

UNICAMERAL UPDATE

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Budget adjustments clear first round, shortfall remains

Lawmakers advanced three measures this week containing the Appropriations Committee's mid-biennium budget adjustments and the proposed payment of claims against the state.

The state budget is structured on a two-year basis, with the budget enacted during legislative sessions held in odd-numbered years. Adjustments are made during sessions held in even-numbered years.

Before the 2026 session began in January, senators were facing a \$471.5 million budget shortfall. That hole got deeper following a February meeting of the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board, which lowered revenue projections by another \$175 million.

The Appropriations Committee's budget adjustment package would reduce the gap, but not close it entirely — leaving the state roughly \$125 million below the minimum reserve requirement. The projected financial status for the next biennium, which ends in 2029, is \$874.1 million below the minimum reserve.

Lawmakers began debate March 9 on LB1071, the main budget adjustment bill introduced by Speaker John Arch of La Vista on behalf of Gov. Jim Pillen. The measure would provide, change and eliminate provisions related to appropriations for state expenses for the biennium ending June 30, 2027.

Among other changes from the bill as introduced, the committee proposal would reduce General Fund appropriations by \$52.4 million in FY2025-26 and \$182.4 million in FY2026-27. It also would boost the state's bottom line by reappropriating \$36.3 million of General Funds already appropriated to a variety of state agencies but not yet spent.

Sen. Robert Clements of Elmwood, chairperson of the committee, said the remaining shortfall would need to



Speaker John Arch (left) and Sen. Robert Clements confer during budget debate March 10.

be addressed during the second round of debate through additional cuts. He added that passage of several revenue-generating bills that are working their way through the Legislature also could help balance the budget.

Clements said the committee would be meeting daily to determine additional cuts.

An amendment offered by Plymouth Sen. Tom Brandt would

remove a provision in the committee package meant to provide “gap year” funding for private school scholarships.

The federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 created a federal tax credit starting Jan. 1, 2027, that allows individuals a dollar-for-dollar, nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$1,700 for donations to organizations that provide scholarships to students attending private and religious schools.

The governor's proposed budget adjustments included \$7 million in FY2026-27 to fund scholarships in Nebraska until the federal law takes effect. The committee amendment would lower that number to \$3.65 million, with \$3.5 million for scholarships and \$150,000 for administrative costs. Families would have to be at 185% of the federal poverty level or less to qualify for scholarship funds.

Brandt noted that Nebraska voters repealed a 2023 law passed by the Legislature authorizing the use of state general funds for private school scholarships. Voters were clear in their rejection of the concept, he said, and senators should respect that by not diverting public funds to private schools.

“For me, this is fundamental,” Brandt said. “This is about the First Amendment; separation of church and state.”

Seward Sen. Jana Hughes supported the amendment, echoing Brandt's sentiments. Hughes said she had been supportive of such scholarships in the past, but that voters

(continued page 2)

Budget adjustments clear first round, shortfall remains

(continued from front page)

had “overwhelmingly” said they don’t want general funds supporting private schools.

“I voted for these scholarship programs when I was here at the beginning of my term, but I will listen to Nebraskans, and I will now not support this,” Hughes said.

Also speaking in favor, Sen. Megan Hunt of Omaha said the value of private school education was not the issue at hand, but whether taxpayer dollars should be used to fund it.

“What we’re talking about is whether public funding should be redirected to subsidize private education out of the General Fund in a time when we have no damn money,” Hunt said.

Opposing the amendment, Omaha Sen. Christy Armendariz said children need educational options. She

characterized not providing private school assistance to low-income families who cannot afford to move to a public school district that better fits their child’s needs as a form of “educational redlining.”

She said expending public funds on scholarships now is a “strong, long-term strategy” to save taxpayer dollars down the road by “turning the tide of generational poverty through educational achievement.”

“I believe it is the responsibility of Nebraskans to support a child’s education through 12th grade, whatever that education looks like for that individual child,” Armendariz said.

The Brandt amendment failed on a vote of 23-17. Twenty-five votes were needed. During debate the following day, Brandt said he would refile the amendment on the next round of debate and would not support the budget package going forward without its adoption.

Another amendment brought by Syracuse Sen. Bob Hallstrom would add the amended provisions of his LB1058 to the main budget adjustment bill.

Those provisions would direct the Nebraska Tourism Commission to develop a program to make a grant to an organization promoting tourism that is located along the Missouri River and within five miles of a first class city.

As introduced, the proposal stated legislative intent to appropriate \$150,000 in general funds. As amended, it instead would transfer those funds from the State Visitors Promotion Cash Fund.

Hallstrom said the funds are intended to fill a gap in federal funding for the Missouri River Basin Lewis & Clark Visitors Center near Nebraska City, which he said serves



Sen. Tom Brandt said he would renew his attempt to pull private scholarship funding from LB1071 on the next round of debate.

UNICAMERAL UPDATE

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Sen. Bob Hallstrom secured funding for a visitors center located in his legislative district.

approximately 10,000 visitors per year.

A \$150,000 federal grant lapsed in 2025, he said, and the transfer in his proposal would bridge the funding gap while efforts are underway to reinstate federal support.

