

Gov. Dave Heineman delivered his State of the State address to the Nebraska Legislature two weeks ago, focusing on three priorities: growing the Nebraska economy, strengthening education, and developing an even more efficient government.

“As we enter a new decade, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on our past accomplishments and take our first steps toward new endeavors,” Gov. Heineman said. “We have worked hard to position Nebraska as an attractive place to live, to work and to raise a family. My focus for the coming year is to prepare our state to take advantage of new opportunities.”

In the budget plan submitted to the Legislature, the governor proposed only minimal adjustments to the FY 2009-2011 budget following changes enacted during the 2009 special legislative session, which closed a \$335 million budget gap without increasing taxes or borrowing from the state's cash reserve fund.

“We acted quickly and decisively,” Gov. Heineman said. “No other state has acted as swiftly and spoken with one voice as Nebraska has in recent months. Nebraska's financial health is stronger than most of our peers across America, because working together we have been fiscally responsible. As a result, we are positioned to continue moving Nebraska forward.”

The governor provided an update on Nebraska's economic progress citing a number of business expansions in 2009 and others planned for 2010 creating new jobs, despite the national economic slowdown.

“Growing our economy means an everyday focus on job creation,” added Heineman. “Our efforts to modernize Nebraska's economic incentive programs, to lower taxes, and to prioritize investments have resulted in a stronger, more stable economy in Nebraska. During this national economic slowdown, we have seized the opportunity to make Nebraska more competitive. Many states have raised income or sales taxes—Nebraska has not. Many states have spent beyond their means—Nebraska did not. We controlled our spending.”

A second area of focus involves strengthening education. Heineman and education leaders

and policymakers involved in the Nebraska P-16 Initiative are moving forward on a number of education-related goals identified last year.

In addition to these goals, state leaders have developed a proposal to create a Nebraska Virtual High School, which will be included in the state's Race to the Top application submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Gov. Heineman said, "Today's jobs require higher reading and math skills than was true 20 years ago. In order to prepare our students for the 21st Century workplace, we need to transform our education system from pre-school all the way through college.

"We've begun that reform by updating Nebraska's high school graduation requirements by supporting a core curriculum including four years of English and three years of math, science and social studies.

"The State Board of Education adopted new requirements starting in the 2014-2015 academic year, and today I approved the Rule 10 regulation updating Nebraska's graduation requirements for the first time since 1984."

The governor called on school districts and education leaders to be part of educational reform efforts by seeking new ways of involving parents in school learning, lower truancy rates, examine school schedules to maximize time spent in the classroom, provide college students with a path to graduation in fewer years, and reprioritize investments by directing financial resources that strengthen student learning and achievement.

"As good as Nebraska's schools are today, they must be even better in the future," said Heineman. "The road to economic prosperity for our state and for individual students is a good education. Now is the time to focus on building an education system that meets the needs of modern students competing in a modern world."

The third area emphasized by the governor includes using technology to reform the delivery of government services in order to become more productive and more efficient.

Projects such as completing the statewide radio network that will provide interoperable communications among local, state and federal agencies, modernizing the way economic assistance services are provided in the state, and encouraging greater use of the more than 200 services available online through Nebraska.gov are important in controlling costs and delivering improved services to the citizens of Nebraska.

“Although 2010 will be a challenging year for Nebraska and all states, it is essential that we continue to position Nebraska for future growth,” he said.

“Our roadmap is clear and my focus will be on three priorities: growing our economy by focusing on job creation; strengthening Nebraska's education system so that our students can compete in the 21st Century economy; and developing a more efficient government through greater use of technology. I am confident that the year ahead will provide us with new opportunities to move Nebraska forward.”