

STATE SENATE

Candidates focus on 413, health care, school costs

DISTRICT 26

Marian Price

If elected to Nebraska's Legislature, Marian Price said, she would protect funding for public schools.

She has been a member of the Lincoln School Board for 14 years and said her political experience makes her a good candidate.

"That is why I am so much different than my opponent," she said.

Price said she is eager to bring her ideas to the Legislature on topics such as assisted living and aid for senior citizens, protecting the water supply and fixing

the farm crisis.

Price also is an opponent of Initiative 413. "To put (413) in the Constitution is wrong," she said. "A statutory law would be much more acceptable."

If 413 passes, Price said, it would spark a huge litigation process.

"Millions of dollars will be spent on attorney fees."

Price is a registered Republican, but said she is known as a person who has great friends on both sides of political parties. She also said she is active in her community. Price prides herself on being an easy person to talk to.

"I'm visible, and I'm accessible. I return every (phone) call. When I go to the door, people know who I am."

Ed Schneider

Ed Schneider is looking for ways to improve health care.

Schneider is a physician and has been with the State Department of Health since 1987.

The main problem, Schneider said, is a scarcity of physicians in the northeast Lincoln area.

"We need to have an incentive for physicians," he said.

One answer, he said, would be to pay physicians a premium for having a practice in northeast Lincoln.

Schneider also wants more emphasis on vocational training for prisoners. It's important for inmates to

acquire some type of skill while they are incarcerated, he said.

"Otherwise, they'll be the same person when they come out."

Schneider said it is important for the state "to control spending and to ensure good quality education." He said it was also important to ensure quality social services.

Schneider said he is a strong candidate for the race because of his experience in state government, which includes his work as consultant for Department of Social Services since 1983 and his work with the Department of Finance and Support.

Price and Schneider are competing for the seat vacated by former Sen. Don Wesely, who retired after last year's session to run for mayor of Lincoln.

DISTRICT 46

Dave Landis

Sen. Dave Landis, the incumbent, has 20 years of experience in the Legislature. If re-elected, he said, he plans to address issues such as tuition costs and faculty salaries.

He supports the university, he said, because he is a 1970 graduate and alumnus of the Law



Landis

School, where he teaches a law class.

Because of his loyalty to his alma mater, Landis said he sees students on a regular basis and spends a lot of time on campus. He said he is in tune with students and is responsive to them.

Landis is chairman of the Legislature's Banking, Commerce and Insurance Committee and a member of Revenue Committee. He said his strongest asset as a candidate is his current position in the Legislature.

"I've passed over 200 bills. I know how to get things done," he said.

Landis said he also has the ability to mediate by bringing two parties together and helping them reach an agreement. He said he has done this within the Legislature and outside the Legislature with state agencies.

Edward Price

If elected to Nebraska's Legislature, the Rev. Edward Price looks to fix the "moral crisis" in today's society. Price believes a biblical foundation is the key to a "righteous and civil legislation."

"We need to have a pastoral view in the Legislature," said Price, who is a pastor at All Nations Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"We get caught up in legality sometimes."

Price said the state's biggest priority should be upholding the First Amendment. Initiative 413 is also important, he said.

"If 413 does not pass, we ought to have some statutory restrictions to regulate spending."

The main issue, though, is what he dubbed a moral crisis, he said.

Some examples of the problems people are facing today are divorce, domestic violence and poor education, he said.

"I'm the one candidate that's qualified and has the experience to challenge the moral crisis confronting our society," Price said.

Price is employed with the Lincoln Police Department as a public service officer. He also works for the State of Nebraska as a chaplain for the Youth Rehabilitation Center in Geneva.

DISTRICT 25

Ronald Raikes

Raikes, running as an incumbent in his district, said his main issue is Initiative 413, which he called "a terrible idea."

Raikes, who was appointed to the Legislature in 1997, watched during the spring session as the debate that led to Initiative 413 unfolded.

"I'm not against controlling spending. I just think it's a terrible idea."

Raikes said he questions 413's support, which was started by a coalition of business leaders.

"This is far from any grass-roots kind of effort."

Despite his opposition to 413, Raikes said spending and appropriation policies are important.

"We need to modify our procedures and address these questions," he said.

Raikes is a soil conservation contractor and a member of the Legislature's Revenue and Education committees. He said he is looking to bring to the Legislature the perspective that he is "someone who's actively engaged in making a living - a citizen just like everyone else making a living."

"I feel I need to try and offer some services in exchange for the opportunities I've been provided as a citizen."

Raikes' opponent, Dennis Zager, did not return phone calls to be interviewed.

BALLOT INITIATIVES

Many state groups attentive to final outcome of 413 vote

BY LINDSAY YOUNG
Senior staff writer

The mood will be tense in the Initiative 413 ring Tuesday night.

