

tunity.

"We want to make it possible for you to stay in the state," Nelson said. "We're not going to put up a fence around the state, we're not going to chain you to the state, but what we ought to be doing is make sure we have sufficient incentives to keep young people in Nebraska, particularly those who are among the best and brightest of Nebraska."

Seducing the buck

Brain gain efforts dovetailed with Nelson's other economic development initiatives.

Nelson said he sought to both build existing Nebraska industry and attract new businesses from other states, with the goal of increasing the number of jobs in the state.

"Obviously you want as many new companies as you can to move to the state, but not at the expense of having companies already here expand," he said.

By visiting Asian and Latin American nations 12 times in the past eight years, Nelson has sought to build contacts between state business leaders and foreign deal-makers.

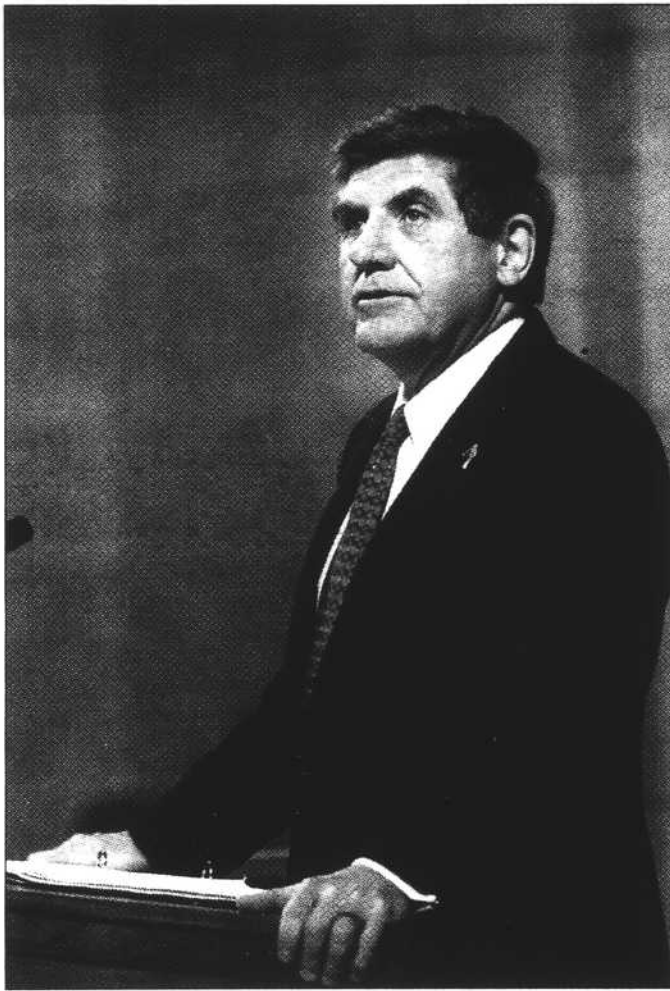
By tripling the amount of Nebraska exports — including items as diverse as agricultural products and high-tech manufactured goods — new jobs have been created and those jobs typically pay more than non-export jobs, Nelson said.

Maxine Moul, director of the Department of Economic Development, said the foreign trade trips have created new opportunities for trade and paved the way for future expansion of international trade.

"Certainly these trade missions have been high-profile, but because they're high-profile they certainly have raised the awareness of business of the importance of international trade," she said.

The other side of economic development under the Nelson administration has been trying to attract new businesses to Nebraska. Though Nebraska failed to lure giants such as computer manufacturer Micron Technology Inc. and Mercedes-Benz, Nelson said tax incentive programs for existing Nebraska businesses have encouraged business growth.

After bolstering incentives, Nebraska did succeed in wooing one major corporation last



MATT MILLER/DN
GOV. BEN NELSON speaks to the Legislature in his final State of the State address Jan. 12. In his speech, Nelson touted the state's flourishing economy but charged state senators to drive down taxes.

year, resulting in a Caterpillar manufacturing plant in Omaha.

