Inside Our Nation's Only Unicameral

The Nebraska Legislature 2020

"There is no sense or reason in having the same thing done twice, especially if it is to be done by two bodies of men elected in the same way and having the same jurisdiction."

~U.S. Sen. George Norris

Origin of the Unicameral

Nebraska's Legislature is unique among state legislatures in the country because it consists of a single body of lawmakers—a one-house legislature, or unicameral. This was not always the case.

Nebraska had a senate and a house of representatives for the first 68 years of the state's existence. It took decades of work to convice Nebraskans to do away with the two-house system (see Norton excerpt, right).

The potential cost-saving aspects of a unicameral system helped the idea gain popularity during the Great Depression. A petition campaign led by the prestigious U.S. Sen. George W. Norris benefited from two other popular proposals that also were on the ballot that year: a local option on prohibition and legalized pari-mutuel betting. In 1934, Nebraska voters finally decided to reform the state legislature on a 286,086 to 193,152 vote.

Norris was a "New Deal Republican" from McCook. Picking up where Norton and others left off, he decried the two-house system as outdated, inefficient and unnecessary. He spread his message through radio broadcasts, printed editorials and personal appearances. Norris was fond of saying that he wore out two sets of automobile tires traveling the state to promote his idea.

The bicameral system in America is modeled after the British Parliament, which consists of the House of Commons—with representatives elected by the people—and the House of Lords, whose aristocratic members are appointed by the crown. Norris argued that this is inherently opposed to the democratic ideal of equality.

A common question raised during consideration of the unicameral was how to preserve the scrutiny that occurs between houses of a bicameral and helps prevent abuses of power. Norris argued that legislation would be held in check by the state Supreme Court and the governor's veto power. More importantly, he said, the people's right to vote and petition would counteract the possible abuse of power by their elected officials. The Nebraska Unicameral would have straightforward procedures and extend greater privileges to the press to allow for enhanced public scrutiny.

"Every act of the legislature and every act of each individual must be transacted in the spotlight of publicity," Norris said.

In a one-house legislature, Norris said, no actions could be concealed as too often happened in conference committees. A conference committee reconciles differences in legislation when the two chambers of a bicameral legislature pass different versions of a bill. In Nebraska, the appointed six-member committee met in secret, and members' votes were not public record. Norris said these committees had too much power and easily could be influenced by lobbyists.

Once a bill came out of the conference committee, it could not be changed, only approved or rejected. Today, under our unicameral system, lawmakers propose amendments and debate them openly on the chamber floor.

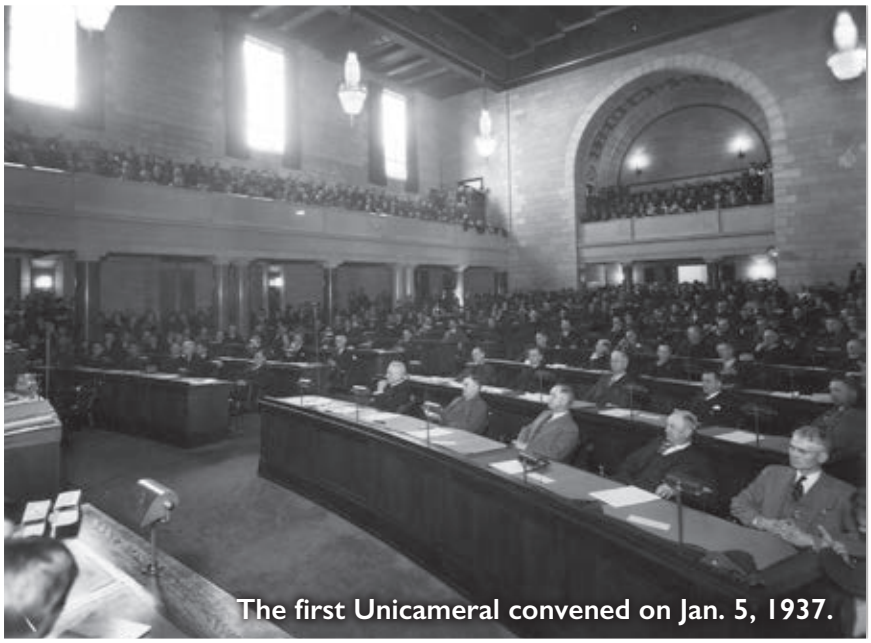
The argument in favor of conference committees was that they prevented hasty legislation, but the unicameral system has safeguards against this possibility. Nearly all bills must have public hearings, at least five days must elapse between a bill's introduction and its passage and bills may contain only one subject.

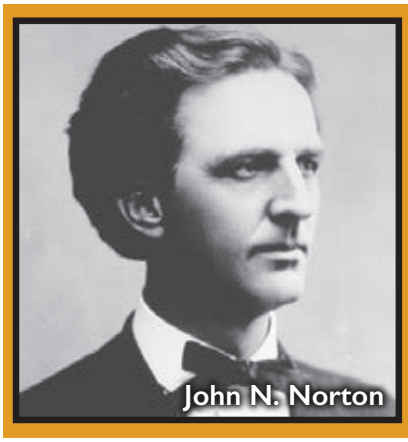
Another unique aspect of Nebraska's legislature is that it is nonpartisan. Norris worked to eliminate partisanship in the Legislature because he believed lawmakers should act on their own convictions and the needs of their districts, rather than according to party dictates. National party concerns, he argued, often have little to do with local government.

Nebraska's transition from bicameralism to unicameralism in 1937 brought immediate change. Legislative membership went from 133 to 43—nearly a 70 percent reduction. The number of committees decreased from 61 to 18, and 581 bills were introduced in 1937, half as many as in the previous session. The legislature met for 98 days (down from 110), passed 214 bills (up from 192) and cost $103,445 (down from $202,593). As promised, efficiency improved significantly.

Movements for unicameralism have occurred throughout the United States since the nation's independence, but so far only Nebraska's has been successful.

The Unicameral's first clerk, Hugo Srb, predicted that lawmakers in other states would be unlikely to legislate their own jobs out of existence. More than three-quarters of a century later, he has not been proven wrong.


The first Unicameral convened on Jan. 5, 1937.


John N. Norton

Laying the foundation for Unicameralism

Efforts to adopt unicameralism in Nebraska began in 1913, when state Rep. John N. Norton of Osceola helped form a legislative committee to study ways to improve state government. Part of the committee's plan, first presented to the Legislature in 1915, recommended a one-house system. It was not enacted.

Numerous attempts by Norton and others to switch to a unicameral legislature met with varying degrees of success in following years. While U.S. Sen. George Norris typically is seen as the driving force behind unicameralism in Nebraska, Norton's work to shape the state's legislature merits recognition.

Norton served as the District 24 representative in the first unicameral legislature in 1937, helping to implement this new form of goverment.