In one corner stands Omaha and Lincoln's pro-413 business leaders. In the other corner stand the motley opponents - university officials, farmers, educators, independent bankers, some business people and most students.

Tuesday night the polls will close, and the two groups will move to the middle of the ring and wait for the voters' decision. Both groups believe they can win the fight.

If 413 fails, opponents will cheer the death of an amendment they feared could slash funding to state education, police and fire departments and many government agencies.

If it's adopted, the proposed constitutional amendment would limit the amount of money the state could take in through taxes.

Any tax revenues above this limit would be returned to taxpayers through property, sales and income tax rate reductions.

The amendment would allow tax revenue to grow with the rate of inflation and population growth. It makes exceptions for temporary emergencies and new unfunded federal mandates, such as Medicaid and special education.

State and local governments would have the option of seeking voter approval to increase their budgets above mandated levels.

After five years, the Legislature could suspend 413 with a three-fourths majority vote and the governor's signature.

The fight for and against the initiative start-

ed in July when Citizens for Nebraska's Future, a pro-413 group, collected more than 184,000 signatures to get the initiative on the ballot.

Ever since, the group has fought for what its members call essential tax reform and relief. They and other 413 supporters insist the initiative would end unrestrained growth in state spending. And they say if the 3,450-word initiative isn't adopted, they won't leave the ring without scheduling another battle.

The need for tax relief won't go away, said Steve Wolf, Citizens for Nebraska's Future co-chairman.

"The issue that brought this amendment to the ballot still continues to be a sore spot for Nebraska taxpayers," Wolf said.

Craig Christiansen, campaign coordinator for the main anti-413 group, agreed the call for tax relief carried by the 413 campaign would stick with Nebraska voters.

"At some point we have to come to some workable solution - something that most of Nebraska can buy into and say is reasonable."

A constitutional amendment isn't workable, according to 413 opponents such as Christiansen's group, Nebraskans for the Good Life. Other reasons groups have given to knock out 413 include a possibility of higher property taxes and police and fire service cuts.

Opponents say local property taxes would have to increase to compensate for the lack of state aid local school districts would receive if 413 is adopted.

But Ed Jaksha, the board chairman of the

Please see INITIATIVE 413 on 8

Initiative 414's supporters, opponents profess same aim

BY JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

Both sides of the debate over reducing long-distance phone charges agree that fees should be reduced but disagree over how and when.

Conflicting promises abound in the campaign for and against Initiative 414, with both groups promising lower phone bills to voters who side with them.

The initiative would require the Nebraska Public Service Commission to reduce the fees local phone companies, such as Lincoln's Aliant Communications and Omaha's US West, charge to long distance providers, such as AT&T, for the use of their lines.

The new access charge would be based on the cost to local providers plus a reasonable profit as determined by the commission.

Long-distance providers would be required to reduce their average prices to match the rate reduction, but individual rates still could vary, detractors said.

"There is no language that guarantees these savings will be passed on," said Pam Hunzeker with Nebraskans to Protect Our Phone Service. "There is no enforcement of this."

The Committee to Vote Yes for Lower Phone Bills is backed by long distance provider AT&T. Nebraskans to Protect Our Phone Service is supported by local phone companies such as Aliant.

Local phone companies say they will have to impose other fees on customers if they lose the income from access fees.

But Todd Baustert, spokesman for the Committee to Vote Yes, called these fees a "cash cow for local providers."

"It only costs them two cents to provide the lines, and they're charging an average of 17 cents - overcharging Nebraskans \$65 million a

year," Baustert said.

"Nebraskans are being ripped off," he said. Yet Hunzeker said those access fees help keep monthly phone bills down.

Both sides acknowledge their arguments contradict each other, but they agree that these access fees need to be reduced. The anti-414 group says the Public Service Commission should be the ones to do it.

Last month, the commission announced its own plan to reduce access fees over two to four years with provisions to create a universal service fund.

All phone customers would pay a fee to support the fund, which then would be used to support rural phone companies.

Nebraska Public Service Commission accountant John Burvainis said the fund would help average phone costs across Nebraska.

"In theory, the benefit (of the initiative) would be seen by a person making calls," Burvainis said, "but local companies say they'll have to raise fees."

Baustert said Nebraska has the highest monthly phone bills and access fees in the region.

Hunzeker countered that all those states with lower rates have universal service funds.

"This needs to be dealt with by the experts - the public service commission," Hunzeker said.

Though the effects of reducing long-distance access fees are unclear, it will be up to voters to decide the timing and the scope of the change.

A vote for Initiative 414 will cut access fees now, but it is unclear how the savings will be given to all phone customers.

A vote against Initiative 414 will put the reduction of access fees in the hands of the Nebraska Public Service Commission, which plans to make the cuts gradually while implementing other programs.