

Nelson seeks broad appeal

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Nelson has served as state chairman for the presidential campaigns of Democrats Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Also, all seven of his Nebraska Supreme Court appointees were Democrats.

Critics also say Nelson is thin-skinned, that he doesn't take criticism well. He says he just works hard to make sure people understand his views.

On issues, clear differences are evident between Nelson and Stenberg.

Whereas Stenberg supports allowing workers to invest a portion of their payroll taxes in private investments, Nelson opposes that idea. He wants to extend Social Security's solvency by infusing budget surplus funds into the trust fund.

"The issue is, when you

take money out of Social Security, what happens?" Nelson said. "It brings the day of reckoning on Social Security's insolvency just that much closer to you."

On taxes, Nelson favors the elimination of the inheritance tax and the so-called "marriage penalty," which forces some married couples to pay more income taxes than if they were single.

He said his priorities for using budget surpluses would be to pay down the national debt, preserve Social Security and provide a tax cut. Like Bush, Stenberg supports a larger tax cut.

On prescription drugs, Nelson supports a proposal to bring all Medicare beneficiaries into a prescription drug benefit program. Recipients would pay monthly premiums and co-payments to spread the risk and lower drug prices

through the power of Medicare in the market, he said.

On social issues, Nelson and Stenberg find much agreement. Both men support the death penalty, oppose abortion and support a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages and civil unions in Nebraska.

Nelson said he wants to work with "sensible centrists" in the Senate on those issues, as well as on reforming farm policy and education.

"People are going to look at the candidates for Senate, and there are just two names there - Ben Nelson and Don Stenberg, just the two of us," Nelson said.

"I've been dealing with the issues, while my opponent has been trying to figure out who his team is. I'm going to be an independent voice for Nebraska."

Stenberg aims for new vision

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Gore."

As attorney general, Stenberg has been a staunch advocate of the death penalty and an opponent of abortion. This year, he argued unsuccessfully before the U.S. Supreme Court in defense of Nebraska's ban on partial-birth abortion.

Critics say Stenberg has politicized the attorney general's office, making decisions to gain political advantage rather than basing them on the law. Stenberg said those critics are simply liberal partisans who disagree with his views.

On issues such as Social Security, taxes and prescription-drug coverage, Stenberg and Nelson disagree strongly.

Stenberg supports allowing younger workers to invest a portion of their payroll taxes in private investments, which he said would yield higher returns.

"I trust the American people to make those investment decisions," he said. "I

don't think we should condemn a future generation of Americans to a 2 percent return on their Social Security taxes."

Like Bush, Stenberg supports a substantial tax cut, saying American families face too heavy a tax burden. He says future budget surpluses will be large enough to support a large tax cut, increased defense spending and additional spending to preserve Social Security.

On prescription drugs, Stenberg proposes allowing seniors to enroll in a prescription-drug discount card program through which they could bargain for discounts. He also supports catastrophic coverage to limit the total amount seniors would have to spend on prescription drugs.

Stenberg said he and the Republicans can achieve these goals only if Americans elect Bush and a Republican Senate and House of Representatives.

"It takes a team to govern this great nation."

Osborne's cruises to easy victory

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form. It may not be right," he said. "But if you have an opportunity to make a difference and don't use it, it's a wasted opportunity."

Osborne grew up in Hastings and has a residence near Lake McConaughy. He said he ran in the 3rd District because that is where the state's greatest challenges are.

The district, which extends from western Nebraska to 40 miles west of Lincoln and is bigger than Iowa, has been ravaged by a struggling agricultural economy. Commodity prices have nosedived, and many farmers have gone out of business.

Some critics, including Reynolds, have said Osborne knows little about agriculture and is ill-equipped to handle challenges.

But Osborne said he spent time on a dairy farm as a child and still owns three pieces of farmland in the district. He has convened agricultural discussion groups this year, and said he has learned much about farm policy.

