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# Legislature plans focus on school aid, tax cuts

### SPENDING from page 1

Omaha Sen. Deb Suttle wants to indefinitely continue a sales-tax cut, which set the sales tax at 4.5 percent last session. The rate expires in July, and unless Suttle's bill (LB125) passes, the tax will return to 5 percent.

Suttle said her constituents have made it clear to her that they want to keep the sales-tax cut. She said the bill has little chance of passing because senators want the money in the state's coffers.

Revenue that would be lost from a continued sales tax cut could be recouped by efficient budgeting and spending, Suttle said.

Legislators may need to do more than prioritize to figure out what to do about the \$22 million local school districts were overpaid last year and may have to re-pay out of 1999-2000 aid.

Hastings Sen. Ardyce Bohlke, chairwoman of the Education Committee, said LB149 would aim to prevent miscalculations of state school aid in the future.

Bohlke on Thursday introduced LB149, which would recalculate state aid to schools and push back the date schools find out how much, aid they are receiving. Schools are now notified Dec. 1, and the bill would move the date to Feb. 1.

The Legislature could then use real dollar figures instead of estimates to calculate how much to appropriate.

(LB149) would give stability and predictability to the formula," Bohlke said.

The bill will need an emergency clause, which requires 33 votes, to pass in time to allow the date to be changed.

Another question surrounding school aid is what to do when property tax levies for schools drop from \$1.10 per \$100 of assessed value to \$1 in the 2001-02 school year, Bohlke said. About \$84 million will be lost when the levies drop-a result of 2-year-old legislation that placed limits on the amount of property taxes that could be levied.

Plattsmouth Sen. Roger Wehrbein said other areas of concern this session may include lowering to 0.08 from 0.10 the legal limit of blood alcohol content for drunken driving offenses, phone deregulation and environmental issues surrounding the growing number of large hog confinement facilities.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



Half of congress is made up of lawyers.

## Funds divide lawmakers, NU officials

**BUDGET** from page 1

#### By LEVA AUGSTUMS Senior staff writer.

With the Legislature's increased focus on tight-fisted spending, university officials are working to convince lawmakers their budget requests are justified.

But heightened concern over state spending may stop the university from receiving better technology and higher faculty salaries; officials are worried.

"I sense a strong desire to help the university," said University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor James Moeser. "We are a favored institution in the state, but we are living in an era of reduced flexibility. It's not going to be easy."

Last July, the NU Board of Regents approved the NU 1999-2001 biennial budget request that asked for a 6.8 percent first-year increase for the 1998-99 budget of about \$355.9 million.

In February, Gov. Mike Johanns will present his budget to the Legislature for the next two years.

Ron Withem, NU associate vice president for external affairs and director of government relations, said the university will have to take into consideration Johanns' recommendation and the Legislature's thoughts, then act on its requests.

"It's going to be a formidable challenge," Withem said. "There is always more needs than dollars to go around."

The university's legislative agenda includes increasing faculty and staff members' salaries, funding for technology and general inflation costs.

Moeser said faculty and staff members' salaries are currently 5 to 6 percent below the midpoint of UNL's peer institutions.

"We are slipping, and our peers are moving away from us," Moeser said. 'We need and want to keep our faculty. We need to catch up." But Regent Drew Miller of

Papillion disagreed.

"I believe in merit pay, not these ideas of averages," Miller said. "We

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