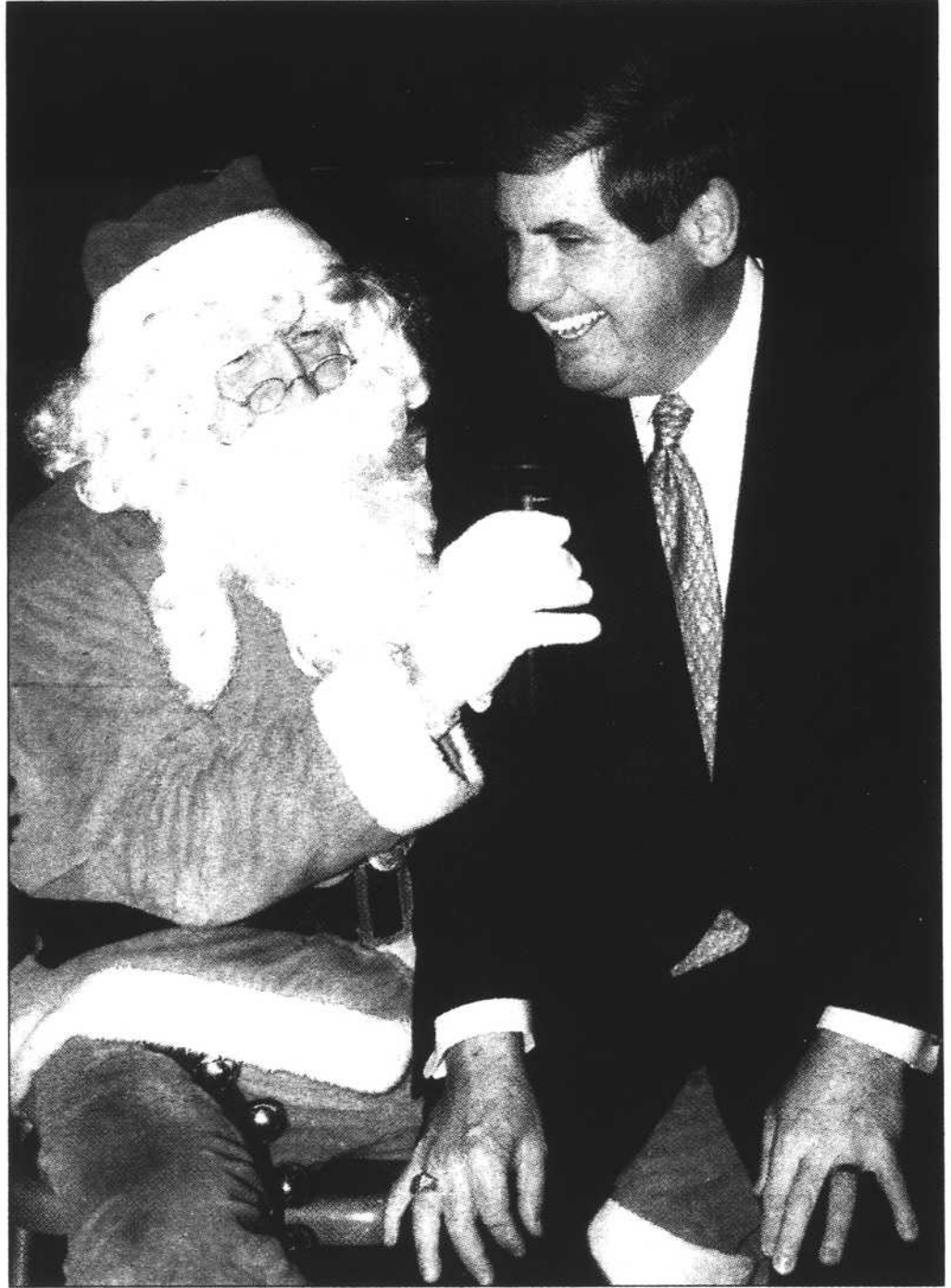
Life-or-death choices

When Nelson took office in 1991, the state had not executed a death row inmate since Charles Starkweather in 1959.

During Nelson's eight years as governor, three prisoners have gone to the electric chair, and a fourth execution is scheduled for early January.

As one of three members of the state's Pardons Board, Nelson has the power to stop a planned execution. He said that situation posed difficult moral conflicts.

Nelson said he was lobbied heavily by opponents of capital punishment, who said he should use his power to prevent what they said was an



MIKE WARREN/DN
NELSON SITS ON Santa Claus' lap and asks Santa to bring all Nebraskans a happy holiday season during Sunday night's farewell dinner.

unjust practice. But as governor, Nelson said he knew his responsibility was to uphold state law, regardless of his personal feelings.

