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The Nebraska Legislature: Policy Implications of Its Organization and Operation

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Robert Sittig

The adoption of a nonpartisan unicameral legislature by Nebraska voters in 1934 increased the opportunity for distinctive policymaking in the state. This reform moved Nebraska to the forefront on many measures of legislative capability, such as structural simplicity, open deliberative process, and level of staff assistance. Yet, the Unicameral lags behind other states on other measures of legislative effectiveness and modernization. This is illustrated by inadequate compensation for legislators, insufficient winnowing of bills prior to floor consideration, and modest restraint of interest group activity. The uniqueness of the Unicameral continues to bring Nebraska attention. Although its organization and operation receive favorable evaluation, certain features require review and possible change.

Policymaking in American political institutions is assigned constitutionally to the legislative branch of government. Policy application and adjudication are the responsibilities of the executive and judicial branches of government, but these phases of the governmental process follow the initiation of policy by the legislature.

This chapter addresses policy initiatives and the ways in which they are handled in Nebraska's uniquely structured, single-chamber, nonpartisan legislature. Given this uniqueness, considerable attention will be given to comparisons of the legislative process in Nebraska and in other states. The performance of Nebraska's legislature will be evaluated, as well. Because all state policy must receive legislative approval, it behooves policy advocates to become familiar with the organization and operation of the Nebraska legislature. Additionally, those seeking to influence policy matters should be aware of recent changes and proposals to reform the Nebraska Unicameral.

Important Historical Events

The adoption of the initiated constitutional amendment by the citizens of Nebraska in 1934, providing for a single-chambered and nonpartisan legislature, set this state apart from all others.¹ These two institutional alterations left a distinct imprint on the proceedings of Nebraska's legislature in form and practice. The unicameral reform proposal was a product of the progressive movement, and was advocated by many Nebraskans in the early twentieth century. The nonpartisan feature, although urged by populist and progressive groups, was much more the handwork of U.S. Senator George Norris, who, during the late 1920s, breathed new life into the largely stalemated unicameral movement in Nebraska. He was the architect of the two-pronged, nonpartisan unicameral reform, and worked strenuously during the public phase of the 1934 campaign to get the amendment adopted.

Since adoption, these institutional factors have given a special character to the legislative process in Nebraska, and they contribute much of what is different about policymaking in this state, when compared with other states. Finally, the unicameral aspect of Nebraska's legislature is established so solidly that there is little question regarding its future. The nonpartisan aspect continues to generate persistent criticism from a variety of sources, and its future is somewhat less assured than that of unicameralism.

Institutional Changes Since Adoption

Since the adoption of the unicameral system, the most visible institutional changes have involved the terms of office, number of legislators, and length of session

for the legislature. The term of office was doubled (and staggered) to 4 years in 1962; longer terms are an everpresent pattern in elective posts at all levels of government. Next, the number of legislators increased from 43 to 49 in the midsixties as a result of political and judicial skirmishing over the need to remedy urban underrepresentation.

Increased urban representation resulted in reshaped legislative agendas and the adoption of many urban-oriented policy initiatives in state legislatures, including Nebraska. Another alteration of the formal machinery was the change to annual sessions in 1971; previously, nearly all state legislatures met only once every 2 years, but now, nearly all meet every year to review legislative proposals. The current organizational arrangement of the Unicameral seems firmly implanted despite occasional efforts, all unsuccessful, to alter it in some fashion (for example, return to biennial sessions, removal of the lieutenant governor as presiding officer, reintroduction of partisanship, and installation of a parliamentary system).

Internal Leadership Authority

The internal allocation of authority in the legislature, however, has been more subject to alteration. The current leadership positions include speaker, president, Executive Board, and Committee on Committees. These officers and bodies have undergone numerous shifts in duties, roles, and powers. Of greatest importance is the speakership, where a series of changes during the past two decades has brought this official to the forefront of the Unicameral. This is a major departure from the past; earlier, the Unicameral held to the principle that the legislative process should be as open and unstructured as possible. But, by the 1980s, the speaker had been

authorized to coordinate the committee system, to set the daily agenda, to designate a number of bills for preferential floor consideration, and, by practice, to serve as the presiding officer over floor deliberations despite the constitutional provision designating the lieutenant governor for this role.

