

### **By Shelby Friesz, Bethany Knipp, Joseph Moore and Demetria Stephens**

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The first day of the 103rd Nebraska Legislative session, Wednesday, Jan. 9, ended with the election of a new speaker and committee chairmen and the swearing in of 11 senators.

Lawmakers elected Sen. Greg Adams of York as the new speaker following his brief remarks to the chamber.

"I have no political agenda, but I do have an agenda," he said. "My agenda is to help you be the best senators you can be. I have an agenda for fairness, above all else. Of making good policy. An agenda for protecting and promulgating the integrity and the culture and the history of this institution."

Standing committee chairmen were voted in by secret ballot.

Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha won a close vote for chairman of the Appropriations Committee against Sen. Tom Hansen of North Platte, 25 to 24.

Most were elected unanimously by acclamation.

Among the 11 new senators, Sen. Jim Scheer of Norfolk shared his goals for the session.

He replaces former Speaker Mike Flood after Flood was unable to run for re-election because of term limits.

Despite being a veteran of public service as a former mayor of Norfolk and president of the Nebraska State Board of Education, Scheer was humble about his new legislative role.

Scheer, who has served on the State Board of Education since 2004, said he was pleased with the election of Sen. Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids to chair the Education Committee.

"I think she'll do a great job," he said. "She has a sincere interest in education in Nebraska and I couldn't be happier with her selection."

Scheer described his excitement about beginning a new career in the capitol.

"It's always a rush to be part of a process like this and meeting my colleagues for the first time," he said. "We've been in groups together, but to actually be able to sit by one another and establish relationships -- it was a special day."

Sen. Al Davis of Hyannis also took the floor for the first time as a Nebraska state senator.

While his first session has just begun, Davis came to Lincoln with specific issues to discuss with his fellow senators.

"One of the things I really hope to do is to convince the body to recognize that depopulation is just a huge, devastating issue for rural Nebraska," Davis said.

Along with finding a solution for depopulation, he said he wants to highlight the needs of the aging population during the upcoming session.

He said that Nebraska's water problems will also be trying for the Legislature.

Davis said he hopes to become part of the Natural Resources, Revenue and either Education or Transportation and Telecommunications committees.

Davis said that he felt nervous coming into the session for the first time, but he appreciates the guidance of his colleagues.

"The body is just so great," Davis said. "They're so welcoming, and every one of these senators will tell you to 'come see me if you have any questions.'"

Newly elected Sen. Dan Watermeier of Syracuse took in the festive atmosphere with his family at the Nebraska legislative chamber.

Watermeier said his goal is to learn more about the legislative process for the next couple of years as a new face at the Capitol.

One place he said he can learn more is in committees.

This week, committee chairs will select their members, based on seniority, he said.

As a farmer, Watermeier said he would be comfortable on the Agriculture or Natural Resources committees.

But he would prefer to eventually be on the Health and Human Services Committee or the Education Committee because he has the least experience in those areas.

“That’s where I have the most room to grow,” he said, adding those committees revolve around emotional, hot-button issues.

Committees aside, one of Watermeier’s goals in his four-year term is property tax relief for his constituents, one of the most important issues for people in his district, he said.

For now, Watermeier is looking forward to the end of the first 10 days of the session when legislators will have introduced bills and the feelings of newness will settle down. Watermeier said he doesn’t feel like a senator yet.

“I’m just filling the seat.”

Around lunch time, Sen. Amanda McGill of Lincoln gave the final speech of the day about her unopposed nomination to chair the Urban Affairs Committee.

“I’m going to speak from my gut and my gut tells me I’m hungry,” she said.

Committee Chairmanships Agriculture: Sen. Ken Schilz of Ogallala. Appropriations: Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha. Banking, Commerce and Insurance: Sen. Mike Gloor of Grand Island. Business and Labor: Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha. Education: Sen. Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids. General Affairs: Sen. Russ Karpisek of Wilber. Government, Military and Veterans Affairs: Sen. Bill Avery of Lincoln. Health and Human Services: Sen. Kathy Campbell of Lincoln. Judiciary: Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha. Natural Resources: Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege. Nebraska Retirement Systems: Sen. Jeremy Nordquist of Omaha. Revenue: Sen. Galen Hadley of Kearney. Transportation and Telecommunications: Sen. Annette Dubas of Fullerton. Urban Affairs: Sen. Amanda McGill of Lincoln.