"You're faced with the ultimate decision," he said. "There is some comfort in knowing that you have to follow the law. Now the disquieting side is that you know that there's a life involved, friends involved, family involved, victims involved; there is, in fact, the person — the condemned."

He who cared

Nebraska political observers say Nelson's success lies in his hard work, dedication and commitment to citizens' well-being.

Wesely said Nelson's consistent aggressiveness and down-to-earth character made him a leader comparable to former President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

"When I think of Gov. Nelson, I think solid," he said.

Landis said Nelson was a strong leader who had charisma.

"He's been a fine governor, and he will have a record second to none," he said. "He allows himself to be self-deprecating, and he was a good sport, which gave him a human side and an approachability that was unique."

Bob Sittig, a political science professor at UNL, said Nelson was similar to most post-World War II Nebraska governors in that his primary role was as a caretaker more than an innovator.

Nelson's successful implementation of a state lottery to help fund education and his supervision of the reorganization of the state's health and human services system were significant, he said.

For the most part, however, Nelson will be remembered more for his day-to-day management of state government than for reinventing it, Sittig said.

"I really think (Robak) enjoyed being the lieutenant governor, and I think it's because she cares," he said.

"Kim loved what she did and had a perspective of where it all fit in."

Robak ready for new duties

■ The lieutenant governor plans to spend time with her family and begin a job with the University of Nebraska.

BY TODD ANDERSON
Senior staff writer

At a recent dinner and dance tribute for Gov. Ben Nelson, Lt. Gov. Kim Robak and her oldest daughter attempted to make their way to the dance floor.

Stopped several times by a deluge of people ready to shake hands with the state's No. 2 leader, it took the mother-daughter team some time to find a moment alone.

After finally arriving on the floor in front of the band, frustrated 10-year-old Katherine was relieved she finally had Robak all to herself.

"Mom, you've been lieutenant governor long enough," she said. "It's time for you to be Mom."

That type of advice not only guides Robak as she leaves office in January, but also stayed with her before the 1998 gubernatorial election primary.

Though some Nebraska Democrats counted on Robak to be the top candidate for governor in the November 1998 election, Robak stepped back to let someone else fill those shoes.

"I just was not willing to give up that time with my kids," Robak said.

Robak, a native of Columbus and daughter of state Sen. Jennie Robak, started out as Gov. Nelson's legal counsel and chief of staff following his election in 1991.

In 1993 she moved to the office of lieutenant governor to replace Maxine Moul, who became the director of the Department of Economic Development.

"I decided it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up," Robak said.

In 1994, Robak was elected along with Nelson in a landslide victory.

The duties of the lieutenant governor are not numerous: preside over the Legislature, act as governor when the governor is absent or the position is vacant and perform duties designated by the governor.

Speaker of the Legislature Doug Kristensen said Robak demonstrated patience and level-headedness while watching over the legislative process.

"She knew the rules very well and had a blind-justice approach," Kristensen said.

"She was very patient, and she always maintained a cool head no matter how hot the battle."

However, Kristensen said professionalism was not what made her possibly the most well-known lieutenant governor, but rather her help in solving statewide and national problems.

Robak said it was really Nelson's assignments that gave her an active role in the legislative process and in the state.

Since 1992, Robak has worked with teams that developed improve-

ment plans for health care and private insurance, and she was a member of a commission focused on developing and integrating information technology in the state.

But Robak said her favorite part of the job has been traveling across the state and meeting people.

The low point of her involvement with the past administration came during Nelson's 1996 bid for a U.S. Senate seat.

Nelson opponents pointed out that if Nelson were sent to Washington, Nebraska would remain with Robak as governor for two years.

"I became an issue," Robak said. "And it was a difficult position to be in because it wasn't my race."

"I didn't want to defend myself and risk the Senate race for (Nelson)," she said.

Robak said she does not regret passing up a run for governor in 1998 and is not certain about running in future elections.

She said she is excited to join the University of Nebraska central administration in January as vice president for external affairs and corporate secretary to the NU Board of Regents.

Kristensen said the Legislature will remember Robak as a person who viewed her position as more than just a job.

"I really think (Robak) enjoyed being the lieutenant governor, and I think it's because she cares," he said.

"Kim loved what she did and had a perspective of where it all fit in."