Clements spoke in favor of the amendment, saying the land the center is on would revert back to the federal government if it is forced to close. In addition, he said, the transfer would be an appropriate use of Nebraska Tourism Commission funds.

The Hallstrom amendment was adopted on a 34-1 vote, and the Legislature adjourned for the day without taking any additional action on the budget adjustment package.

When debate resumed March 10, senators rejected three minor adjustments to LB1071, including an amendment offered by Lincoln Sen. Danielle Conrad to remove \$75,000 in funding to the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office in FY2025-26 and \$175,000 in FY2026-27.



Sen. Danielle Conrad attempted to strike funding from the secretary of state's office intended to cover health care premium costs.

Conrad said Secretary of State Bob Evnen has proven to be a "sharp partisan" who has used his office to testify in favor of voter suppression efforts and recently provided Nebraska voter registration information to the federal government in service of those efforts.

Sen. Kathleen Kauth of Omaha opposed the amendment, saying Evnen's transmission of voter data was done in compliance with a lawful request from the federal government and is an example of the secretary of state fulfilling the duties of his office.

"The implication that the secretary of state is acting improperly is, I think, more wishful thinking and general irritation with voter integrity measures coming from the progressives in our body," she said.

Clements also opposed Conrad's amendment, saying the provisions it would strike give the secretary of state authority to spend cash on hand to cover "huge" increases in health insurance premiums for employees of that office.

Conrad countered that while she appreciates that Secretary of State Evnen is dealing with "exorbitant" health care costs for office employees, everyday Nebraskans are facing the same challenges without help from lawmakers.

"If we're asking ... businesses and families in Nebraska to do more with less to cover skyrocketing health insurance costs, then the secretary of state can do the same," she said.

The amendment failed 8-29. A second Conrad amendment that would state legislative intent to prohibit cuts to the state's child care subsidy program was rejected on a vote of 12-31.

Also considered was an amendment from Bellevue Sen. Victor Rountree that would undo a proposed cut included in the committee amendment of \$450,000 annually over

(continued page 4)



Sen. Victor Rountree said the state should continue funding for successful smoking cessation programs.

Budget adjustments clear first round, shortfall remains

(continued from page 3)

the next two fiscal years from the Tobacco Prevent and Control program.

Senators rejected the Rountree amendment 12-28. After eight hours of debate, Arch offered a motion to invoke cloture, which ceases debate and forces a vote on the bill. The motion was adopted on a vote of 35-12.

Lawmakers then adopted the committee amendment 34-12, which incorporated the amended provisions of the following bills:

- LB858, introduced by Omaha Sen. John Fredrickson, which would appropriate \$500,000 in FY2026-27 from the Health Care Cash Fund to the state Department of Health and Human Services for aid to federally qualified health centers;
- LB1070, sponsored by Sen. Robert Dover of Norfolk, which would appropriate \$6 million from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund in FY2026-27 to be disbursed to approved projects under the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act;
- LB1140, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Ashlei Spivey, which would earmark \$500,000 of existing appropriated general funds in FY2026-2027 within the state Department of Education Vocational Rehabilitation program for a multi-trade pre-apprenticeship pilot program serving young adults in a metropolitan class city;
- LB1190, introduced by Conrad, which would amend an earmark to expand eligibility for aid for mentorship programs for nonprofit organizations administered by the state Department of Economic Development; and
- LB1248, introduced by Dover, which would appropriate \$38 million in federal funds previously appropriated to the state Department of Water, energy and Environment for a grant to a first class city for wastewater treatment facilities, with certification of matching funds by an eligible applicant.

LB1071 advanced to select file on a 32-14 vote.



Sen. John Fredrickson



Sen. Robert Dover



Sen. Ashlei Spivey

Fund transfers

LB1072, also introduced by Arch at the request of the governor, would provide for and change transfers from the Cash Reserve Fund and make a number of changes to other fund transfers, agency powers and duties and a variety of programs.

An Appropriations Committee amendment would authorize sweeps of partial or full balances from dozens of agency cash funds to the General Fund totaling \$38.6 million in fiscal year 2025-26 and \$32.8 million in FY2026-27.

Clements said the priority for committee members was to take only “extra” money from those agency funds.

“We took a lot of time looking at these cash funds and making sure that they were sustainable — taking off excess dollars that haven’t been spent but making sure that they’re able to fully meet their projected expenses for these two years,” he said.

The amendment also would make various transfers between existing funds and increase by \$130 million a transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the General Fund in FY2026-27, leaving a balance equal to roughly 10% of state expenses in the state’s so-called “rainy day fund.”

Fredrickson expressed concern about the committee’s continued reliance on cash fund sweeps to balance the state budget. Doing so, he said, undermines the long-term stability of programs that the Legislature saw fit to establish and the agencies that count on those funds to function.

He said lawmakers should be wary of the temptation to “glamorize” efficiency efforts in the aftermath of the work of the federal Department of Government Efficiency.

“Government, of course, needs to be efficient,” Fredrickson said. “But sometimes when we cut things to the bare minimum and [to] the bone, it does the exact opposite. It makes government very inefficient.”

During first-round debate March 10, Lincoln Sen. Jane Raybould offered an amendment to transfer \$78.75 million in FY2026-27 to the General Fund from the Perkins County Canal Project Fund.