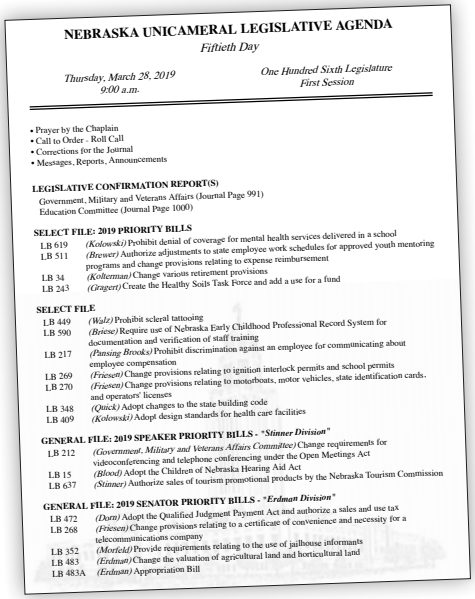
New and returning senators are sworn into office.

About the Senators

There are 49 senators in the Nebraska Unicameral, each representing approximately 37,000 people. Senators are elected to a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms and receive an annual salary of $12,000. Sessions begin in January and consist of 90 working days in odd-numbered years and 60 working days in even-numbered years. Long sessions usually last until early June, and short sessions last until mid-April. Special sessions may be held at the call of the governor or two-thirds of the Legislature.

A typical session day for a senator could include a meeting over breakfast, a working lunch, visits with constituents, committee hearings, research and floor debate. Senators also have obligations during the interim, including communicating with constituents, working on interim studies with committees and developing bills that they plan to sponsor in the upcoming session.

Observing the Legislature



NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
Fiftieth Day

Thursday, March 28, 2019
9:00 a.m.

One Hundred Sixth Legislature
First Session

- Prayer by the Chaplain
- Call to Order - Roll Call
- Corrections for the Journal
- Messages, Reports, Announcements

LEGISLATIVE CONFIRMATION REPORT(S)
Government, Military and Veterans Affairs (Journal Page 991)
Education Committee (Journal Page 1000)

SELECT FILE: 2019 PRIORITY BILLS
LB 619 *(Kolowski)* Prohibit denial of coverage for mental health services delivered in a school
LB 511 *(Brewer)* Authorize adjustments to state employee work schedules for approved youth mentoring programs and change provisions relating to expense reimbursement
LB 34 *(Kolterman)* Change various retirement provisions
LB 243 *(Gragert)* Create the Healthy Soils Task Force and add a use for a fund

SELECT FILE
LB 449 *(Walz)* Prohibit scleral tattooing
LB 590 *(Briese)* Require use of Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System for documentation and verification of staff training
LB 217 *(Pansing Brooks)* Prohibit discrimination against an employee for communicating about employee compensation
LB 269 *(Friesen)* Change provisions relating to ignition interlock permits and school permits
LB 270 *(Friesen)* Change provisions relating to motorboats, motor vehicles, state identification cards, and operators' licenses
LB 348 *(Quick)* Adopt changes to the state building code
LB 409 *(Kolowski)* Adopt design standards for health care facilities

GENERAL FILE: 2019 SPEAKER PRIORITY BILLS - *"Stinner Division"*
LB 212 *(Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee)* Change requirements for videoconferencing and telephone conferencing under the Open Meetings Act
LB 15 *(Blood)* Adopt the Children of Nebraska Hearing Aid Act
LB 637 *(Stinner)* Authorize sales of tourism promotional products by the Nebraska Tourism Commission

GENERAL FILE: 2019 SENATOR PRIORITY BILLS - *"Erdman Division"*
LB 472 *(Dorn)* Adopt the Qualified Judgment Payment Act and authorize a sales and use tax
LB 268 *(Friesen)* Change provisions relating to a certificate of convenience and necessity for a telecommunications company
LB 352 *(Morfeld)* Provide requirements relating to the use of jailhouse informants
LB 483 *(Erdman)* Change the valuation of agricultural land and horticultural land
LB 483A *(Erdman)* Appropriation Bill

The Unicameral meets in the Norris Chamber on the second floor of the State Capitol. During the first half of a legislative session, senators convene there for debate in the mornings and disperse to committee hearings throughout the Capitol in the afternoons. During the second half of session, debate is scheduled for the entire day, with a break for lunch. The agenda is set daily by the Speaker of the Legislature. The legislative calendar, including the daily agenda, is available at NebraskaLegislature.gov.

The Clerk of the Legislature and his staff are at the podium at the front of the chamber. Behind them sits the presiding officer, who recognizes senators in the order of their requests to speak. The lieutenant governor is the president of the Legislature by virtue of his or her office, but the role of presiding officer often is filled by senators in the lieutenant governor's absence.

While bills are being debated, senators often confer with each other on the floor to discuss the measure at hand or items scheduled later on the agenda. They also may consult with their staff or be interviewed by members of the media. Lobbyists are not allowed in the legislative chamber, but they may request that a senator step out of the chamber to meet with them in the rotunda. Because the unicameral is a nonpartisan body, senators are not arranged by political party in the chamber. Generally, newer senators are assigned seats toward the front of the chamber.

Visitors to the Legislature are invited to observe the proceedings from the balconies above the chamber and may be announced by the presiding officer at the request of a senator's office.

Nebraska State Senators 2020

Sen. Joni Albrecht
District 17, Thurston
Capitol Address: District 17,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2716
Elected: 2016
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Carol Blood
District 3, Bellevue
Capitol Address: District 3,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2627
Elected: 2016
Occupation: business consultant

Sen. Bruce Bostelman
District 23, Brainard
Capitol Address: District 23,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2719
Elected: 2016
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Tom Brewer
District 43, Gordon
Capitol Address: District 43,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2628
Elected: 2016
Occupation: retired military

Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh
District 6, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 6,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2714
Elected: 2018
Occupation: senator

Sen. Robert Clements
District 2, Elmwood
Capitol Address: District 2,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2613
Appointed: 2017
Elected: 2018
Occupation: banker, insurance agent, tax preparer

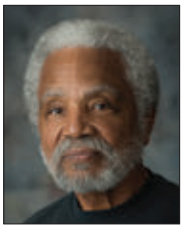
Sen. Wendy DeBoer
District 10, Bennington
Capitol Address: District 10,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2718
Elected: 2018
Occupation: educator

Sen. John Arch
District 14, La Vista
Capitol Address: District 14,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2730
Elected: 2018
Occupation: health care administrator

Sen. Kate Bolz
District 29, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 29,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2734
Elected: 2012, 2016
Occupation: executive director, professor

Sen. Tom Brandt
District 32, Plymouth
Capitol Address: District 32,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2711
Elected: 2018
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Tom Briese
District 41, Albion
Capitol Address: District 41,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2631
Elected: 2016
Occupation: farmer



