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Robak returns to education

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Robak helped create and lead the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, which became a state agency in 1998.

Because of her previous duties, Smith said Robak will carry out duties in the university information systems.

"I am by no means a techno whiz," Robak said. "My eyes in fact glaze over when I hear about megahertz and gigabytes."

But Smith disagreed. "She is a bright, outstanding woman," Smith said. "Her knowledge and experience will be an added contribution to this university."

Graduating from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Teachers College in 1977, Robak, a Columbus native, decided to become a speech and drama teacher at Irving Middle School.

As an undergraduate, Robak pursued speech and theater. Robak said she has always had a dream to become an actress.

"I really didn't know what I wanted to do at the time," Robak said. "However, I still do regret not going to New York and seeking an acting career."

In 1982, Robak decided to go back to school. Past experiences, including working on Sen. Bob Kerrey's gubernatorial campaign, influenced her decision to seek a law degree, she said.

Robak graduated from the NU

College of Law in 1985.

Following Gov. Ben Nelson's 1991 election, Robak launched her political career as Nelson's legal counsel and then his chief of staff.

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

In 1994, Robak was elected with Nelson, and she maintained her state office until December 1998.

"Now I am at the university, and I want to make a difference," Robak said.

Some of Robak's short-term goals include staying on top of the university's agenda and setting priorities for the NU system.

In the long term, Robak wants the state to recognize and understand how important the University of Nebraska is.

"I'm a big football fan, but I want there to be as much love for the institution as there is for the institution's football team," she said. "This is the state's institution."

Sen. Jennie Robak of Columbus said her daughter, Kim, has always voiced her opinions and provided motivation to create positive change.

"I remember in third grade how Kim argued with a neighbor boy why Barry Goldwater should not be president," Jennie Robak said. "She voiced her opinion then, and she continues to do so today."

Jennie Robak, who has been a sen-

ator for 11 years, said she missed her daughter and the times they would spend together at the capitol.

"I keep thinking I still can walk down the hall to her office and talk to her," Jennie Robak said. "Instead, I have to keep reminding myself I must pick up the phone."

Kim Robak said her decision to accept Smith's offer was influenced by her family and children.

"I wanted to maintain a position that would still be able to impact policy and spend time with my family," she said. "Here I can do that."

As vice president for external affairs, Robak's responsibilities include strengthening relationships with external constituents, such as chambers of commerce and the Legislature.

She is also one of Smith's two closest advisers. She will work with Smith and other senior administrators to develop programs, policies and procedures.

As corporation secretary, she will be the principal staff liaison to the NU Board of Regents.

Smith said one of Robak's great abilities is to take a big-picture view and turn it into reality.

"She wants to maintain the quality of this institution, as well as improve it," Smith said. "She is ready to make things happen."

Jennie Robak agreed.

"She is just touching the tip of an iceberg," she said. "We have not heard the end of Kim Robak."

Johanns' first speech reveals budget plans

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dent on a sustained healthy economy in Nebraska.

The plan would put excess state revenue and savings from government efficiency in a trust fund, which could accumulate almost \$400 million over the next three years.

Under the plan, property taxpayers would receive a check for about 11 percent of their property taxes by the beginning of 2001.

Speaker Doug Kristensen of Minden said although Johanns' plan is a switch from the Legislature's focus on reducing property tax levy limits to achieve property tax relief, senators should not discount it.

"I think it's a legitimate plan that will receive good attention," Kristensen said. "I don't think anyone should underestimate the difficulty of a change of course that we've been going on."

Johanns did not recommend dropping the current property tax levy limit of \$1.10 per \$100 assessed valuation to \$1, which the Legislature planned several years ago.

But Hastings Sen. Ardyce Bohlke said if the economy took a downturn, less money from state revenue would mean a smaller rebate portion for taxpayers.

That scenario, coupled with Johanns' proposal to keep the property tax levy limit at \$1.10, will offer little relief, said Bohlke, who is chairwoman of the Education Committee.

Harrison Sen. Bob Wickersham said he was disappointed that Johanns decided to keep the limit at \$1.10 and worried about maintaining stability in property tax relief.

"His proposal is substituting uncertainty for certainty already on the books," Wickersham said.

The University of Nebraska and state colleges would receive \$42.7 million under Johanns' budget.

The budget for the University of Nebraska included money for salaries, health insurance and operations and maintenance.

Although Wehrbein had not analyzed the proposed budget for NU, he said he was happy that there was an increase for the basics.

"At this point, at least it's provided some increase," he said. "It was not nothing."

Johanns' budget did not include the \$22 million in additional state aid to schools proposed in Bohlke's LB149. Johanns said LB149 may cause more instability to the state's formula for calculation of aid to schools.

Johanns said a group of school officials recently told him they favored predictability in the formula to calculate state aid to schools over increased state aid.

"We must agree to improve stability and move away from annual changes to the mechanics of the formula which serve to make the system even less predictable," he said. "I believe there is a better way to fund property tax relief than increasing state aid to local school districts."

"Attempting to provide property tax relief through state aid to local governments is simply not an effective method of providing property tax relief."

But Bohlke said LB149 was a steady solution because it would provide the schools with the \$22 million they are expecting as well as set out a more accurate formula for figuring state aid.

"The one thing 149 does is really bring stability and predictability," Bohlke said.

Bohlke and Johanns plan to discuss some possible solutions to funding and calculation of state aid to schools.

Other proposals in the budget included:

- Funds of \$280 million next year and \$294 million the following year for state highway and interstate construction projects.

- Funds of \$8.5 million for Platte River and Republican River water rights litigation with surrounding states.

- A \$1,000-per-year tax credit for each child a family adopts until that child turns 6 years old.



KFC employee robbed

A masked man robbed a KFC employee at gunpoint as he was closing the restaurant Tuesday night.

Just before 11 p.m., the 17-year-old employee was approached as he was closing the restaurant at 2100 N. 48th St., Lincoln Police Sgt. Ann Heermann said.

The employee's girlfriend was waiting for him in the parking lot, and the robber was standing near her car.

After locking the door, the employee was approached by the robber, who displayed a handgun and demanded the bank bag.

The robber fled with an undisclosed amount of cash and checks. He was wearing a black ski mask, a black hooded sweatshirt and black pants.

He was described as a black man, 5 feet 4 inches tall, weighing 135 pounds.

Teens paintball garages

Two teen-agers were caught after firing paintballs at their neighbors' garages Tuesday afternoon.

One of the neighbors, who lives on the 4000 block of Locust Street, heard something hit his house around 3:30 p.m., and went outside to find yellow paint on his garage, Heermann said.

Police tracked down the teens, ages 16 and 17, with a description of the car they had been driving.

The teens were cited for vandalism and discharging a weapon within the city limits. Police said there are nine similar cases in the neighborhood that the teens may be charged for.

Family center vandalized

Someone broke into the Carol Yoakum Family Center on Tuesday evening by smashing a glass door.

An employee entering the backdoor of the 4621 N.W. 48th St. facility found the broken glass door, Heermann said.

Between 6 p.m. and 9:45 p.m. someone threw a rock through the door, and took a VCR and a stereo from inside, a \$300 loss. The damage was estimated at \$370.

Compiled by senior staff writer Josh Funk