The fund, which lawmakers created in 2022 to pay for a canal to divert South Platte River water from Colorado to Nebraska under a 1923 interstate compact, currently has a balance of approximately \$613 million.

The amendment also would authorize a \$5.13 million transfer from the canal fund this fiscal year to the Water Recreation Enhancement Fund and a \$6 million transfer



Sen. Jane Raybould attempted to replace dozens of cash fund sweeps with dollars from the Perkins County Canal Project Fund.

in FY2026-27 to the Water Resources Cash Fund.

Raybould said the transfers could be used to restore the balances of funds swept by the committee amendment, including the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund. She said senators have “clung” to the canal fund as a “sacred cow” while sweeping money from veterans’ aid, the arts and many other projects and priorities.

Describing herself as an “enthusiastic supporter” of the canal project, Raybould said the majority of money in the project fund won’t be needed for many years while lawsuits play out, environmental studies are concluded and land is acquired.

Several lawmakers, including Central City Sen. Loren Lippincott, opposed the amendment. He said the canal project is ahead of schedule and that maintaining momentum is “critical” to protect against development by Colorado that could hinder the project and to prevent costly construction delays.

Additionally, he said, leaving money in the fund demonstrates Nebraska’s commitment to seeing the project through.

“Securing Nebraska water is essential to the state’s economic prosperity and long-term welfare,” Lippincott said.

The Raybould amendment failed on a vote of 9-30. The Legislature adjourned for the day without taking additional votes on the measure.

Other amendments

When debate resumed March 11, lawmakers rejected a series of additional amendments that would have stricken a variety of fund transfers from LB1072. They approved one minor change, however, offered by Whitman Sen.

Tanya Storer – an amendment to undo a transfer of \$34,000 from the Niobrara Council Easement Defense Fund to the General Fund.



Sen. Tanya Storer

Storer said the sweep would leave the Niobrara Council unable to defend against future challenges to easements along the Niobrara National Scenic River. Easements exist in perpetuity, she said, and the council has a legal responsibility to hold grant funds in reserve to defend them if needed.

“If we sweep these funds, not only are we putting the Niobrara Council but ultimately the state of Nebraska at risk for a legal challenge,” Storer said.

The amendment was adopted 27-0.

The committee amendment also would make a variety of transfers between funds, including \$1.5 million in the current and next fiscal year from the Nebraska Veterans’ Aid Fund to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs Cash Fund.

Rountree offered an amendment to eliminate that transfer. He said moving dollars from a fund that provides direct emergency aid to individual veterans for housing, food and other urgent needs to a more general departmental fund would set a bad precedent.

“Instead of transferring these dollars out, we should increase their availability, or increase the services that we give to the veterans,” Rountree said.

Omaha Sen. Bob Andersen opposed the amendment. He said the Nebraska Veterans’ Aid Fund has a balance of more than \$53 million and pays out approximately \$1.5 million in aid annually to veterans. The transfer authorized in the committee amendment would come from interest on the fund and not the principal balance, he said, and would be used for upgrades to the state’s veterans’ homes.

“The fund is going to continue to grow, it’s not going to be depleted,” Andersen said. “The veterans are going to continue to be supported. They’re going to continue getting what they need.”

The amendment failed on a 20-20 vote. Twenty-five votes were needed.

An effort by Kearney Sen. Stan Clouse to remove a provision that would change the allocation of funds within the Municipal Equalization Fund also fell short. Clouse said the fund serves as a passthrough for a portion of sales tax dollars that are returned



Sen. Stan Clouse

(continued page 6)

Budget adjustments clear first round, shortfall remains

(continued from page 5)

to cities in the form of equalization aid to encourage municipalities to keep levies low.

The committee amendment would move approximately \$14 million from the fund to the Department of Revenue Enforcement Fund. Clouse said a better solution would be to change the formula to allow more dollars to be returned to cities.

The amendment failed on a 20-16 vote.

Sen. Dunixi Guereca of Omaha attempted to remove a provision in the committee amendment that would transfer \$5 million from the Nebraska Cultural Preservation Endowment Fund to the General Fund. He said the cultural endowment acts as a “force multiplier” by providing state matching dollars to philanthropic donations that increase the impact of the arts across the state.



Sen. Dunixi Guereca

Clements opposed the amendment, saying the transfer still would leave \$10 million in the endowment fund. Those dollars will continue to earn interest, he said, allowing the Nebraska Cultural Endowment to continue as a successful program.

The Guereca amendment failed 14-23.

Lawmakers rejected four additional amendments, including an attempt to transfer dollars to provide funds for financial literacy. After eight hours of discussion over two days, Arch offered a cloture motion March 11, which was adopted on a vote of 34-12.

