

Election Day '98



BILL HOPPNER HUGS his wife, Nancy, Tuesday night during his concession speech at Lincoln Station, Seventh and P streets. Hoppner said he and his wife will be taking a much-needed vacation after his loss to Mike Johanns in the gubernatorial election. SANDY SUMMERS/DN

Hoppner: Campaign a success despite loss

By **TODD ANDERSON**
Senior staff writer

After a crowd of supporters greeted him with cheers, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bill Hoppner conceded the race to his Republican opponent, Lincoln Mayor Mike Johanns, in downtown Lincoln on Tuesday night.

Shortly before arriving in Lincoln from Omaha at 10 p.m., Hoppner said he called and congratulated Johanns.

Hoppner and his running mate, Pam Bataillon, entered the Lincoln Station Grand Room in the Haymarket to a band made up of student volunteers and a crowd of more than 200 party members.

While kissing and hugging friends and family, Hoppner made his way to the front of the large room.

"Eight years ago I came back from Omaha and had to say these same words," Hoppner said.

In 1990 Hoppner lost to current Gov. Ben Nelson in the Democratic primary by 41 votes.

Hoppner thanked supporters in Lincoln and Lancaster County, where he carried a majority of the vote against Johanns.

"Where they know me the best, I did the best," he said.

After hugging his wife, Nancy, and two daughters, Hoppner said Democrats had won the election as individuals, even though they had lost to their Republican opponents.

He said his campaign was successful

because of its focus on farmers, teachers and working people across Nebraska.

Hoppner said he had promised to work for families from the beginning and "let the chips fall where they may."

"Even though those chips didn't fall quite right in the gubernatorial race ... we stood for principle, we stood for a right cause, and we won," he said.

Hoppner said insufficient resources prevented him from delivering his message to the state.

He said the 3-to-1 difference in spending and Republican majority of voters in the state had an impact on the outcome of the race, though his message was still heard by thousands of Nebraskans, he said.

"I knew at the beginning of the campaign that we were going to be outspent," Hoppner said.

"But I knew we had a shot at this if we were organized and mobilized the people of Nebraska."

Despite his loss, he said the Nebraska Democratic Party will have something to build on in future elections.

"We created an organization this year that says you're going to have to listen to our voice because we're not going away," he said.

After losing the election, Hoppner said he and his wife would take a vacation during the coming weeks.

He did not say whether he would run again in four years as the Democratic candidate for governor.

"Tonight isn't the right time to be thinking about that."

Johanns takes governor's race

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In an interview, Hagel said Johanns had struck a chord with Nebraskans. He said Johanns would take his public service experience to the governor's mansion and be a governor who responds to the people and works well with the Legislature.

"I'm very proud of Mike Johanns," he said. "And I'm also proud of Bill Hoppner. They did a great job of keeping this above board."

Hagel said Johanns' victory added to a shift toward Republican control of Nebraska political offices.

In 1996, Democrats controlled both Senate seats and the governor's office. Following Hagel's election to the Senate in 1996 and Johanns' victory Tuesday, Republicans will control all three congressional seats and every statewide office except that of Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey.

"I think we've done a good job of developing an agenda, focusing and energizing the party and harnessing that energy to win elections," he said. "That began with my election in 1996 and continued tonight."

Maurstad said he looked forward to working with Johanns to pursue conservative reform of state government.

"It's affirming to know the state believes in Johanns and me," he said. "It makes me feel good that people believe we have the capacity to serve Nebraska citizens."

Johanns' supporters credited his victory to his three years on the campaign trail, where he built a statewide network of support for his message of fiscal conservatism.

"I think he won because of clean campaigning, sticking to the issues and saying the things Nebraskans wanted to hear," said Chuck Sigerson, chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party.

Beth Smith, executive director of the Nebraska Republican Party, said Johanns' candidacy had gained momentum from his victory in a bitterly contested three-



FRIENDS CONGRATULATE Stephanie Johanns after her husband's victory over Democrat candidate Bill Hoppner on Tuesday night at the Cornhusker Hotel. Stephanie Johanns was an active supporter in her husband's campaign. HEATHER GLENBOSKI/DN

way GOP primary election in May.

"I think he came out really strong from the primary," she said. "It was a tough primary, but it made Mike a stronger candidate."

Johanns said he would take a short break to savor his victory. When asked what he planned to do after that, Johanns grinned.

"Go to work," he said with a laugh.

Staff writer Ieva Augstums contributed to this report.