He supports federal crop insurance, wants to expand the use of ethanol and hopes to unify the agricultural sector for more effective lobbying. He also hopes to limit federal

regulations, which he said have crippled farmers and small businesses.

Osborne frequently laments over what he calls the "steady, progressive unraveling of the culture."

He opposes abortion, same-sex marriage and further gun control. He believes sex, drugs and violence in TV, movies and video games have contributed to society's moral collapse. In order to regain lost ground, the country must once again focus on strong families and religious faith, he said.

"I think it's a real cultural war," he said. "It's not imagined. It's out there."

Osborne also holds beliefs that are contrary to the majority of his constituents. For example, he opposes the death penalty.

Osborne continues to receive criticism for his handling of several players who ran afoul of the law, especially running back Lawrence Phillips. In 1995, Phillips sat out six games for dragging his former girlfriend down the stairs by her hair. Osborne reinstated him at the end of the season.

He received intense criticism, both locally and nationally, but he stood by his decisions.

Unicam hopefuls list key issues

BY LINDSEY BAKER

Tuesday's election will see six senators from the Lincoln area elected to the Nebraska Unicameral for the next four years. What follows is a short description of the candidate and his or her view on pertinent issues.

District 1

Lavern Bartels: Bartels, a Johnson County native, was mayor of Tecumseh from 1978 to 1990. Bartels said his campaign goals are lower taxes, welfare reform and pro-abortion issues.

Floyd Vrtiska: Unicameral incumbent and semi-retired farmer and cattle-feeder, Vrtiska has been in the legislature for eight years.

Vrtiska said his goals focus on economic development, education, provision of money to state colleges and teacher pay.

District 21

Carol Hudkins:

Hudkins, a grain and livestock farmer, is finishing her second term in the Unicameral. Her goals include improving agriculture, education and economic development.

District 25

Ron Raikes: Raikes, a farmer, was appointed to the Nebraska Unicameral in 1997, and elected two years ago to complete the term. Raikes said he wants to pay attention to both taxation and education.

District 27

DiAnna Schimek: Incumbent Schimek has been a member of the Unicameral for 12 years. Schimek focuses on health care, including women's health and diabetes, and election laws, such as campaign finance reform and lobbying laws.

Paul Edwards: "Homegrown Nebraskan" Edwards, Director of Public Affairs for the Rural/Metro Ambulance, is centering his legislative

goals on child care for single-parent families, including tax breaks for businesses that offer in-house child care and education. Edwards also spoke out against drug trafficking and handgun-related crimes.

District 29

Mike Foley: Foley, a corporate planning analyst for the Nebraska Public Power District, said his key theme is campaign finance reform. Foley also supports higher teacher salaries and lower taxes.

James Hewitt:

Attorney Hewitt has spent 40 years in Lincoln's 29th District. Hewitt stressed three goals: higher teacher salaries, reassessing taxing processes and the maintenance of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus's high status.

District 23 candidate **Curt Bromm** could not be reached for comment Sunday.

Underdog Reynolds focuses on agricultural issues, not football

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gerous gamble.

"It's the death knell for agriculture," he said. "We're going to lose most of our farmers shortly, and he's just going to wave them goodbye."

As the agricultural economy

withered, Reynolds believed 3rd District Rep. Bill Barrett was ignoring the depths of the problem.

Reynolds entered the race in the fall of 1999. A couple of months later, Barrett decided to retire. But then, Osborne entered the race, and the campaign changed.

But Reynolds has made his

campaign a quixotic crusade to reverse the agricultural economy's sagging fortunes. He said he forced Osborne to address agricultural issues more directly.

"Let's get the agricultural economy going again," said Reynolds, who left farming to become a Grand Island real estate

investor. "Everyone's talking about it, but nobody seems to want to do anything about it."

He said the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act, which removed government production controls and encouraged farmers to produce crops of their choice, hasn't worked.

He said the government should pay farmers who volunteer to put some of their land out of production. This would help raise commodity prices and boost farmers' incomes.

"Agriculture has to do well before the rest of the district can do anything," he said.