Senators then adopted the committee amendment 33-11. Among other provisions, the amendment includes the following bills:

- LB844, introduced by Sen. Victor Rountree of Bellevue, which would expand grant eligibility under the Site and Building Development Fund to authorize a grant of \$100,000 to a nonprofit organization for building rehabilitation for purposes of food distribution in certain counties;
- LB862, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Jason Prokop, which would extend intent language under the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act for regional coaches and job-embedded training relating to evidence-based reading instruction until FY2029-30;



Sen. Jason Prokop

- LB992, introduced by Sen. Robert Dover of Norfolk, which would create the Nebraska Technology Infrastructure Cash Fund and require that documentation related to software, informational technology hardware and a planning report be included with agency budget requests;
- LB1229, sponsored by Sen. Paul Strommen of Sidney, which would require the state Department of Health and Human Services to designate a unique budget subprogram for purposes of federal law for the Rural Health Transformation Program; and
- LB1231, also introduced by Strommen, which would amend the Animal Damage Control Cash Fund to include intent to appropriate funds for the animal damage control program and amend the Panhandle Improvement Project Cash Fund to authorize transfers to the Animal Damage Control Cash Fund.



Sen. Paul Strommen

Following adoption of the committee amendment, senators advanced LB1072 to select file 33-12.

State claims

Finally, lawmakers advanced a measure March 12 that would provide for payment of claims against the state. If a person sues the state of Nebraska, he or she files a claim with the State Claims Board. Approved claims exceeding \$50,000 must be reviewed by the Legislature.



Sen. Kathleen Kauth introduced a measure to pay claims against the state.

LB1133, sponsored by Business and Labor Committee chairperson Sen. Kathleen Kauth of Omaha, would approve:

- a settlement reached by the attorney general on behalf of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs regarding VA disability and dependent benefits totaling \$51,791;
- an indemnification claim totaling \$354,456 to settle with a former Nebraska State Patrol captain who claimed retaliation after investigating and disciplining troopers accused of significant criminal activity and unlawful conduct;
- five Worker's Compensation Court claims totaling \$882,500; and
- a variety of state agency write-offs totaling \$2.843 million.

A committee amendment, adopted 33-0, would add three workers' compensation claims totaling \$285,000. An additional amendment from Kauth would add a \$289,260 line-of-duty claim for a Nebraska State Trooper who died when struck by a plow while assisting at an accident scene during a 2025 snowstorm.

Following the 34-0 adoption of the Kauth amendment, lawmakers advanced LB1133 to select file on a 36-0 vote. ■

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Current hearing schedules at:
NebraskaLegislature.gov/calendar

Thursday, March 19

Agriculture
Room 1525 - 12:00 p.m.
AM2503 (DeKay) Amending LB1187

Health & Human Services
Room 1510 - 12:15 p.m.
AM2642 (Health & Human Services) Amending LB912

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Friday, February 20, 2026 Latest: CPA licensure rules updated

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- Bill considered to eliminate Brand Committee, make inspections voluntary
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- Constitutional amendment to expand TIF use considered
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Resources

- Legislative interim hearing schedule
- Live video of Legislature via NPM
- Legislative publications
- Civic education resources
- Legislative calendar

JUDICIARY

February 20, 2026

Controlled substance cleanup bill amended to add fentanyl enhancement, advanced

AGRICULTURE

Omnibus ag bill approved

A bill intended to modernize regulatory language and update certain fees related to fertilizer and soil conditioners was given final approval March 12.

LB948, introduced by the Agriculture Committee, renames the Nebraska Commercial Fertilizer and Soil Conditioners Act as the Nebraska Commercial Fertilizer and Beneficial Substances Act. It also incorporates beneficial substances — such as biostimulants that support a plant’s natural processes — as regulated products and revises fees collected under the act.

The bill adds a new registration fee of \$50 per product to cover the state Department of Agriculture’s cost of reviewing product labels, increases the minimum tonnage inspection fee from \$5 to \$10 and increases an annual license fee for distributing fertilizers and beneficial substances from \$15 to \$25.

Finally, the measure includes provisions of LB947, also introduced by the committee, that:

- revise authority for license, inspection and certification fees under the Plant Protection and Plant Pest Act;
- repeal obsolete sections of state law relating to non-functioning agricultural organizations;
- update fees under the Nebraska Pesticide Act;
- amend the department’s duties relating to publishing and distributing the “Weeds of the Great Plains” book;
- repeal the Nebraska Poultry and Egg Act on Dec. 31, 2027; and
- terminate the Potato Develop-

ment Cash Fund and direct residual funds to the Plant Protection and Plant Pest Cash Fund. LB948 passed on a 35-10 vote and takes effect immediately.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Executive board publication bill advanced

A measure that would update state law related to the compilation, printing and distribution of several official legislative documents was advanced from first-round debate March 12.

LB1236, introduced by the Executive Board, would consolidate those duties under the Clerk of the Legislature’s Office. Blair Sen. Ben Hansen, committee chairperson, said the bill would centralize work that currently is spread across a number of entities, including the Secretary of State’s Office and the Nebraska Supreme Court.

“By consolidating these functions within the legislative branch, the bill aims to improve efficiency, reduce administrative burdens on other branches of government and ensure timely access to legislative materials for public officials,” Hansen said.

A committee amendment, adopted 29-0 replaced the bill with a modified version of the proposal. Under the amendment, the clerk of the legislature would be authorized to distribute session laws, the legislative journal and state statutes in print, electronic or both formats.

The amendment also would change current mandatory and fixed numbers of copies to “up to” and “provided upon request.” Hansen said the change would promote flexibility and reduce unnecessary printing, poten-

tially saving up to \$300,000 if more people move to an electronic format, without compromising access to important documents.

