

statewide public radio stations; 26 commercial and noncommercial TV stations, including nine statewide public TV stations.

Nebraska also has an Associated Press wire service operation based in Omaha, with bureaus in Omaha and Lincoln. The AP is an international news organization that compiles news from and distributes news to its members, which include all daily newspapers and most broadcasting outlets.

## GOVERNMENT<sup>42</sup>

### Federal Government

Nebraska is represented in Congress by two senators and three representatives, giving Nebraska five votes in the Electoral College, which elects the U.S. president and vice president. Senators serve six-year terms, while representatives serve two-year terms. Nebraska members of Congress have offices and residences in Nebraska as well as in Washington, D.C.

The federal executive branch is represented in Nebraska by agency branch offices and other entities, many of which are in Lincoln and Omaha. Cabinet-level agencies with a presence in Nebraska include the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, Transportation, Treasury and Veterans Affairs. A major federal presence in the state is Offutt Air Force Base, which employs approximately 12,000 military and civilian personnel. Offutt, located near Bellevue, is home to the Air Force's 55th Wing, as well as the U.S. Strategic Command, which manages the nation's strategic forces in order to deter attacks on the United States. About a dozen independent federal agencies also have Nebraska branch offices, including the U.S. Postal Service, which maintains post offices in almost every community.

The U.S. judicial branch includes courts of appeals and district courts. Nebraska is part of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and the entire state makes up a single district in the district court system. Nebraska presently has two U.S. 8th Circuit judges and five U.S. district judges, including those with senior judge status.

### State Government

Nebraska's first constitution, adopted in 1866, served as the basis for the state's admission to the Union in 1867. This constitution was replaced in 1875 by one that strictly limited state government power. In 1920, Nebraskans approved 41 amendments proposed by a constitutional convention.

Constitutional amendments may be proposed by the state Legislature, by a con-

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<sup>42</sup> Information for this section compiled from the following sources: *The United States Government Manual 2015-16*; Nebraska Constitution; U.S. government agencies; League of Nebraska Municipalities; Nebraska Association of County Officials; Nebraska Department of Administrative Services; Nebraska Department of Revenue; Nebraska State Court Administrator's Office; Nebraska Indian Commission. For further details on federal, state, local and tribal government in Nebraska, see sections elsewhere in this book. See "Nebraska Political Parties and Elections" for information on Nebraska's voting requirements and election dates.

## The Unicameral Legislature<sup>43</sup>

Nebraska is the only state in the nation with a unicameral (one-house) legislature. All other state legislatures have two houses. Nebraska's 49 legislators, called state senators, are elected from 49 districts, each with approximately the same number of residents.

Nebraska also has the nation's only nonpartisan legislature. Senators are elected with no party affiliation next to their names on the ballot, and the Legislature's speaker and committee chairpersons are selected without regard to their party membership.

Before 1937, Nebraska had a two-house, partisan legislature. In 1934, Nebraska voters adopted a constitutional amendment providing for a one-house, nonpartisan legislature. This proposal was submitted to voters through an initiative petition effort. The leading advocate of the proposal was U.S. Sen. George W. Norris, who said the two-house system was outdated and inefficient. For more information about the Nebraska Legislature, see Pages 268-311.



stitutional convention or by the people. Amendments must be approved by voters at a regular or special election in order to be adopted.

The state constitution gives the people the power of initiative, which allows them to propose, by petition, constitutional amendments or statutory changes. The people also have the power of referendum, which may be invoked, by petition, against acts of the Legislature.

Like the federal government, Nebraska's government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. Nebraska is the only state in the nation with a unicameral (one-house) legislature and the only state with a nonpartisan legislature. The 49 legislators, called state senators, serve four-year terms.

Nebraska's chief executive is the governor, who is elected for a four-year term. Other elected four-year term officials are the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, auditor of public accounts, treasurer and attorney general. Within the executive branch are various departments and agencies that perform a variety of functions.

Nebraska's judicial system is lead by a Supreme Court, comprised of a chief justice selected at large and six judges selected from six judicial districts in the state. Beneath this

<sup>43</sup> Source: Unicameral Information Office, Clerk of the Legislature.

court are the Court of Appeals, district courts, county courts, a workers' compensation court, and separate juvenile courts in Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy counties. Judges are appointed by the governor and must be approved periodically for retention by voters.