Sen. Ernie Chambers
District 11, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 11,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2612
Elected: 1970, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2012 and 2016
Occupation: defender of the downtrodden

Sen. Sue Crawford
District 45, Bellevue
Capitol Address: District 45,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2615
Elected: 2012, 2016
Occupation: political science professor

Sen. Myron Dorn
District 30, Adams
Capitol Address: District 30,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2620
Elected: 2018
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Steve Erdman
District 47, Bayard
Capitol Address: District 47,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2616
Elected: 2016
Occupation: realtor, farmer

Sen. Suzanne Geist
District 25, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 25,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2731
Elected: 2016
Occupation: self-employed

Sen. Mike Groene
District 42, North Platte
Capitol Address: District 42,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2729
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: territorial sales manager

Sen. Ben Hansen
District 16, Blair
Capitol Address: District 16,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2728
Elected: 2018
Occupation: chiropractic physician

Sen. Mike Hilgers
District 21, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 21,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2673
Elected: 2016
Occupation: business owner, attorney

Sen. Sara Howard
District 9, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 9,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2723
Elected: 2012, 2016
Occupation: grant writing specialist

Sen. Megan Hunt
District 8, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 8,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2722
Elected: 2018
Occupation: business founder, owner

Sen. Curt Friesen
District 34, Henderson
Capitol Address: District 34,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2630
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Tim Gragert
District 40, Creighton
Capitol Address: District 40,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2801
Elected: 2018
Occupation: retired military

Sen. Steve Halloran
District 33, Hastings
Capitol Address: District 33,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2712
Elected: 2016
Occupation: restaurateur

Sen. Matt Hansen
District 26, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 26,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2610
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: adjunct professor

Sen. Robert Hilkemann
District 4, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 4,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2621
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: retired podiatrist

Sen. Dan Hughes
District 44, Venango
Capitol Address: District 44,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2805
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: farmer, businessman

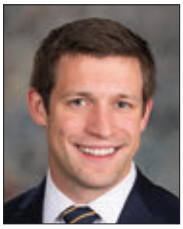
Sen. Rick Kolowski
District 31, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 31,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2327
Elected: 2012, 2016
Occupation: education consultant

Sen. Mark Kolterman
District 24, Seward
Capitol Address: District 24,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2756
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: insurance professional

Sen. Steve Lathrop
District 12, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 12,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2623
Elected: 2006, 2010 and 2018
Occupation: attorney

Sen. Lou Ann Linehan
District 39, Elkhorn
Capitol Address: District 39,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2885
Elected: 2016
Occupation: senator

Sen. John McCollister
District 20, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 20,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2622
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: business principal



Sen. Adam Morfeld
District 46, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 46,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2720
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: nonprofit executive director

Sen. Dave Murman
District 38, Glenvil
Capitol Address: District 38,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2732
Elected: 2018
Occupation: farmer

Sen. Dan Quick
District 35, Grand Island
Capitol Address: District 35,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2617
Elected: 2016
Occupation: power plant maintenance mechanic

Sen. Andrew La Grone
District 49, Gretna
Capitol Address: District 49,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2725
Appointed: 2019
Occupation: attorney

Sen. Brett Lindstrom
District 18, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 18,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2618
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: financial advisor

Sen. John Lowe
District 37, Kearney
Capitol Address: District 37,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2726
Elected: 2016
Occupation: real estate investor

Sen. Mike McDonnell
District 5, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 5,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2710
Elected: 2016
Occupation: labor executive

Sen. Mike Moser
District 22, Columbus
Capitol Address: District 22,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2715
Elected: 2018
Occupation: business owner, manager

Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks
District 28, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 28,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2633
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: attorney, law firm VP

Sen. Jim Scheer
District 19, Norfolk
Capitol Address: District 19,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2929
Elected: 2012, 2016
Occupation: insurance agency owner

Sen. Julie Slama
District 1, Peru
Capitol Address: District 1,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2733
Appointed: 2019
Occupation: senator

Sen. John Stinner
District 48, Gering
Capitol Address: District 48,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2802
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: retired banker

Sen. Tony Vargas
District 7, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 7,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2721
Elected: 2016
Occupation: nonprofit executive director

Sen. Lynne Walz
District 15, Fremont
Capitol Address: District 15,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2625
Elected: 2016
Occupation: realtor

Sen. Justin Wayne
District 13, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 13,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2727
Elected: 2016
Occupation: attorney, construction CEO

Sen. Matt Williams
District 36, Gothenburg
Capitol Address: District 36,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2642
Elected: 2014, 2018
Occupation: banker

Sen. Anna Wishart
District 27, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 27,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2632
Elected: 2016
Occupation: consultant

Contacting your Senator

Identifying your senator: Use the "Find your Senator" tool on NebraskaLegislature.gov or contact your county clerk or county election commissioner to determine which district you reside in and which senator represents you.

Personal meetings: The best way to set up a meeting with a senator is to contact his or her legislative office and work with the staff member who handles the senator's schedule.

Phone calls: Phone calls are effective because they allow for direct contact between constituents and legislators and often are easier to schedule than personal meetings. If a senator is unavailable, his or her staff will see to it that the senator receives your comments.

Email: Senators' email addresses can be found at NebraskaLegislature.gov. Because of the large volume of email a senator's office receives, do not expect a response to every message you send. When sending your senator an email, include your name and contact information at the bottom of the message to allow the legislator a variety of ways to respond to you.

Letters: Written letters are effective because they allow constituents to thoroughly explain their needs and positions. Focus on the main points you wish to make. A constructive approach to the issue is more likely to receive attention.

Our Legislative Process

The idea for a new law may come from anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies, the governor or senators themselves. The idea must be introduced as a bill by a senator or a committee to be considered by the Legislature. A bill that advances through all of the stages described here becomes law in Nebraska.

1 Research, Drafting and Introduction

Research

First, a senator and his or her staff research a problem and study possible legislative remedies. A senator may introduce a bill to create a new law or to repeal or change an existing law. Staff are available to help legislators with their research. Much of this work takes place during the period between sessions, which is called the interim. During this time, legislative committees study a variety of issues that have been outlined in interim study resolutions passed by the Legislature.

Drafting

A senator brings his or her idea for a new law to a bill drafter, who works with the senator to transform the idea into the proper legal form. Unlike some states, Nebraska requires that each introduced bill contain only one subject.

Introduction

Bills are introduced during the first 10 days of the legislative session. A senator introduces a bill by filing it with the Clerk of the Legislature. The clerk reads the title of the bill into the record, assigns it a number and prints copies of it for public and legislative use.

Fiscal Note

The Legislative Fiscal Office prepares budget statements called fiscal notes, which estimate the change in state, county or municipal expenses or revenue that would result under the provisions of each bill. Each fiscal note contains three estimates: one calculated by the Fiscal Office staff, another prepared by the governor's budget office and a third prepared by the affected state agency. Additionally, the Fiscal Office prepares appropriation bills ("A" bills), which accompany bills that require an appropriation, authorizing the expenditure.