LB1236 advanced to select file on a 29-0 vote.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Gaming updates pass final round

Lawmakers approved a bill March 12 that makes a series of changes to the state’s racetrack gaming industry and authorizes music bingo and progressive jackpots for certain organizations.

LB1001, introduced by the General Affairs Committee, updates laws governing racetrack operations, wagering distribution, horse registration, simulcasting and problem gambling oversight.

Among other provisions, the bill:

- updates racetrack licensing and simulcasting regulations;
- allows racetracks to petition the Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission for waivers or modifications of minimum race requirements under specific circumstances;
- mandates timely registration of Nebraska-bred thoroughbreds and quarter horses;
- transfers oversight and funding of the Nebraska Commission on Problem Gaming from the state Department of Revenue to the commission;
- allows waiver of a 30-day residency exception for certain mares;
- provides for a waiver from the 90-day requirement that a dam be in Nebraska continuously

prior to foaling;

- authorizes gaming tax proceeds to support problem gambling programs; and
- allows 19-year-olds to participate in keno at licensed racetrack enclosures in an area separate from the casino gaming floor.

The measure includes provisions of three additional bills, including LB828, introduced by Niobrara Sen. Barry DeKay, which broadens the definition of “operator” in laws governing gift enterprises and savings promotion raffles.



Sen. Barry DeKay

LB1047, sponsored by Sen. Rick Holdcroft of Bellevue, expands the Nebraska Bingo Act to include music bingo, in which winning outcomes are based on song titles, musical artists or music genres.



Sen. Rick Holdcroft

Those provisions also increase the amount that can be charged for each bingo card from 25 cents to \$1, the maximum prize amount that a licensed organization may award from \$25 to \$50 per game and the number of special event bingo permits a qualifying nonprofit may obtain annually from two to four.

Finally, Blair Sen. Ben Hansen’s LB1120 allows a licensed organization to conduct a lottery or raffle game with a progressive jackpot or multiple drawing dates, such as the Queen of Hearts. Tickets to such games may be sold through a vending or dispensing device.



Sen. Ben Hansen

A licensee must register each lottery or raffle game with the state Department of Revenue and post the rules in a visible location where the game is conducted or tickets are sold. At least 50% of the gross proceeds from such games must be used for prizes.

Lawmakers passed LB1001 on a 45-0 vote and the measure takes effect immediately.

GOVERNMENT, MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS

Government cleanup bill clears first round

A measure that would update provisions of law related to the state Department of Veterans’ Affairs advanced from general file March 12.

LB787, sponsored by Sen. Rita Sanders of Bellevue, would update the ex officio membership of the Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs. The bill would allow the state Department of Economic Development and the director of Veterans’ Affairs to specify a designee to serve in their place.



Sen. Rita Sanders

It also would add as members the commanders of the 95th Wing, 90th Missile Wing, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, U.S. Department of Defense Nebraska service secretary and any wing or headquarters positioned or established in Nebraska in the future.

“Having these leaders at the table when the commission meets will facilitate cooperation between Nebraska

and our federal partners and allow the voting members of the commission to make better informed decisions,” Sanders said.

The measure also would eliminate an annual reporting requirement and instead make the commission’s report due upon request of the governor or when the commission deems drafting of an updated version appropriate.

Lawmakers advanced LB787 to select file on a 27-0 vote.

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

HHS omnibus bill given first-round approval

A measure that would establish an endorsement process for community health worker training programs was amended to become an omnibus proposal and advanced to the second round of debate March 12.

LB912, as introduced by Gering Sen. Brian Hardin, would create the Community Health Worker Training Endorsement Act.



Sen. Brian Hardin

Under the bill, the state Department of Health and Human Services would be required to establish a statewide process to endorse community health worker training programs that meet minimum standards of quality and ensure services provided by community health workers are eligible for reimbursement by Medicaid and private insurers.

The department also would be responsible for establishing rules and regulations required for training

programs to receive endorsement, including:

- setting reasonable fees;
- identifying core competencies;
- approving programs and training providers; and
- defining the application, approval, denial, suspension, revocation and renewal process for training endorsements.

The completion of a community health worker training program would not constitute licensure, certification or credentialing under the Uniform Credentialing Act.

Hardin said community health workers improve access to care by serving as liaisons between community members in need and the systems that provide nonclinical health, behavioral health and social services, such as health education, outreach, patient navigation and care coordination.

Creating endorsed training programs would ensure community health workers receive instruction in the skills needed to effectively provide non-clinical services and work appropriately alongside licensed professionals within the health care system, he said.

“Supporting community health workers through consistent training standards can lead to improved health outcomes, a stronger workforce and more efficient use of our health care resources,” Hardin said.

A Health and Human Services Committee amendment replaced the bill with a modified version of the original proposal and would require DHHS to establish the rules and regulations for community health worker training programs no later than July 1, 2027.

