

Legislature

Appropriations releases 2-year budget proposal

Committee overshoots Gov. Johanns' mark

BY JESSICA FARGEN
Senior staff writer

State senators will be looking at some heavy reading this weekend — not a new novel or some recent study, but a 213-page document proposing how the state should spend \$4.7 billion over the next two years.

The Appropriations Committee Thursday let loose its budget, which called for more spending than Gov. Mike Johanns had proposed.

Starting Tuesday, senators will have 18 days to sort through Johanns' and the committee's spending recommendations.

For the University of Nebraska, the committee recommended spending about \$23 million less than the university's request. NU asked for \$783 million for the next two years. The committee recommended \$760 million and Johanns has proposed \$751 million.

Chris Peterson, Johanns' press secretary, said it was too early to tell what items in the committee's NU allocation the governor would veto.

The university's budget, as proposed by the committee, is \$372 million the first year — a 4.6 percent increase. The committee recommended a 4.2 percent increase for the following year.

A lot of that increase would be spent to bring the university's faculty salaries in line with its peer institutions.

Keeping and recruiting quality professors has been one of the university's budget priorities this year.

NU is asking for \$20 million to bring faculty salaries up to the midpoint of its peers. The university also requested an additional \$19 million in salary increases for administrators and other university employees.

"In a number of areas, the committee is recommending spending more (at NU) than what the governor recommended," Peterson said. "Each of those differences will be scrutinized over the next several weeks."

Funds for the university, along with the state college system, make up about 17 percent of the state's general fund, which includes taxes such as income tax and sales tax.

Peterson said the governor's main concern with the overall committee budget was the reduced potential for property-tax relief.

"Clearly they are proposing to spend more than the governor, and they don't leave as much room for tax relief as the governor had hoped," Peterson said.

Although the budget calls for more spending than Johanns had proposed, Peterson said this budget was tighter than past budgets.

Johanns wants to limit state spending to about a 3.2 percent increase for the next two years, while the committee set their spending increase at 3.4 percent.

"The governor recognizes that there is more spending restraint in this budget than there has been in recent budgets," Peterson said.

In total, Peterson said, every spending item would be looked at carefully by the governor and the Legislature.

"Everything in the budget, including those university funds, is going to be scrutinized."

"Clearly they are proposing to spend more than the governor, and they don't leave us much room for tax relief..."

CHRIS PETERSON
Johanns' press secretary

Earth Day participants run for cover from rain

BY VERONICA DAEHN
Staff writer

A celebration designed to promote awareness of, interest in and action for the environment could have been washed up Thursday because of the rainy weather.

But organizers made sure that even though the festivities were moved indoors, students still had the chance to honor their Mother Earth.

A flurry of brochures, tie-dyed T-shirts, posters and outdoor climbing equipment lined the north side of the Nebraska Union for UNL's eighth annual Earth Day celebration.

Originally scheduled for outside on the greenspace in front of the union, the celebration was forced inside, but Graham Johnson, Environmental Resource Center volunteer, said it wasn't a problem.

"It's allowed people to get together and talk more," he said.

People should gain an increased awareness of environmental issues at the event, Johnson said, and also find something that interests them among the 30 to 35 booths.

Interest encourages action, he said, and action is the most important step in helping the environment.

"We need to make the jump from the conceptual to the practical," Johnson said. "That's where change begins."

Paula Leslie, a UNL graduate student, said the main goal of her Campus Recreation Outdoor Adventures booth was to educate people on preserving the land around them.

"Earth Day is about preserving and awareness," Leslie said. "Most people haven't thought about how they impact the Earth."

Outdoor Adventures teaches people how to have as little impact on the environment as possible, she said.

Earth Day dates back to 1970, Johnson said, when books about energy crises and

"Earth Day is about preserving and awareness. Most people haven't thought about how they impact the Earth."

PAULA LESLIE
graduate student

population explosion were popular.

From there, the influence of the 1960s and 1970s migrated to Europe and was the foundation of the political Green Party that remains today.

It is more difficult to motivate Americans to concentrate on the environment, Johnson said, because the effects are not as immediate here.

The United States, particularly Nebraska, has ample land and little air pollution.

European countries are not as fortunate, so Europeans are more willing to concentrate on the environment, he said.

Promoting awareness and education in America is important, Johnson said, and Earth Day is a good way to get people together.

"People need an awareness that these things are going on in our community," he said. "Lincoln is not this isolated box."

Each booth concerned the environment and offered expertise on ways to improve it.

"It's a big jump between idea, action and implementation," Johnson said. "This is our contribution to trying to make people aware. It's going to be for the good of their health."

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