

STATE SENATOR JEREMY NORDQUIST

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2009 END OF SESSION REPORT

Dear Neighbor,

After five busy months, the 2009 Legislative Session has come to a close.

This year, I introduced legislation with a focus on crime prevention, education, lowering taxes on our seniors, and increasing Nebraska's investment in renewable energy. Over the course of the session, I took an interest in several other bills. It is my hope that this report helps bring you up to speed on my priorities and the Legislature's accomplishments in 2009.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with your questions, opinions, or concerns. My staff and I are dedicated to serving you, and we hope to hear from you soon.

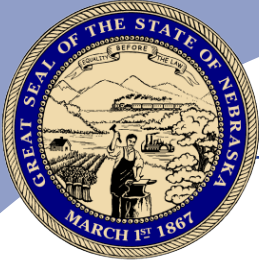
Sincerely,



JEREMY NORDQUIST'S COMMITTEES

Appropriations
Enrollment and Review (Chair)
Nebraska Retirement Systems (Vice Chair)

Building Maintenance
State-Tribal Relations
Children's Behavioral Health Oversight
Health Care Reform



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BILLS ENACTED IN 2009

The 2009 session was largely a successful one for downtown and South Omaha. Many of my bills and other priorities were passed into law. The difficult economic climate meant that the Legislature had to make tough decisions, and -- while I did not always agree with the final outcome -- I am encouraged that we are moving Nebraska in the right direction. I have included a few of the highlights from this session below:

LB 16 INCREASING TRANSPARENCY IN STATE GOVERNMENT

Senator Tom White of Omaha wrote the Taxpayer Transparency Act to create a publicly-available website detailing state spending and corporate tax incentives. I co-sponsored the bill because I believe citizens have a right to know and access this information to make state government more open and honest. The website will be created by the Nebraska State Treasurer and should be available by January 1, 2010.

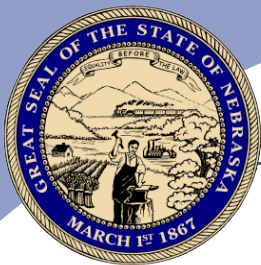
LB 63 CRACKING DOWN ON GRAFFITI AND VIOLENT CRIME

LB 63 is a much-needed modernization of our violent crime statutes. It stiffens penalties for existing violent crimes and creates new offenses for gang-related activities that are known to create and encourage violence. I believe the bill was made stronger by the inclusion of the anti-graffiti measures I introduced earlier this session.

But in passing LB 63, we're not just increasing punishments for violent criminals -- we're also working to prevent the crimes before they take place. The bill creates the Office of Violence Prevention, which will be charged with developing, fostering, promoting, and assessing violence prevention programs. I have every confidence that the new office will have a positive impact on crime in Omaha and the rest of the state.

LB 97 GETTING TOUGH ON SEX OFFENDERS

The Attorney General's office worked directly with members of the Legislature to pass LB 97, a comprehensive package that modernizes Nebraska's laws dealing with sex offenders. Technological advances such as instant messaging, social networking websites, and cell phones have made it easier for sex offenders to solicit victims as well as collect, transmit, and store illegal materials. Sex offenders have also found ways to use technology to contact children and potential victims. LB 97 will make it easier for law enforcement to track down and prosecute sex offenders using these technologies.



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BILLS ENACTED IN 2009 (CONTINUED)

LB 315 PASSING A RESPONSIBLE BUDGET

As a member of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, I spent much of my time this session reviewing, tracking, and assessing state spending. A difficult economic climate added to our challenge of finding and cutting government waste while ensuring that state assistance still is available to Nebraskans who need it.

Thanks in part to the aid provided by the federal government's adoption of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, we were able to pass a budget that contained no tax increases or new taxes. In fact, most Nebraskans will benefit from tax cuts outlined in the Recovery Act. I encourage anyone interested in how the Recovery Act has benefited Nebraska to visit www.recovery.gov. My colleagues and I made every effort to ensure that the money received from the Recovery Act is being put to work in the best manner possible.

I believe the end result of the Legislature's efforts is a responsible budget that maintains funding for essential programs while holding state spending growth to sustainable levels.

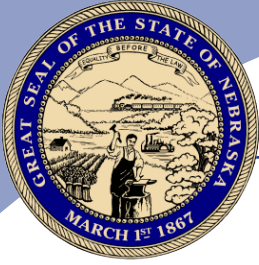
LB 545 PROTECTING OMAHA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While the economic climate and decrease in tax revenues made budget cuts unavoidable, I fought hard to balance Nebraska's budget without doing so on the backs of our children and hard-working teachers. Education is an investment in Nebraska's future, and it's more important than ever that we do whatever we can to ensure our children are receiving an education that prepares them to compete in a 21st century, knowledge-based, technology-driven economy. I worked with other members of the Omaha delegation to ensure that Omaha received its fair share of state education funding.

LB 551 OFFERING COVERAGE TO MORE UNINSURED NEBRASKANS

Before LB 551, anyone aged 23 or older could no longer qualify for coverage under their parents' health insurance. Unfortunately, finding a job -- especially a job that offers insurance benefits -- has become increasingly difficult and too many Nebraskans in their mid-20's have been forced off their parents insurance with few options.

Nearly 10% of Nebraskans are uninsured, and many of those without coverage are young job-seekers. LB 551 will help provide families with an option of paying to add their son or daughter to their insurance plan at no cost to taxpayers.