The committee amendment also includes amended provisions from the following bills:

- LB735, sponsored by Bellevue Sen. Victor Rountree, which would adopt the Respiratory

Care Interstate Compact to allow licensed respiratory care therapists to practice across participating states;



Sen. Victor Rountree

- LB736, also introduced by Rountree, which would adopt the Athletic Trainer Compact with the goal of improving public access to athletic training services;

- LB887, sponsored by Sen. Bob Hallstrom of Syracuse, which would allow accredited pharmacy programs to determine the date and time of the jurisprudence examination for pharmacy students and clarify that certified pharmacy technician requirements do not apply to pharmacist interns under the supervision of a pharmacist;



Sen. Bob Hallstrom

- LB891, sponsored by Blair Sen. Ben Hansen, which would update the Child Care Licensing Act to align state law with federal background check regulations, clarify how self-reported licensing investigations appear on public records, allow certain volunteers to be counted toward staff-to-child ratios and prohibit residency requirements for family child care homes; and



Sen. Ben Hansen

- LB892, also introduced by

Hansen, which would prohibit a massage therapist from practicing in a location other than a licensed massage therapy establishment, except as permitted by DHHS.

Hansen offered an amendment to add provisions of his LB1012 to the committee amendment. The proposal, adopted 31-0, would allow a physical therapist to file a medical lien for damages awarded to an injured patient.

Hansen said medical liens – which provide repayment for medical treatment and allow patients to defer bill payment while they receive critical rehabilitative treatment – currently can be filed only by physicians, nurses, chiropractors, hospitals and EMS providers.

He said the amendment would allow physical therapists to provide prompt care to patients with a reasonable expectation of payment.

Sen. Beau Ballard of Lincoln also offered an amendment to the committee amendment that included provisions of his LB936.



Sen. Beau Ballard

The amendment, adopted 33-0, would allow a nurse practitioner who has completed the necessary education and training to perform fluoroscopy, and allow a licensed medical radiographer to use fluoroscopy in collaboration with a qualified nurse practitioner.

Ballard said a credentialing review report conducted by DHHS found that expanding fluoroscopy use to include nurse practitioners would improve access to care, especially for Nebraskans living in rural parts of the state.

An amendment brought by Ralston Sen. Merv Riepe, adopted 32-0, would add the amended provisions of his LB1211 to the committee package.

Those provisions would update the Automated Medications Systems Act to allow licensed pharmacies to operate automated pickup kiosks that securely store and dispense prescription medications to patients and caregivers.



Sen. Merv Riepe

Under the amendment, kiosks must be located on property owned or leased by the licensed pharmacy or at a hospital, health clinic, health care practitioner facility or rural emergency hospital where the licensed pharmacy operates. A licensed pharmacy would be prohibited from dispensing controlled substances through a kiosk unless it was located at an authorized hospital with proper oversight.

The measure also would require a licensed pharmacy to obtain annual licensure for each kiosk, designate pharmacist oversight, comply with all standard dispensing and labeling requirements and offer pharmacist consultation. The fee for license application or renewals could not exceed \$50.

Riepe said automated pickup kiosks are authorized in 38 states and provide greater flexibility to patients who are not able to pick up their prescriptions during a pharmacy's normal operational hours.

"[This] is a great opportunity to let medical technology be utilized in Nebraska, expand access to medications and do so with clear accountability," Riepe said.

Following the 31-0 adoption of the committee amendment, lawmakers advanced LB912 to select file on a vote of 31-0.

JUDICIARY

Charitable asset transfer updates amended, advanced

A measure intended to streamline the transfer of assets left to charitable organizations after a person dies received first-round approval March 12.

LB758, introduced by Elkhorn Sen. R. Brad von Gillern, would allow a charitable organization to claim certain assets left to it — such as funds in financial accounts, retirement plans, insurance policies or other payable-on-death transfers — by submitting a sworn affidavit and basic documentation.



Sen. R. Brad von Gillern

Required documentation would include proof of the organization's nonprofit status, proof that the person who owned the property has died and proof that the person signing the affidavit is authorized to act on the charity's behalf.

The proposal also addresses nontestamentary transfers on death, which are assets that pass directly to a named beneficiary without going through a will or probate court. LB758 would create a statutory process allowing charitable beneficiaries to request information about the property and claim it directly from the person or institution holding the asset.

Von Gillern said the transfer process can be slow and complicated when individuals leave assets to charities. Some financial institutions require charities to open accounts and provide personal information from staff or board members, he said, causing delays that can leave organizations waiting months or even up to a year

to receive donations.

LB758 aims to remove those barriers and allow charities to receive the assets more quickly, von Gillern said, so that funds can be used for their intended charitable purposes.

A Judiciary Committee amendment, adopted 30-0, replaced the bill with a modified version of the proposal.

The amendment would require affidavits to include the decedent's name and address, a description of the property, the charity's contact information, a statement confirming the organization's entitlement to the asset and other supporting documentation.

Among other provisions, the amendment also would revise compliance timelines, prohibit charities from being required to open accounts or provide personal information from staff or board members and define "reasonable delay" to include situations in which a transfer is subject to a court order or would violate certain federal banking laws or Securities and Exchange Commission self-regulatory rules.

Lincoln Sen. Carolyn Bosn, chairperson of the Judiciary Committee, said the amendment also would make technical changes to motor vehicle title statutes, allowing county treasurers to accept an affidavit as proof of ownership when transferring a vehicle, manufactured home or mobile home that is left to a charity.

The change would not create a new type of vehicle transfer, she said, but would ensure the affidavit process works with the existing county title system and avoids delays or confusion.