Since Nebraska's constitution allows no indebtedness, government expenses must be met on a pay-as-you-go basis. Most state revenues are generated through sales and income taxes. Other revenue sources include taxes on insurance premiums, gasoline, tobacco and liquor.

### *Nebraska State Capitol*

The seat of state government in Nebraska is the State Capitol. Nebraska had two territorial capitols in Omaha. Since achieving statehood, Nebraska has had three capitols in Lincoln. The current Capitol, a registered National Historic Landmark, is considered one of the nation's great architectural achievements. The building was designed in 1920 by architect Bertram G. Goodhue as both a practical working environment for state government and an inspiring monument for Nebraskans.

Goodhue assembled a three-person team to decorate the building: Lee Lawrie, sculptor; Hildreth Meière, tile and mosaic designer; and Hartley B. Alexander, thematic consultant for inscription and symbolism. Clad in Indiana Limestone, the Capitol's floor plan is a cross within a square creating four interior courtyards. The square base measures 437 feet on each side. From the base's center rises a 400-foot domed tower, crowned with a 19-foot bronze figure, designed by Lawrie, called "The Sower," which represents agriculture, Nebraska's chief industry. A thematic progression of ornamentation extends from the principal second-floor entrance on the north, around the building's exterior and through its interior.

The building, furnishings and landscaping cost just less than the \$10 million budget. The money was secured by a special capitol levy, and all building expenses were paid upon completion in 1932. The four-phase construction was completed in 10 years. The building's construction was overseen by the original 1919 Capitol Commission composed of the governor, the state engineer and three members appointed by the governor.

The Capitol has been honored by the American Institute of Architects, the National Park Service, the Building Stone Institute and other groups.



**State Capitol in Lincoln**

## Local Government<sup>44</sup>

Nebraska has 93 counties, 70 of which have a commissioner form of government. These 70 are each governed by a board of commissioners with three, five or seven members, elected for four-year terms. The remaining 23 counties have a supervisor-township form of government. These are governed by seven-member boards of supervisors, also elected to four-year terms.

There are 530 cities and villages, or municipalities, in Nebraska. Most cities have a mayor-council form of government, while exceptions like Nebraska City have a commissioner form of government, and several others use the council-manager form. Most villages are governed by a five-member board of trustees. Nebraska's constitution grants the option of home rule to cities with more than 5,000 residents, meaning they may operate under their own charters. Only Lincoln and Omaha use this option.

## Tribal/Sovereign Governments<sup>45</sup>

Within Nebraska are four sovereign Native American tribes that have democratic forms of government. These tribes are the Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux and Winnebago. Tribal governments are governed by tribal constitutions, bylaws, ordinances and laws. The governing bodies are the tribal councils, made up of elected council members who serve a term as determined by the tribal constitution. Elections are held regularly as dictated by the tribal constitution, and tribal members are allowed to vote. Membership for the Omaha, Santee Sioux and Winnebago tribes is determined by a set blood quantum percentage, as determined by documented lineal descent. Membership in the Ponca Tribe, which has no blood quantum requirement, is determined solely by documented lineal descent.

Nebraska is a Public Law 280 state and did assume Public Law 280 jurisdiction over the tribes. Public Law 280 is the federal law that gave the states extensive jurisdiction over tribes, if the state chose to assume such jurisdiction. Nebraska has chosen to retrocede some Public Law 280 jurisdiction back to the federal government. The effect of this retrocession is that the Omaha, Winnebago and Santee tribes have their own judicial and law enforcement agencies and the Ponca tribe has a tribal court system.

# HISTORY<sup>46</sup>

## Earliest Records

Nebraska's fossil beds and glacial deposits show that it once was an inland sea bed that later was elevated above water. The area once had a tropical climate, but during a later period, glaciers covered the land. Archaeologists estimate that prehistoric people inhabited the area between 10,000 and 25,000 years ago, based on discoveries of stone

<sup>44</sup> For more information about local government in Nebraska, see Page 790.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on tribal government in Nebraska, see Page 147 (U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs) and Page 665 (Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs).

<sup>46</sup> Information for this section compiled from the following sources: History Nebraska; Nebraska Indian Commission; Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service; *Nebraska: An Illustrated History*, Frederick C. Luebke, 1995; *History of Nebraska*, James C. Olson and Ronald Clinton Naugle, 1997.