Additionally, the last two speakers have overcome a tradition of noncontinuation in the office, and have been re-elected. It seems only a matter of time or circumstance until some speaker, through skill and effectiveness, becomes a long-term (perhaps career) holder of this office. Even with growth in stature, the primary source of influence behind other state legislative speakers--leadership of the majority political party--is not part of the speaker's power base. Regardless, the powers of the office have grown steadily in recent years.

Nearly the opposite is true for the president of the legislature, the lieutenant governor. Repeated attempts have been made since 1970 to reposition the office, but a final solution has evaded the reformers. The pattern in many states has been to team up the election of governors and lieutenant governors, to assign the second executive full-time administrative duties, and to reduce or eliminate their legislative role (table 1). The other

Table 1 - Legislative power of state lieutenant governors

Power	Number of states
Presiding officer	28 (including Nebraska)
Break tie votes	26 (including Nebraska)
Assign bills	16
Appoint committees	10

Source: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Question of State Government Capability*, Washington, DC, 1985, p. 9-5.

extreme is evident in six states where the office of lieutenant governor has been abolished. Some movement toward the team approach and a full-time administrative role for the lieutenant governor has occurred in Nebraska, but legal and political complications have stalled the process for the time being.

The Executive Board of the Legislature is composed of two elected officers, six regional representatives of the senators, the speaker, and the chair of the Appropriations Committee ex-officio. Their responsibilities are to supervise all staff personnel and to act on behalf of the legislature when it is not in session. Additionally, they assign bills and approve and assign studies concerning new policy questions to committees. This body can be considered an administrative entity rather than a policymaking unit, although this is not always true. For example, the number and assignment of legislative staff influence the substantive performance of the legislature.

The Committee on Committees has a small but important role in the organization of each new legislature, that of assigning legislators to committees. The body has an elected chair and twelve regional representatives who review requests for committee assignments and assign members within size and geographical constraints. Apparently, nearly all requests can be granted or adjusted satisfactorily because complaints about assignments are rare.

Staff Resources

The major recent physical change within the Unicameral has been in facilities and resources (offices and staff) provided to senators. Much of the impetus for this came from the increased time commitment required

of senators, which stemmed from the shift to annual sessions, and, to a lesser extent, the increased workload associated with interim studies of new and controversial issues by standing committees. This means that senators are on full-time duty about 6 months of the year and on call intermittently after the session for interim committee responsibilities and occasional special sessions. Accordingly, during the past 10 years, the senators have provided themselves, through the Executive Board, with individual offices near the chamber and two full-time staffers (one research, the other clerical) per legislator. This has been a major change in the legislature's staffing pattern, and it puts Nebraska in a group of ten states that assign year-around staff to individual senators; nearly all of these states have large populations (table 2). In a few states (not Nebraska), the legislators also have staffed offices in their home districts (Council of State Governments, 1986).

Table 2 - Staff assistance provided to individual state legislators, 1987

Level of assistance	States
	Number
Full-time professional and clerical	10 ¹
Some professional and some clerical	13
Clerical only	16
Secretarial pool only	11

¹ California, Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Source: Alan Rosenthal, *Legislative Life*, New York, 1981, p. 207.

Of much longer duration is the Unicameral's divisional staff which provides support for legislators, committees, and leaders (such as, bill drafting, research, and recordkeeping). It has increased somewhat in number as the legislative task has grown and the length of the session has increased. Positioned between the divisional and senators' staffs are the standing committee staffs.

Committee staffing began about 20 years ago with the Appropriations (then Budget) Committee, and was gradually extended to all committees. The committee research staffs vary in number from one to ten, plus each committee has one clerical position. It would seem that the legislature, through its divisional, committee, and senatorial staffs which currently number about 250, is now better equipped to deal with the policy options they review.