Following adoption of the committee amendment, senators voted 32-0 to advance LB758 to select file.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Utility-scale battery storage framework amended, advanced

A proposed regulatory framework for privately developed battery energy storage facilities advanced to select file March 12 after it was amended to include three other energy-related measures.

LB1010, sponsored by Plymouth Sen. Tom Brandt, would require private developers to apply to the Nebraska Power Review Board before constructing or acquiring an energy storage resource, which the bill defines as a facility that can receive electricity from the electrical grid or an associated generation source and store it for later injection into the grid.



Sen. Tom Brandt

Brandt said large-scale battery storage projects are becoming more common across the country and can provide certain benefits, including additional electrical capacity and higher grid reliability.

“[The bill] ensures that ... Nebraska can welcome private investment while still protecting the public power model and ensuring these projects operate in a way that benefits our utilities, our infrastructure and ultimately the people of the state,” he said.

LB1010 would require a private electric supplier to show that they have:

- entered into, or will enter into, a power purchase agreement or other contract with a Nebraska public power supplier for the purchase of the ESR’s electric energy and capacity throughout

its operational life;

- jointly filed the application with the public power entity;
- obtained written consent from affected electric suppliers; and
- entered into a joint transmission development agreement with the public power supplier that owns the transmission facilities that will interconnect with the ESR.

The proposal also would expand the existing eminent domain authority of public power districts to include property used in the storage of electrical energy.

A Natural Resources Committee amendment, adopted 26-0, replaced the bill with a modified version of the original proposal and provisions of two other measures considered by the committee this session.

Under the amendment, a private electric supplier seeking to build an ESR would not have to file a joint application with a public power entity. Brandt said the amendment also would exempt ESRs from the use of eminent domain by public power suppliers.

The amended provisions of LB1064, introduced by Sen. Eliot Bostar of Lincoln,



Sen. Eliot Bostar

would create the Large Load Customer Regulation Act. They would require public power suppliers to establish standards for interconnecting retail customers with a new or expanded load of more than 20 megawatts at a single site.

The standards would require large load customers to disclose whether they are pursuing a similar interconnection request and pay a fee to the interconnecting public power supplier for initial load studies.

Bostar said these provisions are intended to discourage “interconnection shopping” in which a developer applies with multiple utilities for a potential project. The practice makes it more difficult for public power suppliers to make accurate load forecasts, he said.

The measure also would authorize public power suppliers to establish rates, charges and operating standards for each large load customer and impose electric service requirements for those customers in addition to the proposed standards.

Finally, Bostar’s proposal would require public power suppliers to develop a procedure requiring large load customers to curtail their electricity use or deploy onsite backup generating facilities during times of grid instability or emergencies.

The amended provisions of LB1111, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh, would allow public power suppliers to impose certain requirements on large data centers, including terms or conditions requiring data centers to pay the full cost of providing their electric service.



Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh

The measure also would require the owner or operator of a data center to submit an annual report to the state Department of Water, Energy and Environment and the Natural Resources Committee. The report would include the data center’s size, location and annual electricity demand and water usage, among other information.

Brandt introduced an amendment, adopted 25-0, that included provisions of LB1193, introduced by Sen. Jason Prokop of Lincoln.

They would impose the annual nameplate capacity tax – currently

paid by owners of private renewable energy generation facilities — on owners of ESRs with a nameplate capacity of 100 kilowatts or more. The measure also would exempt certain equipment used in ESRs from the tangible personal property tax.



Sen. Jason Prokop

Prokop offered an amendment he said was intended to protect Nebraska ratepayers by prohibiting public power districts from making certain “inappropriate” purchases, including sports tickets, country club memberships and private flights.

Niobrara Sen. Barry DeKay opposed the amendment, saying a private aircraft is “essential” to the operations of the Nebraska Public Power District, which has a large service territory. NPPD policies already prevent spending on most of the other items in question, he said.

After voting 7-15 to reject Prokop’s amendment, senators advanced LB1010 to select file on a vote of 27-0.

NEBRASKA RETIREMENT SYSTEMS

Retirement cleanup bill clears first round

Lawmakers advanced a cleanup measure from general file March 12 related to Nebraska’s public employee retirement systems.

LB820, introduced by the Nebraska Retirement Systems Committee, would amend various sections of state law governing state and county retirement plans administered by the

Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems, the Public Employees Retirement Board and the Nebraska Investment Council.

As introduced, the bill would:

- consolidate language regarding approved identification documents for state retirement plan purposes;
- change the NPERS director’s title to executive director;
- clarify language regarding state contributions to the School Retirement Fund and the Omaha School Employees Retirement System Plan;
- provide for tax treatment of contributions under the Deferred Compensation Plan in designated Roth IROA accounts under the Internal Revenue Code; and
- delete obsolete provisions related to the transfer of OSERS governance to the PERB, which is now complete.

A committee amendment, adopted 29-0, incorporated provisions of three additional bills.

LB1102, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Beau Ballard, would change the adjustment date of cost-of-living adjustments under the Class V School Employees Retirement Act to align with the beginning of the plan year.