2 Committees

Every bill receives a public hearing by a legislative committee. A nine-member Reference Committee determines which bills will be heard by each of the 14 standing committees. At hearings, citizens have a chance to express their opinions to the committee members. Testimony is recorded, transcribed and made part of the official committee record. After the hearing, committees may vote to send a bill to general file with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone the bill or take no action.

ADVANCE

HOLD

FAIL

Laws of Nebraska

3 GENERAL FILE

General file is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on a bill. At this stage, senators consider amendments, which may be proposed by committees or individual senators. It takes a majority vote of the Legislature—25 votes—to adopt an amendment or move a bill to the next stage of consideration.

ADVANCE | AMEND | FAIL

4 SELECT FILE

Select file is the second debate and voting stage. It provides another opportunity for amendment, compromise and reflection. Bills on select file may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to the next stage.

ADVANCE | AMEND | FAIL

5 FINAL READING

Before final passage, bills are constitutionally required to be read aloud in their entirety by the Clerk of the Legislature unless three-fifths, or 30 members, of the Legislature votes to waive the requirement.

A bill may not be amended or debated on final reading, but senators may vote to return it to select file for consideration of a specific amendment.

Bills may not be voted on for final passage until at least five legislative days after the bill is introduced and one legislative day after it is placed on final reading.

PASS | FAIL

6 GOVERNOR

After the Legislature passes a bill on final reading, it goes to the governor for consideration. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to act on a bill. If the governor signs a bill or does nothing with it, the bill becomes a state law. If the bill is vetoed, the Legislature may override that veto with a vote of 30 senators.

Most bills passed and approved by the governor go into effect three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns. However, bills may take effect before then if they contain an emergency clause or another specified operative date.

SIGN | DECLINE TO SIGN | VETO

VETO OVERRIDE | VETO SUSTAINED

Legislative Committees

Every bill introduced in the Legislature receives a public hearing by one of 14 standing committees, except for a few technical bills. The Reference Committee directs bills to the following committees based on each committee's focused jurisdiction:

- **Agriculture**
- **Appropriations**
- **Banking, Commerce and Insurance**
- **Business and Labor**
- **Education**
- **General Affairs**
- **Government, Military and Veterans Affairs**
- **Health and Human Services**
- **Judiciary**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Nebraska Retirement Systems**
- **Revenue**
- **Transportation and Telecommunications**
- **Urban Affairs**

Public hearings on bills typically are held in the afternoons during the first half of the legislative session. Committees have regularly scheduled rooms and meeting days, although they sometimes meet in different rooms at varying times in order to accommodate testifiers or large audiences. The weekly schedule of committee hearings is published on the last legislative day of the week throughout the legislative session and is available from the Clerk of the Legislature's Office, the Sunday editions of the Lincoln Journal Star and the Omaha World-Herald, the weekly Unicameral Update (update.legislature.ne.gov) and NebraskaLegislature.gov.

- If you plan to provide written information to the committee when you testify, please bring enough copies for each committee member, plus three more for support staff. You might call ahead to see if the committee prefers electronic submissions.
- Fill out the testifier sheet provided in the hearing room prior to testifying. Once you are seated at the testifier's table, identify yourself, spell your name and state what organization you represent, if any. Speak directly into the microphone, as committee proceedings are transcribed.
- Be prepared to limit your testimony to three to five minutes. If you also are providing written testimony, consider summarizing rather than reading it verbatim.
- Committee members may ask questions after your testimony. However, testifiers are not allowed to ask questions of committee members.
- If you are not testifying in person on a bill and would like to submit a written position letter to be included in the official hearing record as an exhibit, the letter must be delivered or emailed to the office of the chairperson of the committee conducting the hearing by 5 p.m. on the last workday prior to the public hearing. Additionally, the letter must include your name and address, state a position for, against or neutral on the bill in question and include a request for the letter to be included as part of the public hearing record.

Legislative Divisions

In addition to the personal staff of each senator and committee, the Nebraska Legislature relies on legislative divisions and staff to help it fulfill its responsibilities. Support offices of the Legislative Council include the Clerk of the Legislature, Revisor of Statutes, Legislative Fiscal Office, Legislative Audit Office, Legislative Research Office, Office of Public Counsel, Accounting and Budget Office and Coordinator of Legislative Services.

Clerk of the Legislature

Elected by the Legislature, the Clerk assists in the administrative operation of the Unicameral. The office maintains official records of all legislative business, including the daily and permanent journal. Other duties include distributing bills, resolutions and amendments, providing online information and other education materials to the public, handling lobbyist registration and overseeing use of legislative space.

Patrick J. O'Donnell
Room 2018, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2271

Revisor of Statutes

The Revisor's Office drafts and prepares all bills, resolutions and most amendments, reviews bills for correct form and craftsmanship, incorporates all enacted legislation into the Nebraska Statutes, reports any defects found in state statutes or the Nebraska Constituiton and drafts proposed legislation to correct them.

Joanne Pepperl
Room 358, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2225

Legislative Fiscal Analyst

The Fiscal Office provides fiscal and management information and assistance to the Legislature and the Appropriations Committee. This includes reviewing the financial impact of every bill and amendment and examining state agencies' management and finances to improve efficiency and services.

Tom Bergquist
Room 1007, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2263;
Fax: 402-479-0959

Legislative Auditor

The Audit Office conducts performance audits on topics selected by the Legislative Performance Audit Committee. Performance auditing is a systematic review of any aspect of agencies and their programs to evaluate agencies' success in effectively implementing legislative intent. Suggestions for performance audits may be made by legislators, constitutional officers and legislative division directors.

Martha Carter
1225 L St., Suite 502 • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-1282