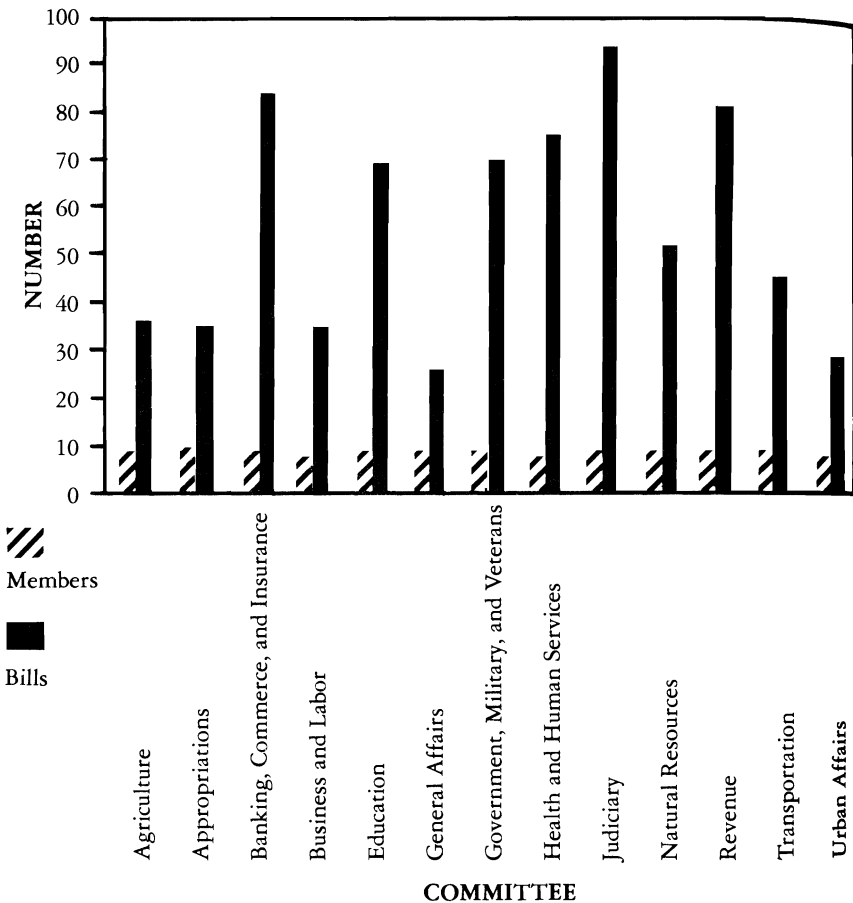
Legislative Process: Early Stages

The introduction of bills provides the legislature with its official business. Although only members may introduce bills, most originate outside the legislature. Bills are quickly assigned to committee according to their subject; for example, school consolidation to the Education Committee and control of irrigation to the Natural Resources Committee. The number of bills being introduced has climbed in recent years, and, given the constraints on session time (90 days in odd and 60 days in even years), the system is pressed to handle them in a timely and efficient way. A previous attempt to restrict the number of bills a senator could introduce proved to be unworkable, so other remedies have evolved. The most recent is the ranking of bills by senators, committees, and the speaker.

Committee Organization and Operation

The standing committee arrangement in the Unicameral is moderately complex, with thirteen committees having from seven to nine members each (figure 1). The number and size of committees have been quite stable since the 1950s, although there have been periodic adjustments of committee titles,

FIGURE 1
Standing Committees of the Nebraska Legislature, 1987



jurisdictions, and workloads. The most recent adjustment came in 1986, when one committee was abolished, another divided, and two others retitled. These jurisdictional changes are difficult to initiate because they entail the shifting of arenas (but not senators) where preliminary decisionmaking occurs. Despite reluctance to make changes, the legislature coordinates its policymaking structure with the executive branch, as the state government policy agenda evolves.

Each committee is headed by a chair who presides at committee meetings and generally directs committee activities. Since 1973, these leaders have been elected in floor votes (all are eligible to run) when a new legislature organizes. Those selected must be approved every 2 years. While partisan and seniority factors predominate in the selection of committee chairs in other state legislatures and the national congress, these factors are only slightly important in Nebraska. For example, the unofficial partisan lineup in the chamber in 1987 showed a slight Republican majority (25 Republicans, 23 Democrats, and 1 Independent), yet seven of the thirteen committee chairs elected were Democrats. The qualifications required of first-time chair candidates and those seeking re-election include, prior service on the committee for aspirants and support from those who served on the committee for former chairs. In only 6 of 58 instances has a committee chair been defeated from 1973 to 1987, and in about three-fourths of the cases, chairs who sought re-election faced no opposition. This indicates the evolution of leadership stability in these bodies, and contrasts with the system used prior to 1973, when appointments resulted in wholesale changes from one legislature to the next.

Senators are assigned to committees after presenting their requests to regional caucuses of the Committee on

Committees. The assignments need to coincide with size and geographical constraints that are intended to make each committee reflective of the entire body, and, thus, representative of the entire state. The geographical factor is perhaps the more important one; standing committees normally have two legislators from each of four regions of the state (far west, north central, south central, and Omaha metro).² This builds a geographical dimension into committee structure and decisionmaking. In other states, partisan and seniority factors weigh much more heavily, sometimes absolutely, in matters such as allocation of seats on committees and committee assignments.

