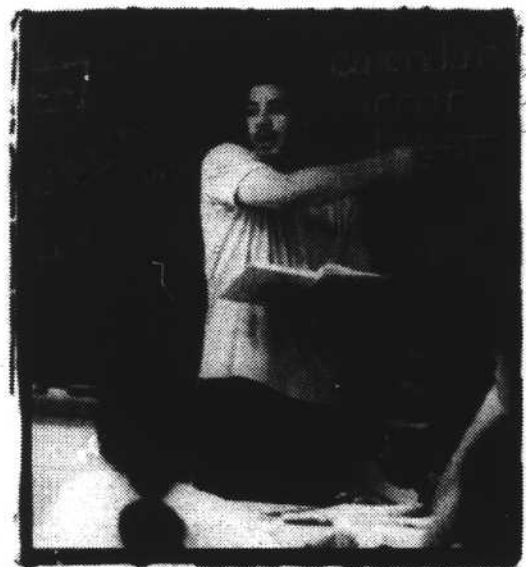
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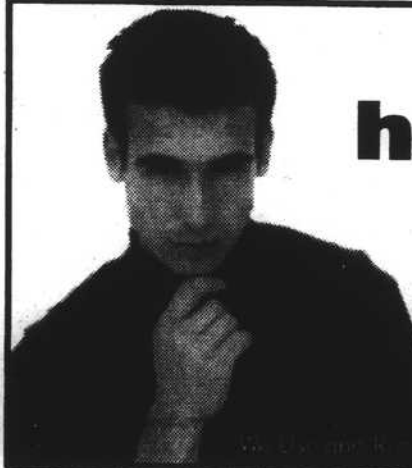
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