Director of Research

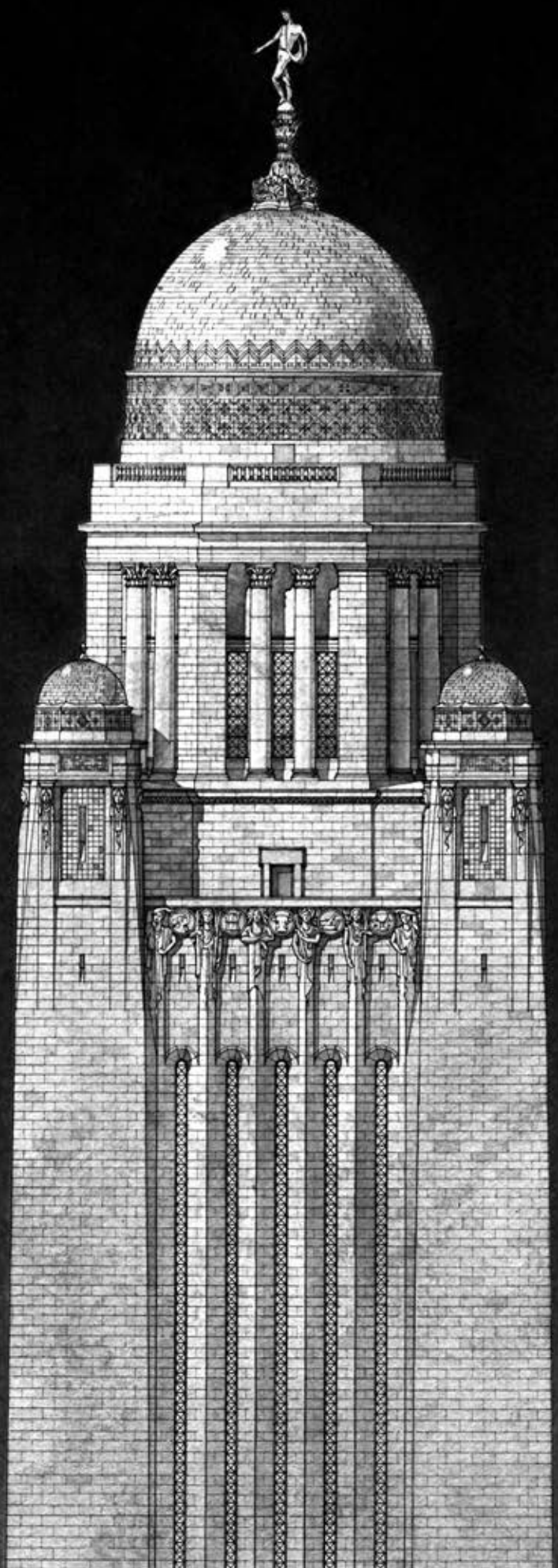
The Research Office conducts research and interim studies for legislative committees, state senators and staff. Duties include preparing research memoranda and reports, conducting special projects for the Executive Board of the Legislative Council, maintaining a reference library, disseminating information to senators and staff and exchanging information with other state legislatures and national legislative organizations.

Nancy Cyr
Room 1305, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2221

Public Counsel (Ombudsman)

This independent governmental office receives, investigates and informally resolves complaints made by citizens relating to administrative agencies of state government, recommends ways to improve agencies' policies and procedures and answers questions about government operation.

Carl Eskridge (acting ombudsman)
1225 L St., Suite 300 • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2035; 800-742-7690



Tower on the Prairie

Designed by architect Bertram Goodhue and completed in 1932, the Nebraska State Capitol is the third home for the Nebraska Legislature built in Lincoln. Goodhue's design (see original drawing, left) was named the winner of the Capitol design competition in 1920 by the State Capitol Commission over nine other submissions.

The new Capitol was built on the same site as the previous two. State employees worked in the old building while their new offices were built around them. When the north and south portions of the perimeter structure were complete, they moved into those new sections while the old Capitol was razed and the rest of the perimeter and the 400-foot limestone tower were built.

The Sower, created in bronze by sculptor Lee Lawrie, is 19 feet tall and weighs 8.5 tons. It was lifted into place atop the Capitol dome by crane. Lawrie also designed all of the Capitol's exterior and interior carvings and oversaw the artisans who executed his designs.

Of the many artists who contributed to the Capitol, most notable is Hildreth Meière, an artist selected by Goodhue. Meière's designs are found throughout the building and include the striking floor mosaics in the Rotunda.

During your Visit

Take a tour: The Capitol is located in Lincoln at 1445 K. St. Call the Capitol Tours Office at 402-471-0448 or visit capitol.nebraska.gov for more information and tour hours.

Watch floor debate: If the Legislature is in session, you can watch senators debate from a balcony in the Norris Chamber. For information regarding the schedule of the Legislature, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov.

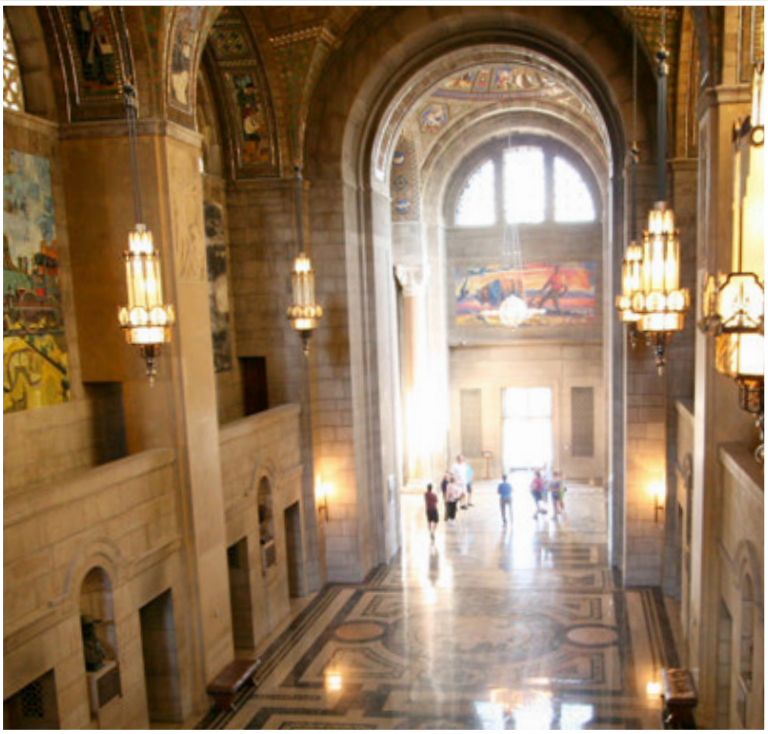
Attend a committee hearing: During session, the Legislature holds numerous committee hearings that are open to the public. Check the public hearing schedule posted on NebraskaLegislature.gov.

Meet your senator: Senators often can make time to meet with constituents from their district. Be sure to contact your senator's office in advance of your visit.

Visit the observation deck: The observation deck on the 14th floor is open to visitors during public hours, as weather permits.

See the Nebraska Hall of Fame: Bronze busts of Nebraska Hall of Fame members are located on the second floor.

View photos of state senators: Historic photos of state senators are displayed in the west hallway of the first floor.



