

# Daily Nebraskan

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## Modern Masters

The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange melds dance with teaching.  
A&E, PAGE 10



## A bigger man

At a heavier weight, Charles McTorry is coming into his own.  
SPORTS, PAGE 16



# Johanns pushes variety of crime bills

By Michelle Starr

Staff writer

Gov. Mike Johanns wants to beef up Nebraska's crime prevention methods with four legislative bills this session and two budget adjustments for the 2000-01 fiscal year.

"In this coming legislative session, we will propose a combination of changes to criminal law and enhanced resources to step up Nebraska's criminal justice effort," Johanns said.

Among the efforts listed include four legislative bills: switching the state's execution method from the electric chair to lethal injection, reforming the appeals process, changing the offi-

cer training program and revamping the officer carrier program.

The two funding adjustments include adding 12 new state troopers and updating the law enforcement officers' information computer systems.

The most controversial bills concern modifying Nebraska's death penalty to lethal injection and reforming post-conviction appeals.

Johanns has pushed for the bill to be debated this session because of a Florida case in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, said Phil Weitzl, Johanns' assistant press secretary.

The court could rule that electrocution, Florida's method of capital punishment, is cruel and unusual punishment, thereby unconstitutional, which Weitzl

said might affect Nebraska's method of capital punishment.

Johanns wants to avoid the time and money it would take to call special legislation to correct or clarify the death penalty if the court rules against Florida, Weitzl said.

Nelson Potter, co-chairman of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, disagrees with the rush for a change and thinks the bill could wait until next year's session.

Potter believes the court could allow Florida to keep using electrocution, but he said even if the court did not rule in favor of Florida, nobody on Nebraska's death row is close to an execution.

His opinion is based in light of Friday's Nebraska Supreme Court deci-

sion to re-sentence Randy Reeves. Reeves was most likely the next person to receive the death penalty, Potter said.

Potter was also concerned with Johanns' bill LB186, which would limit a convicted person's appeals to one within three years of conviction for all crimes.

The bill, introduced last session, would increase the chances of imposing the death penalty on an innocent person, Potter said.

Weitzl disagreed, saying though the convicts would be allowed only one appeal, they would have the chance to present their cases to the pardons board.

Potter said the governor's history of not granting pardon board hearings wouldn't give inmates the option.

"If that means the governor has changed his mind and would vote for a hearing, then that's good news," Potter said. "I'm surprised that the governor's office is saying that we should take the board of pardons more seriously."

With the current system of numerous appeals, Weitzl said, the prisoner usually exhausts almost all of his or her arguments.

Weitzl also said limiting appeals would limit the amount spent by taxpayers for the appeals process.

The governor also wants to cut money spent training officers with LB994 by changing the procedure for training and hiring law-enforcement

Please see **CRIME** on 7



Gov. Mike Johanns gives his State of the State address in the Norris Legislative Chamber of the Capitol on Wednesday morning.

Nikki Fox/DN

# Senators react to Johanns' speech

By Jill Zeman

Staff writer

Gov. Mike Johanns' State of the State address on Wednesday is receiving a mixed response from state senators.

Johanns spoke about crime, taxes, agriculture, the economy and children's rights.

He spoke briefly about education but did not mention his proposed budget adjustments concerning the University of Nebraska system.

According to the Johanns' initiatives and budget adjustments report, the NU Board of Regents requested \$8.5 million for employee health care costs, and the governor recommended giving \$4 million.

Omaha Sen. Deborah Suttle, vice chairwoman of the Education Committee, said Johanns' decision concerned her, but she could not comment further until the Appropriations Committee approves Johanns' recommendation.

## Speech focuses on economy, taxes

*"The health, safety and development of Nebraska's children is a high priority."*

Mike Johanns  
governor of Nebraska

By Jill Zeman

Staff writer

Gov. Mike Johanns focused on five main issues in a 25-minute State of the State address on Wednesday at the Capitol.

Johanns mentioned priorities such as lower taxes, less government, building Nebraska's economy, protecting families and the health, safety and success of Nebraska's children.

The governor referred to the priorities in a number of proposals made in his speech.

Johanns emphasized his commitment to lower taxes, saying that more

than \$105 million would be provided in tax relief over the next three years.

He stressed his priority of less government by recommending the merger of Natural Resources and Water Resources for a more efficient and responsive state government.

The merger would create a new agency, which would be called the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

Johanns said the overall economy of Nebraska was strong, but the rural areas of the state had been hit

Please see **SPEECH** on 7

Johanns' initiatives sparked "normal disagreements" that can be reconciled with the Legislature, said Plattsmouth Sen. Roger Wehrbein,

Appropriations Committee chairman. Wehrbein said the Appropriations Committee will decide on the final amount NU will receive in two to four

weeks, but Johanns' suggested amount "certainly is plausible."

Please see **REACTION** on 7

## ASUN Parties to stay on ballot

■ After debate, majority of senators decide to keep party affiliations on paper.

By Sara Salkeld

Staff writer

At Wednesday's meeting, ASUN voted 14-8 to keep candidates' party names on electoral ballots. One senator abstained.

Last semester, the electoral committee decided to keep the party names on the ballots by approving the election rules presented by the Electoral Commission. This semester, the issue was raised again.

According to ASUN bylaws, the rules must be approved in both fall and spring semesters.

While the rules had already been approved last semester, President Andy Schuerman expected a debate about taking the names off the ballots.

Several senators were against keeping the names on the ballots. Arts and Sciences Sen. Natalie Hoover was one of them.

She said keeping the names off the ballots gave the candidates more flexibility, allowing them to not always be forced to stand for all of their parties' ideals.

Arts and Sciences Sen. Beth Augustine agreed.

Augustine said that keeping the names off the ballots would make the candidates more responsible for getting their names out.

Schuerman, who took a neutral stance, said that in his experience, how hard an individual worked depended on the individual, not whether a party name appeared on the ballot.

Arts and Sciences Sen. Jason Mashek and Engineering and Technology Sen. Cody Northrop were in favor of keeping the names on the ballots.

They talked to people who said having the party names on the ballots made voting easier.

In other business, ASUN appointed Christy Hamilton as senator for the nursing college.