

# Johanns vows to focus on campaign themes

By BRIAN CARLSON  
Staff writer

Mike Johanns took the oath of office Thursday as Nebraska's 38th governor, pledging to carry his victorious campaign themes into his new office.

Johanns was sworn in by Nebraska Supreme Court Justice John Hendry in the legislative chamber Thursday afternoon. He then delivered an inaugural address focusing on familiar themes from his campaign: reduced government spending, lower taxes, stronger law enforcement and economic development.

Johanns, a Republican and former mayor of Lincoln, offered few specific proposals. Those are expected to be unveiled later this month, with his State of the State address tentatively set for Jan. 27.

"It starts with smaller government," he said. "From coffee shops to letters to the editor to the voting booths, Nebraskans are sending a message: Do everything you can to reduce the tax burden while continuing to provide the services Nebraskans need and expect at a level of service they deserve."

Elected leaders must "review, analyze, reconfigure, prioritize and downsize our government," in order to provide tax relief, he said.

"If we will say no to rapid spending growth, we can say yes to tax relief," he said.

Despite the defeat last November of Initiative 413, which would have limited the growth of government spending and taxation, Nebraskans clearly want their tax burden reduced, Johanns said.

He complimented the Legislature on its efforts to reduce property taxes, but he said more must be done. He said he would submit a property tax relief plan to the Legislature later this month.

"I ask you to debate it, tear it apart, put it back together and hopefully pass it," he said.

Calling public safety "the highest purpose of government," Johanns called on the state to ensure that law enforce-

ment is adequately funded and that criminals receive "swift and sure justice." As a candidate, Johanns championed increased funding for the State Patrol.

In particular, he said, the state must fight the burgeoning methamphetamine traffic in Nebraska.

Johanns made a general call for economic development, stressing educational investment, work force development, affordable health care and investment in the state's transportation and technology infrastructure.

The governor also promised to provide leadership in the midst of the state's agricultural woes, manifested most recently by a plunge in pork prices.

"The awful prices for corn, beans, wheat, beef and pork have been an economic nightmare to many in our state's most important industry," he said.

"You have my personal commitment that I will do all I can to lead our state through these trying times."

Johanns said he would begin his term by meeting individually with each member of the Legislature.

"I am eager to work with all 49 of you, and while we may not always agree on every issue — in fact, I guarantee you we won't — when we disagree, it will be with civility, fairness and respect," he said.

Speaker of the Legislature Doug Kristensen of Minden said Johanns delivered a "very appropriate" inaugural address consistent with his campaign message.

He said he agreed with many of Johanns' goals and was eager to hear more specific proposals.

"You could see he was making the transition between being a candidate and using a candidate's rhetoric and being a governor and carrying out policy," he said. "I expect that in his State of the State address, he will put meat on that."

Sen. Roger Wehrbein of Plattsmouth, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, said the speech echoed Nebraska citizens' calls for lower government spending and tax

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Gov. MIKE JOHANNS

relief.

"I think he's right on key with what Nebraskans are expecting from us," he said. "I think he laid his vision out for where his focuses are to be very well."

Revenue Committee Chairman Sen. Bob Wickersham of Harrison said he appreciated Johanns' praise for the Legislature's efforts to cut property taxes, as well as his call for further steps in that regard. Most important, he said, is that the Legislature and Johanns work together to provide property tax relief while preserving essential government services for citizens.

Sen. Kermit Brashear of Omaha, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, said Johanns gave a good speech with an appropriate emphasis on the economy. He also said he expected Johanns would contribute important ideas for improving law enforcement.

Also sworn in Thursday were the following state officials: Attorney General Don Stenberg, State Auditor Kate Witek, State Treasurer Dave Heineman, Secretary of State Scott Moore and Lieutenant Governor David Maurstad, all Republicans. Supreme Court Justices William M. Connolly, John M. Gerrard and John F. Wright also were sworn in.

Daily Nebraskan writers Jessica Fargen and Shane Anthony contributed to this report.

# Dunagan charged with manslaughter

■ The UNL freshman and Regents Scholar pleaded no contest to the charges, and he may be able to avoid jail time.

By JOSH FUNK  
Senior staff writer

In mid-December, prosecutors and defense attorneys reached an agreement that may keep a UNL freshman out of jail for killing his father.

Matthew Dunagan, 18, pleaded no contest to charges of manslaughter and the use of a weapon to commit a felony for the Sept. 30, 1997, shooting of his father, John Dunagan.

Previously Dunagan was charged with first-degree murder and the use of a weapon to commit a felony.

Prosecutors are preparing a presentence investigation detailing the circumstances of the shooting that the judge will consider before sentencing Dunagan on Feb. 18.

Manslaughter carries a penalty of one to 20 years in prison and/or a \$25,000 fine, but Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey has said this case calls for compassion.

Lacey would not say whether his office would recommend prison time.

"We thought Mr. Dunagan's actions — while not legally justifiable — were something a jury would empathize with," Lacey said.

Michael Hansen, one of Dunagan's lawyers, said their goal was to keep Matthew out of jail.

Lacey said prosecutors reviewed a detailed psychiatric evaluation of Dunagan when considering a plea agreement.

The evaluation showed a systematic pattern of abuse over Dunagan's life, Lacey said, includ-

ing physical brutality to his mother and emotional abuse to the whole family.

"One thing that a prosecutor has to do is see that justice is done," Lacey said. "(Dunagan) must be punished, but the facts of the case did not warrant first- or second-degree murder."

On Sept. 30, 1997, police officers were called for a shooting in the early morning hours to the Dunagan home in southwest Lincoln where Matthew and his parents, John and Kay, lived.

Kay Dunagan called 911 at 12:40 a.m., and reported that "... my husband is an alcoholic, he was drunk, he was going to kill me and my son defended me."

Police reports filed in Lancaster County court detail the events of that night leading up to the shooting:

Kay and John Dunagan had been arguing earlier that evening, which reportedly was common when John drank.

During the argument Matthew Dunagan went to his room and loaded a 12-gauge shotgun in case the argument got physical.

About two hours later, after the argument ended, John Dunagan was talking with Matthew downstairs.

John Dunagan became upset when Matthew suggested the possibility of divorce, and said "he ought to blow the bitch's head off."

Then Matthew Dunagan went upstairs to his room, got the shotgun and returned to the living room, where he shot his father three times as he lay on the couch.


Matthew Dunagan was jailed for the shooting until his mother bailed him out a few days later.

Dunagan completed his senior year of high school at Lincoln Pius X with a private tutor. He graduated with a 4.0 GPA.

This fall Dunagan, a Regents Scholar, took 12 hours of classes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and he is registered for 16 hours in the spring.

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