The Warner and Norris Chambers

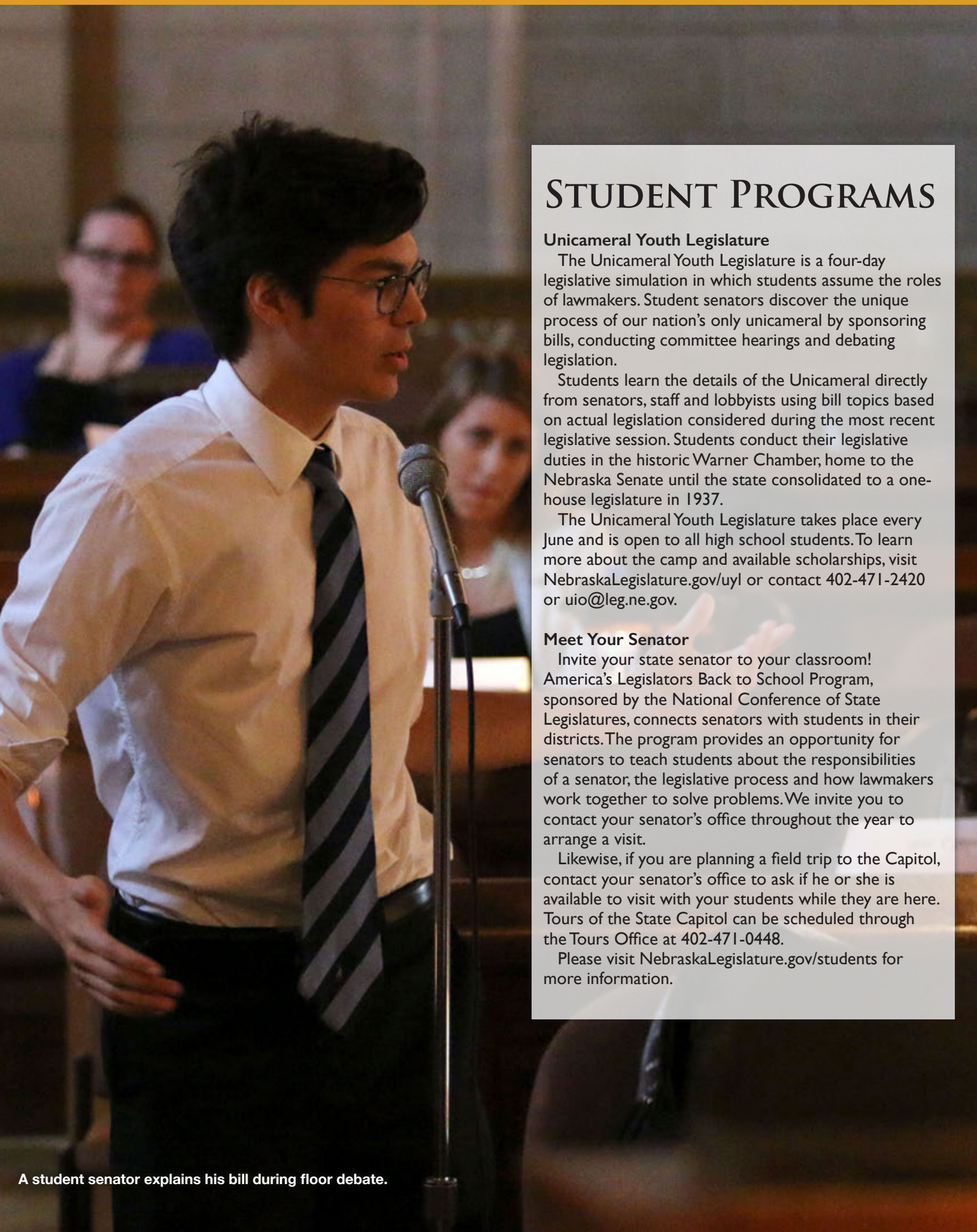
Because the Nebraska Legislature still was a bicameral legislature when its current Capitol was designed and constructed, the building has two separate legislative chambers.

Located on the east side of the rotunda, the Warner Chamber (left) housed Nebraska's Senate until 1937. Today, it is used for presentations and ceremonial occasions. Its visual elements honor Native American culture.

The Unicameral meets in the Norris Chamber (right), which features a beamed ceiling of Nebraska walnut that provides an ornate history lesson displayed in gold leaf appliqué. The images depict the progress of Western culture in Nebraska, from Spanish explorers to pioneering cattlemen and homesteaders.

Although the chamber was restored in 2008, few changes have been made to the room. Originally, it had seats for 100 lawmakers, but many of these were removed following the adoption of the unicameral system. The legislative floor now seats 49 senators and two sergeants at arms, with a few extra seats available for persons attending special occasions. The senators' desks are crafted of North American walnut.

The large display panels that flank the voting board were installed in 1985 when the voting system was computerized. Designed to blend with the limestone wall at the front of the chamber, the panels tell senators which bill is being considered, who sponsors it and the specific item under consideration.



A student senator explains his bill during floor debate.

Student Programs

Unicameral Youth Legislature

The Unicameral Youth Legislature is a four-day legislative simulation in which students assume the roles of lawmakers. Student senators discover the unique process of our nation's only unicameral by sponsoring bills, conducting committee hearings and debating legislation.

Students learn the details of the Unicameral directly from senators, staff and lobbyists using bill topics based on actual legislation considered during the most recent legislative session. Students conduct their legislative duties in the historic Warner Chamber, home to the Nebraska Senate until the state consolidated to a one-house legislature in 1937.

The Unicameral Youth Legislature takes place every June and is open to all high school students. To learn more about the camp and available scholarships, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov/uyl or contact 402-471-2420 or uio@leg.ne.gov.

Meet Your Senator

Invite your state senator to your classroom! America's Legislators Back to School Program, sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, connects senators with students in their districts. The program provides an opportunity for senators to teach students about the responsibilities of a senator, the legislative process and how lawmakers work together to solve problems. We invite you to contact your senator's office throughout the year to arrange a visit.

Likewise, if you are planning a field trip to the Capitol, contact your senator's office to ask if he or she is available to visit with your students while they are here. Tours of the State Capitol can be scheduled through the Tours Office at 402-471-0448.

Please visit NebraskaLegislature.gov/students for more information.

Publications and Online Resources

Unicameral Update

The Unicameral Update is the Legislature's official news source, produced since 1977 by the Clerk of the Legislature's Unicameral Information Office. News stories about legislative hearings and floor debate are posted daily throughout session at Update.Legislature.ne.gov. The site also provides a teacher's guide, which suggests ways to incorporate the Unicameral Update into civics and government lessons.

The online version of the Unicameral Update maintains a Twitter feed at twitter.com/UnicamUpdate and a facebook page at www.facebook.com/UnicameralUpdate. A free weekly print publication also is available. Call 402-471-2788 or email uio@leg.ne.gov to subscribe.