Sen. Beau Ballard

Beginning in 2026, COLAs would be calculated and adjusted Sept. 1 of each year. The measure also would change the annuity payment date and the definition of “retirement date” under the act to align with the School Employees Retirement Act.

LB1103, introduced by Sen. Eliot Bostar of Lincoln, would increase the mandatory retirement age for mem-

bers of the Nebraska State Patrol from 60 to 65 and authorize members who joined the plan after July 1, 2016, to participate in the deferred retirement option plan.

LB1166, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Margo Juarez, would amend the School Employees Retirement Act to modify the timeline for annual adjustments to employee and employer contributions to the School Retirement Fund. Beginning in 2027, contribution rates would be calculated as of July 1 each year and apply beginning Sept. 1 of that year and prior to Sept. 1 the following year.



Sen. Margo Juarez

Following adoption of the committee amendment, senators advanced LB820 to select file on a 30-0 vote.

REVENUE

Tax increase to fund workforce housing amended, advanced

A measure intended to create a stable funding source for two Nebraska workforce housing programs cleared the first round of debate March 9.

LB1067, introduced by Syracuse Sen. Bob Hallstrom, would increase the documentary stamp tax on real estate transactions and split the additional proceeds between the Rural Workforce Housing Investment Fund and Middle Income Workforce Housing Investment Fund.



Sen. Bob Hallstrom

The programs, administered by the state Department of Economic Development, provide grants to non-profit developers to build workforce housing in the state's rural and urban communities.

Hallstrom said a 2022 Nebraska Investment Finance Authority report found that Nebraska needs 35,000 more affordable housing units by 2028 to meet demand. LB1067 would provide an "immediate, reliable" funding source to help address that shortage, he said.

The bill also would eliminate a provision allowing the Legislature to transfer money from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to the state's General Fund and other funds that receive documentary stamp tax proceeds.

Additionally, Hallstrom said, LB1067 would ensure that the proceeds dedicated to the two workforce housing programs could not be used by the Legislature for other purposes.

As introduced, the measure would

increase the documentary stamp tax from \$2.32 to \$3.82 for each \$1,000 in value.

A Revenue Committee amendment, adopted 38-2, instead would increase the tax to \$3.32 for each \$1,000 in value through Jan. 1, 2032, when it would return to the current amount. The additional revenue still would be split between the two programs.

Hallstrom said the amended proposal would generate approximately \$8 million for each program annually. It would add \$250 in taxes to the sale of a \$250,000 house, an amount he said is unlikely to "squench" closings.

Sen. Robert Dover of Norfolk supported LB1067. Funding additional housing would attract and retain workers, he said, helping Nebraska grow its economy and expand its tax base over the long term.

Lincoln Sen. Jane Raybould also supported the bill, particularly the provision intended to ensure that workforce housing funds could not be swept


to help balance the budget. Increasing the state's affordable housing stock is widely seen as a top priority among Nebraska business leaders, she added.

"We need to grow our workforce," Raybould said, "but we can't grow it without sufficient housing."

Sen. Mike Jacobson of North Platte said he opposed the original bill but supported the amended proposal with its more "reasonable" tax increase. He said North Platte used funding from the Rural Workforce Housing Investment Fund for a successful housing incentive program.

Also opposed was Sen. Tanya Storer of Whitman, who said she is "not convinced" that a documentary stamp tax increase is the best way to fund the rural housing program. Although the program has benefited her district, she said, LB1067 would increase the cost of housing transactions.

The bill advanced to select file on a vote of 32-8. ■



Unicameral Youth Legislature Registration Now Open

Learn what it's like to serve as a Nebraska state senator during the 2026 Unicameral Youth Legislature, June 7-12. In this legislative simulation, high school students from around the state have the opportunity to take on the role of lawmakers. Student senators sponsor bills, conduct committee hearings, debate legislation and discover the unique process of the nation's only unicameral by learning directly from current state senators and staff.

The program is conducted by the Clerk of the Nebraska Legislature, through the Unicameral Information Office, in coordination with Big Red Summer Camps.

For information on registration, visit the Unicameral Youth Legislature page: NebraskaLegislature.gov/uyl. ■

2026 Legislative Session*

January						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
			DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	DAY 8	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	HOLIDAY	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
	DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	

February						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21	DAY 22	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	RECESS	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	HOLIDAY	DAY 27	DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	DAY 31	DAY 32	DAY 33	DAY 34	DAY 35	

March						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	RECESS	DAY 36	DAY 37	DAY 38	DAY 39	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	DAY 40	DAY 41	DAY 42	DAY 43	RECESS	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	RECESS	DAY 44	DAY 45	DAY 46	DAY 47	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	DAY 48	DAY 49	DAY 50	DAY 51	RECESS	
29	30	31				
	DAY 52	DAY 53				

April						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
			DAY 54	DAY 55	RECESS	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	RECESS	DAY 56	DAY 57	DAY 58	DAY 59	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	DAY 60	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Federal & State Holidays
 January 19 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 February 16 – Presidents’ Day

Legislative Recess Days
 February 13
 March 2, 13, 16, 27
 April 3, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16

*The Speaker reserves the right to revise the session calendar.

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Office of the Capitol Commission employees lowered chandeliers in the George W. Norris Legislative Chamber March 13 to replace light bulbs.