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# SENATOR JEREMY NORDQUIST

## 2011 END OF SESSION REPORT

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Dear Neighbor,

After six productive months and the introduction of over 700 bills, the First Session of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Legislature has come to a close. This session has been marked by very difficult budget decisions, as we worked to overcome a nearly \$1 billion shortfall. Despite the challenging financial situation, we were able to craft a budget that protects the core functions of government, streamlines state spending and makes important investments to help Nebraska recover stronger than before from the recent economic downturn.

This year, my legislative priority was to work with my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to craft a budget that avoided new taxes and protected property tax relief for my constituents in downtown and South Omaha. Beyond the budget, I focused on legislation that supports the health of Nebraska children and families, protects your online identity, improves access to nutritious food for low-income and underserved communities, and provides relief for my constituents from increased sewer fees to pay for Omaha's combined sewer overflow project. As Chair of the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee, I worked with my Committee members to find common-sense solutions to protect and stabilize our public pension systems, without the controversy that has plagued these issues in other states.

In the coming months, my staff and I will be diligently researching potential legislation for the next session, as well as assisting constituents with issues affecting you and your family. 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,



Senator Jeremy Nordquist



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### SENATOR NORDQUIST'S COMMITTEES

Appropriations  
Nebraska Retirement Systems (Chair)  
State Tribal Relations  
Children's Behavioral Health Oversight

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### **BILLS ENACTED IN 2011**

In just under 90 working days of the 2011 session, the Legislature enacted several important pieces of legislation. Like many Nebraska families in this challenging economic climate, we were forced to make tough decisions about our spending priorities and look for increased efficiency and savings in state government. Our work is certainly not over, and we will need to continue to find ways to make important investments in our state's future. However, I am proud of the progress the Legislature was able to make this session by passing the following bills:

#### **LB 284 PROTECTING MOURNERS FROM PICKETERS**

Prompted by recent tragedies in which the funerals of Nebraskans have been targeted by out-of-state picketers, LB 284 will create a larger buffer between those paying their respects to a lost loved one and picketers.

#### **LB 374 CLOSING A NEARLY \$1 BILLION BUDGET GAP**

As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I have worked with my colleagues to craft a budget that brings our state back from a substantial budget shortfall, while maintaining the property tax relief credit and without raising or creating new taxes.



Photo Courtesy of the Unicameral Information Office

#### **LB 389 CULTIVATING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CLIMATE IN NEBRASKA**

A study prepared for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development found that our state is “lagging behind in its entrepreneurial activity.” In an effort to support the development of new businesses in our state, the Legislature created the Angel Investment Tax Credit. This new tax incentive provides a valuable opportunity for Nebraska to attract a wide array of businesses and further diversify our state's economy.

#### **LB 397 REFORMING AND PROTECTING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS**

This session, under the leadership of Senator Steve Lathrop and the Business and Labor Committee, the Legislature was charged with the weighty task of enacting substantive and meaningful reforms to the Commission on Industrial Relations (CIR). The product of the collaboration among the Committee members and other legislators, the business community, the political subdivisions, and representatives of public employees provides predictability and specific criteria to be applied by the CIR, while protecting collective bargaining rights in our state. The final legislation was agreed upon through thoughtful compromise in which no side got everything they wanted, but ultimately, the bill is a win for public employers and employees, as well as taxpayers.

#### **LB 463 KEEPING AT-RISK KIDS ENGAGED IN SCHOOL**

This bill continues the Legislature's commitment to meeting the needs of at-risk kids in our education and child welfare systems. LB 463 directs the Learning Community to engage in efforts to reduce truancy. It also provides funding for the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program, which trains volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have been abused or neglected and have become wards of the state.

***Enacted Bills Continued...*****LB 665 STRENGTHENING CHILD ENTICEMENT LAWS**

This bill broadens and strengthens laws relating to criminal child enticement by prohibiting the solicitation, coaxing, enticement, or luring of any child under the age of fourteen years with the intent to seclude the child from his or her parent, guardian, or other legal custodian or the general public.