Unicam Kids: A Visit to Your Nebraska Legislature

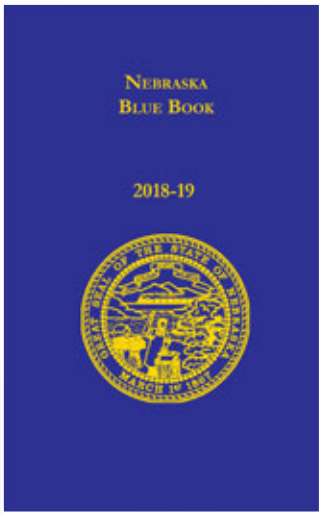
In this illustrated booklet for fourth graders, George Norris, the "father of the Unicameral," provides a guided tour through the Nebraska State Capitol. Along the way, kids learn about their unique unicameral Legislature, the state senators who represent them and the process of how a bill becomes a law. Call 402-471-2788 or email uio@leg.ne.gov to order free copies.

Capitol Classroom

Capitol Classroom is a unique curriculum that teaches high school students about the Unicameral's legislative process. It includes a committee hearing simulation in which students play the roles of state senators, lobbyists and concerned citizens. Materials to guide a floor debate also are provided, along with a public policy development exercise.

Nebraska Blue Book

The Nebraska Blue Book is a reference work containing information about Nebraska's government, geography, economy, history and culture. It can be purchased by calling 402-471-2271 or found online at NebraskaLegislature.gov/bluebook.



CAPITOL CLASSROOM

Legislative Page Program

Legislative pages are college students who assist senators and others by distributing information, making copies and performing various other tasks during committee hearings and floor debate.

Pages work four-hour shifts, five days a week. At some schools, pages also may earn college credit.

To apply, contact the Clerk of the Legislature's Office at 402-471-2271.

Glossary of Legislative Terms

Appropriation Bill ("A" Bill) - a bill to appropriate funds to finance another bill bearing the same number.

Act - the proper name for a bill after it is enacted into law. Also, a term used to refer to a group of laws addressing a particular subject, such as the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act.

Agenda - a daily order of legislative business set by the speaker.

Attorney General's Opinion - a written analysis of a question of law prepared by the attorney general for the governor, the head of an executive department or any state senator.

Biennium - the two-year period in which a single Legislature, such as the 104th Legislature, exists. Also, the two fiscal years for which a single Legislature plans a budget and makes appropriations.

Bracket - to delay consideration of a bill.

Call of the House - a procedure used to compel attendance of unexcused senators in the chamber.

Carry-Over Legislation - bills and resolutions introduced during the regular session in an odd-numbered year and held over for consideration during the regular session in an even-numbered year.

Chair - the presiding officer.

Cloture - a parliamentary action to cease debate on a bill and vote immediately on its advancement. A motion for cloture may be made after full and fair debate on a bill at any stage of consideration.

Committee on Committees - the select committee that proposes appointments of senators to other legislative committees at the beginning of each biennium.

Committee Statement - a statement indicating whether a committee voted to advance or indefinitely postpone a particular bill. It includes the roll call vote of committee members, a summary of the bill and any proposed committee amendments and a list of who testified at the bill's hearing.

Constitutional Amendment Resolution (CA) - a proposal to amend the state constitution, ratify or reject an amendment to the U.S. Constitution or petition Congress about amending the U.S. Constitution. State CA resolutions have the suffix "CA" by the resolution number, and they must be approved by the voters as well as the Legislature.

Consent Calendar - a portion of the agenda in which relatively noncontroversial bills are considered and quickly advanced to the next legislative stage. Usually, a bill on consent calendar can be debated for no more than 15 minutes.

Emergency Clause ("E" Clause) - a provision that allows a bill or a portion of a bill to take effect immediately after the governor signs it or after the Legislature overrides the governor's veto.

Engrossment - the process of preparing a bill for Final Reading by incorporating all adopted amendments.

Enrollment and Review (E&R) - the process of incorporating adopted amendments into a bill and reviewing the bill for technical and grammatical accuracy.

Executive Board of the Legislative Council - a nine-member special committee that oversees legislative services, personnel and other internal affairs of the Legislature. The Executive Board also serves as the Reference Committee.

Executive Session - a closed meeting of a committee to discuss and act on bills and resolutions. An executive session is open only to committee members, staff and the media.

Final Reading - the third and last stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. The clerk reads the entire bill aloud, unless final reading is waived, and senators vote without debate on whether to submit the bill to the governor.

Fiscal Note - a statement prepared by the Legislative Fiscal Office estimating the effect a bill would have on state and/or local expenditures and revenue.

Floor - the area of the legislative chamber where the senators sit. When a committee advances a bill "to the floor," it means the bill is being sent to the full Legislature for consideration.

General File - the first stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. Bills on General File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Select File.

Germane - relevant to the specific subject of the bill being considered. Any amendment that is not germane is out of order.

Hearing - a regularly scheduled committee meeting to receive public comment on proposed bills and resolutions.

House Under Call - the term used when all unexcused senators are required to be in their seats in the chamber and unauthorized personnel must leave the floor.

Indefinitely Postpone (IPP) - to suspend all further activity on a bill or resolution.

Initiative - the power of the people, through the petition process, to enact laws and adopt constitutional amendments independently of the Legislature.

Interim - the period between legislative sessions.

Legislative Bill (LB) - a proposal to create, change or delete one or more laws.

Legislative History - the committee and floor debate records for any bill. A history includes transcripts of the bill's hearing and all floor debate.

Legislative Journal - official record of legislative floor action, including all motions, vote counts, etc.

Legislative Resolution (LR) - a proposal to make a formal expression of opinion, intent or recognition; amend the state or federal constitution; or authorize an interim study of an issue.

Line-Item Veto - the power of the governor to make specific reductions in any part of a budget bill passed by the Legislature.

Machine Vote - a vote taken by electronic voting system. The voting board shows how each senator voted, but only vote totals are entered in the Legislative Journal.

Major Proposal - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution that the speaker designates as important enough for scheduling priority. Each session, up to five bills may be chosen as major proposals, all of which must be senator priority bills and have the approval of two-thirds of the Executive Board.

One-liner - a one-line description of a bill or resolution.

President of the Legislature - the lieutenant governor. While senators address whomever is in the chair as Mr. or Madam President, the lieutenant governor alone holds the official title.

Presiding Officer - the president or the senator currently presiding over legislative proceedings.

Priority Bill - a bill that has priority status and generally is considered ahead of other bills in debate. Each senator may select one priority bill, each committee may select two priority bills and the speaker may select up to 25 priority bills.

Record Vote - a vote for which a record is kept of how each senator voted. The vote is taken by electronic voting system, and the senators' names and corresponding votes are then printed in the Legislative Journal.

Reference Committee - the committee, made up of the nine Executive Board members, that refers bills, resolutions and gubernatorial appointments to other committees.

Referendum - the power of the people, through the petition process, to repeal or amend any act or part of an act of the Legislature.

Regular Session - the annual session that begins the first Wednesday after the first Monday of each January.

Revisor Bill - a bill, prepared by the Office of the Revisor of Statutes, proposing a technical correction or the repeal of an obsolete statute.