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BILLS ENACTED IN 2009 (CONTINUED)

LB 555 ENCOURAGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Encouraging 21st century industries to come to Nebraska is vital to our state's long-term economic development. I was pleased to see the Legislature approve an expansion of the existing research and development tax credit to encourage more high-tech companies to make their home in our state. These are companies that offer high-paying, high-quality jobs for hard-working Nebraskans.

Over the next four years, LB 555 is projected to create 290 new jobs and generate \$13 million in new tax revenue. The measure is a good investment in our state's economy.

LB 603 HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED

LB 603, a bill aimed at solving some of the significant problems in Nebraska's behavioral and children's health services. Right now, desperate parents are forced to make a horrible choice: Keep their children or give up custody to the state so they can receive the health care and treatment they need. LB 603 will increase access and availability of health care services that are not dependent on a parent losing custody of their child. The bill also increases income eligibility for SCHIP health coverage, making it easier for parents struggling to make ends meet to get their children the coverage they deserve.

I was also pleased that my priority bill, LB 601, was amended into the final version of LB 603. By seeking federal matching dollars for some of our behavioral health services, we can improve our quality of care while saving the state millions of dollars each year. All together, LB 603 is an excellent package to address some serious problems in the way our state treats struggling parents with children in need of behavioral health treatment.

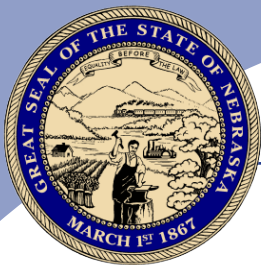
OTHER NORDQUIST BILLS PASSED BY THE LEGISLATURE

LB 81* Ensures solvency for Nebraska State Troopers' retirement system

LB 221* Modernizes Omaha's school finance operations

LB 232 Expands educational opportunities at community college culinary programs

** denotes bills passed into law as amendments to other legislation*



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BILLS HELD OVER FOR 2010

While many of my priorities were passed into law this session, a few of them were not enacted. I look forward to working with my colleagues over the interim and through next session to find ways to turn these ideas into Nebraska public policy.

LB 421 PROMOTING ENERGY SECURITY AND A CLEANER ENVIRONMENT

LB 421 would provide a tax exemption for compressed natural gas (CNG) until the year 2015. Currently, CNG is subject to a tax of \$0.26 per gasoline gallon equivalent (GGE). It is my hope that the five year window provided by this bill will help CNG establish itself as a mainstream fuel to power cars and trucks in Nebraska.

Natural gas burns cleaner and is an average of 40% cheaper than gasoline. It also is readily available domestically and from Canada; currently, 98% of natural gas consumed in the United States is produced in North America. I firmly believe that CNG-powered vehicles can be part of the solution -- along side ethanol and electric power -- to our country's transportation energy problems.

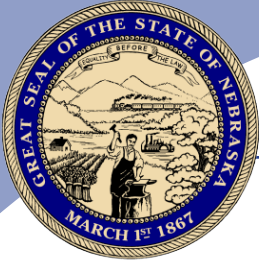
LB 455 ENCOURAGING RENEWABLE ENERGY IN NEBRASKA

Because Nebraska's public power providers do not pay income taxes, they are ineligible for federal renewable energy production incentives. LB 455 seeks to level the playing field between our public power producers and privately-owned energy companies. I am confident that an investment in renewable energy will bring a cleaner environment, a sustainable industry, and good, high-paying jobs to our state.

LB 633 DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

The Neighborhood Development Act, proposed by Senator Heath Mello and prioritized by Senator Tom White, both of Omaha, would provide grants to neighborhood associations for significant community improvement projects that focus on enhancing the quality of life.

The Neighborhood Development Act recognizes that neighborhood associations play a critical role in sustaining the vitality of both urban and rural communities as well as revitalizing areas that need more development. The legislation will encourage neighborhood associations to partner with the College of Public Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Omaha to create community development plans and initiatives.



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2009 INTERIM STUDIES

At the end of each session, every State Senator is afforded the opportunity to submit interim studies to examine problems facing Nebraska in order to prepare us to find practical public policy solutions. I have submitted several studies, with a focus on increasing Nebraskans' quality of life and insuring that state tax dollars are being used wisely. A few of the studies are listed below.

LR 139 IMPROVING THE TAX CLIMATE FOR NEBRASKA'S RETIREES

This year, I introduced LB 303, which would have exempted Social Security benefits from our state's income tax. Currently, Nebraska is one of only five states that taxes Social Security benefits to the same extent as the federal government. Iowa and Missouri have recently passed similar measures.

While the bill's price tag was too high to be enacted this session, LR 139 should give us an idea of how to relieve the pressure put on our retirees by state taxes.

LR 140 MEASURING RETURN ON OUR TAX INCENTIVE INVESTMENTS

Every year, Nebraska gives millions of dollars in tax incentives to companies promising to create good, high-paying jobs in Nebraska. Unfortunately, our government rarely takes the time to measure how effective those tax incentives are.

I believe it is important that we evaluate the quality of jobs created by these tax incentives to ensure that we are not making bad investments. I plan on making sure business leaders and labor advocates are involved in the discussion as the work on this study moves forward.

LR 198 HELPING NEBRASKANS SAVE FOR COLLEGE

Known as "529 College Savings Plans," the federal government has created a special tax consideration aimed at helping forward-thinking families save for their child's college education. Each state is responsible for administering one or more 529 plans.

Unfortunately, two of the three 529 plans made available by Nebraska state officials were rated among the five worst performing in the nation. Nebraskans should be able to count on their state government to provide high-quality, high-performance plans. It is my hope that LR 198 sheds some light on why our families are being left behind and how we can get our 529 College Savings Plans back on track.