**LB 667 and LB 675 STRONGER PENALTIES FOR DRUNK DRIVING**

The Legislature passed two bills this session that crack down on drunk driving. LB 667 increases the use of vehicle interlock devices, which are sensors that do not allow a car to start if alcohol is detected on a driver's breath. LB 675 strengthens penalties for repeat offenders convicted of drunk driving.

**BILLS NOT ADOPTED IN 2011**

While the 2011 session was a successful one for downtown and South Omaha, not all of our priorities were passed by the Legislature. It is my hope to work with my colleagues to find solutions in future sessions to the challenges addressed in the following pieces of legislation:

**LB 123 and LB 552****PROTECTING YOU AND YOUR KIDS ONLINE**

Cyber-bullying and electronic impersonation have become hot-button issues in today's increasingly connected society. Two bills that were not advanced out of their respective committees aimed to protect children from online bullying and protect all Nebraskans from being impersonated through electronic means of communication.



Photo Courtesy of the Unicameral Information Office

**LB 488 PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DELINQUENT CHILD SUPPORT**

The Child Support Transparency Act, which was an effort to locate and provide public accountability for those who are intentionally avoiding their obligation to provide support to their children, was not acted upon by the Judiciary Committee and will be carried over to next session. LB 488 would publish the names on the Internet of those who are more than six months overdue and owe over \$5,000 in child support.

**LB 587 INCREASING ENERGY INDEPENDENCE WITH COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS**

I introduced LB 587 which would reduce our dependence on foreign oil by supporting infrastructure investments in compressed natural gas (CNG). CNG is an environmentally friendly and economical alternative to gasoline and diesel fuel. LB 587 creates a grant program for compressed natural gas infrastructure projects and will help promote transportation fuel options to lessen our state's dependence on foreign oil. This bill remains in the Natural Resources Committee and will be carried over to the next session.

**LB 682 PROTECTING TAXPAYERS FROM COSTS OF OMAHA'S CSO PROJECT**

I worked with Senator Heath Mello to return sales tax revenue generated from the combined sewer overflow (CSO) project in Omaha to pay down the cost of this project. This would have lowered sewer use fees for homeowners and businesses in the metro area. This bill was put on hold for further consideration during the next legislative session.

## **2011 INTERIM STUDIES**

At the end of each session, every state senator proposes interim studies to examine challenges for which we would like to develop practical public policy solutions. Below are just a few of the studies on which I will focus this interim:

### **LR 138 CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE**

I introduced an interim study to examine the availability of private health insurance coverage for children in our state. As a result of the new federal health care law, insurance companies can no longer deny coverage to children because of pre-existing conditions. Rather than fulfilling the promise of health insurance coverage to all children, insurance companies have completely pulled out of the private market for child-only policies, forcing children into publicly-subsidized programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program or leaving them to remain uninsured. I would like to find ways to work with private insurance companies and the Department of Insurance to encourage insurers to offer options of private coverage to families who are willing and able to pay for such coverage.

### **LR 197 TRANSPARENCY IN THE COST AND QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE**

One of my major legislative priorities over the interim and through the next legislative session will be to promote consumer empowerment in the purchasing of health care. Too often, medical decisions are made with little information about the cost or quality of health care services. The purpose of this study is to examine the potential implementation of an all-payer claims database in Nebraska. An all-payer claims database can collect and provide cost and quality information on medical, pharmacy, and dental services to be used in comparison shopping. An all-payer claims database can provide greater transparency regarding the cost and quality of medical services in order to empower consumers to make well-informed health care decisions.

### **LR 234 ENERGY INDEPENDENCE THROUGH COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS**

In an effort to support the energy independence of Nebraskans, I have proposed a study to examine what can be done to support the expansion of compressed natural gas (CNG) as a transportation fuel in our state. CNG is a cheap, clean and domestically available energy source that holds great potential for individual and business commuters in our state.

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