Roll Call Vote - a vote during which the senators vote one at a time as the clerk reads their names. Senators cast their votes verbally, and their names and corresponding votes are printed in the Legislative Journal if the house is under call.

Select Committee - a permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to the administration of the Legislature.

Select File - the second stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. Bills on Select File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Final Reading.

Session - a period of time, usually a number of days, during which the Legislature meets and transacts business. See Regular Session, Special Session.

Sine Die - without setting a future date for reconvening. When the Legislature adjourns sine die, the legislative session is finished for the year.

Slip Law - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution printed individually in its approved form after being enacted into law or submitted to voters.

Speaker of the Legislature - the officer of the Legislature, elected from among the senators, who prepares the daily agenda and the session calendar and presides in the absence of the lieutenant governor.

Special Committee - a committee created by law for a specific reason. Except for the Executive Board, special committees have no jurisdiction over bills or resolutions.

Special Session - a limited legislative session called for a specific purpose by the governor or two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

Standing Committee - a permanent committee with subject-matter jurisdiction related to an area of public policy. Almost all bills and resolutions are referred to one of the 14 standing committees.

Statement of Intent - a statement, prepared by the sponsor of a bill, that briefly describes the bill and the reasons why it is being introduced.

Summary Sheet - a daily list of all legislative activity that has taken place in one legislative day, including action taken on bills and resolutions.

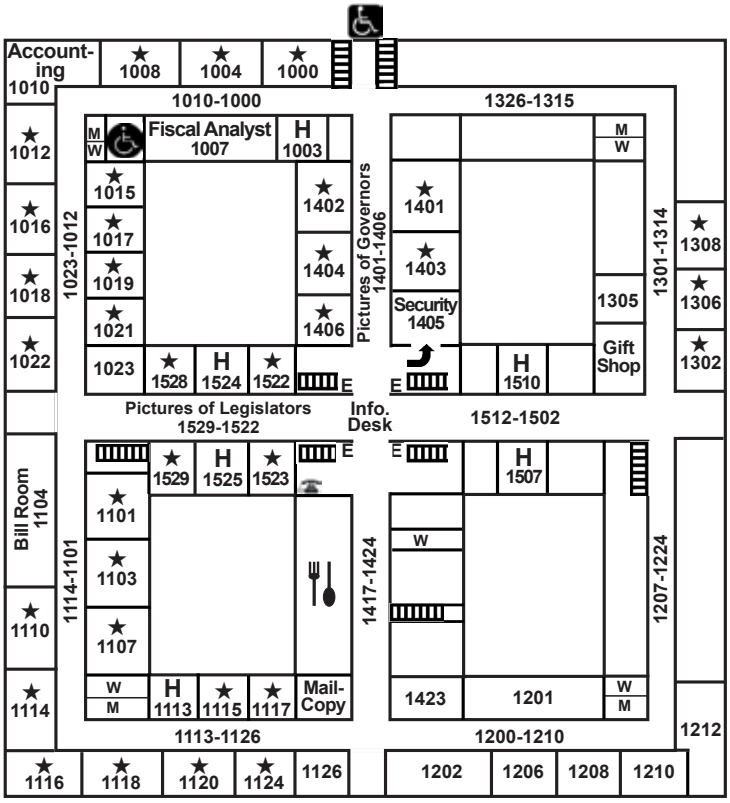
Veto - the power of the governor to reject bills passed by the Legislature. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to either sign or veto a bill. The Legislature then has an opportunity to override the veto.

Veto Override - the power of the Legislature to pass a bill over the governor's veto. A veto override requires the approval of three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature.

Voice Vote - a vote in which senators cast their votes orally and no totals are recorded.

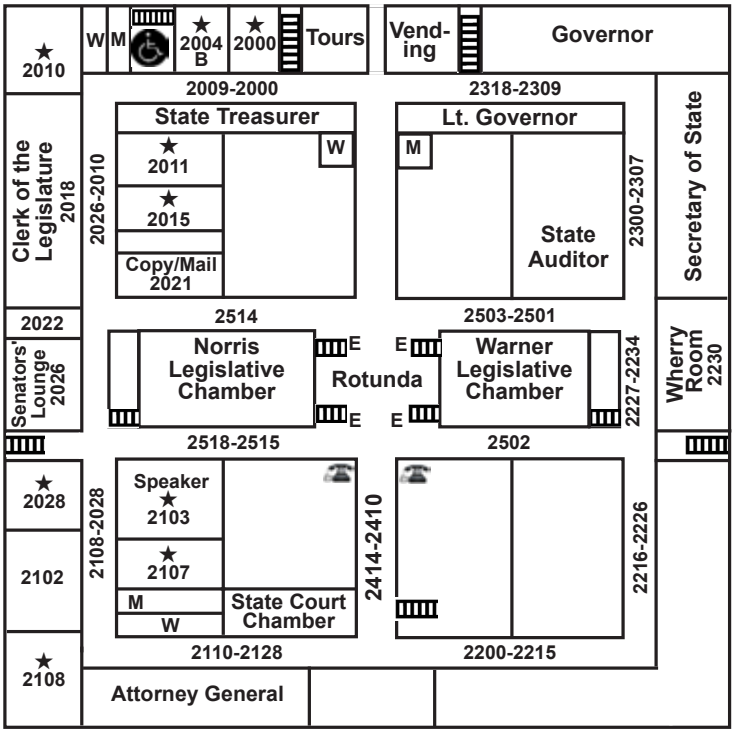
Worksheet - a list, prepared daily, that indicates the status of all bills and resolutions at the end of that legislative day.

The replacement of Capitol heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment began in 2018, requiring temporary relocation of certain legislative offices and committee hearing rooms. Please contact the Clerk of the Legislature's Office (402-471-2271) if you have difficulty locating a particular office or hearing room.



Capitol First Floor

- E - Elevator
- Elevator (Handicap Accessible)
- Entrance (Handicap Accessible
- H - Hearing Rooms
  - Room 1003
  - Room 1113
  - Room 1507
  - Room 1510
  - Room 1524
  - Room 1525
- Cafeteria/Vending Machines
- Public Telephone
- ★ - Senator's Office
- Stairs
- M - Men's Restroom
- W - Women's Restroom



Capitol Second Floor

- E - Elevator
- Elevator (Handicap Accessible)
- ★ - Senator's Office
- Public Telephone
- Stairs
- M - Men's Restroom
- W - Women's Restroom

Published January 2020
Unicameral Information Office • Clerk of the Nebraska Legislature
Nebraska State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604 • Lincoln, NE 68509
402-471-2788 • uio@leg.ne.gov • NebraskaLegislature.gov

Photo credits: pages 2,13 (bottom group): History Nebraska; pages 5-8: University of Nebraska-Lincoln; page 13 (drawing): Nebraska Capitol Collections, Nebraska Capitol Commission
Other photos: Unicameral Information Office