Given the rarity of committee chair losses, tenure of chairs and committee members has been increasing steadily. In the absence of complicating factors, such as chairing a committee to which the senator has not been assigned or filling the speaker's post (which precludes any committee service), about three-fifths of re-elected senators remain on the committees they were assigned to in the previous legislature. This is evidence that members prefer serving on a committee rather than transferring and broadening their policy perspective, an attribute of considerable importance, but apparently less so than policy specialization.

Committee Influence

Research indicates that the legislative committees, in Nebraska and elsewhere, are making the definitive decisions on legislative proposals.³ It seems that the floor of the legislature is where decisions ought to be made in deliberative assemblies. This is the case, to an extent, because in order for proposals to become law, they must be approved by a legislative majority.

However, before they can move to the floor for consideration, they must clear the committees to which they are assigned.

Once assigned, bills must be scheduled for a public hearing in Nebraska, a step which is optional in every other state but North Dakota. Next, they are debated in a closed executive session (media representatives may attend and relate the discussion and votes to the public). Then, bills must be reported.

A favorable report by a committee majority sets in motion the process leading to final enactment. Thus, as few as 4 or 5 legislators in a body of 49 nearly control the fate of bills assigned to the committees on which they serve. Favorable committee reports have averaged as high as 71 percent (1973) and as low as 57 percent (1983) in recent legislative sessions. These are ratios that are somewhat higher than those in the typical state legislature (table 3). The trend is toward fewer bills being reported favorably, another indication of growing committee influence.

Favorably reported committee measures are often sent to the floor with suggested changes or amendments. These amendments are considered first on the floor; other (outsider) amendments can be offered later, but they require more votes to be adopted. Thus, committees

Table 3 - Percentage of favorable committee reports, selected states and years

State	Percent
Alabama (1977)	67
Nebraska (1983)	57
14-state average (1967-77)	48
Connecticut (1967)	27

Source: Alan Rosenthal, *Legislative Life*, New York, 1981, p.199.

are afforded the best opportunity to shape the final version of bills that they find suitable for enactment.

Another test of committee effectiveness concerns bills that fail to clear the committee because of a tie vote or because a majority of the committee members opposes them. Because all assigned bills must be reported, tie or negative votes, once reported, set the stage for a possible overrule of the committee decision. This is one procedural check legislative bodies have over committees.

In Nebraska, a bill with a negative recommendation can be revived if 30 senators vote to do so; a bill stalled on a tie vote requires 25 supporters. Potentially, committees could be overruled this way dozens of times each session. Actually, they are rarely overridden.

In the 1987 session, many disgruntled senators complained after bills they sponsored were stalled or killed, but they attempted to dislodge or revive only four of them. Committee decisions were sustained with one exception. Recently, other sessions had similar records. Negative committee decisions on major bills are rarely overturned. Thus, committees in the Nebraska legislature each review 25-100 bills each session with confidence that their decisions, even negative ones, will be final.

Another indication of the increasing influence of committees is evident from a recent study of the relationship between bill viability and the timing of public hearings. Nearly all bills come to committees within the first 10 days of the session, and, because only a few can be heard each day (normally two to four), the time at which a bill is heard and reported makes a difference.

The study revealed that bills positioned for an early hearing (first 30 days) were four times more likely to be enacted than those heard late (last 14 days) in the

schedule during the 1986 session (Nebraska Legislative Council, 1986). This shows that analysts must probe beyond the formal rules and procedures to discern when, where, and by whom the critical decisions are made in public bodies such as legislatures. Thus, the scheduling of public hearings might seem to be merely a procedural matter; however, in 1986, it was a significant indication of a bill's chance for enactment into law.

Legislative Process: Final Stages

Once favorably reported, bills move to the floor and through it via a series of calendars and priority designations. Early in the session, during half-day committee and floor schedules, the least controversial measures are handled with a minimum amount of debate or discussion. Measures which generated little or no criticism during the committee phase are unlikely to encounter opposition on the floor. These measures often clarify or refine laws, and they move speedily through the required floor tests: General file, where most debating and amending occurs; select file; and final enactment. For example, in the 1985 session, the legislature gave final approval to more than 20 bills in one morning, and all but one passed unanimously (and it had only one negative vote).

Of greater challenge to the legislature's deliberative capacity are measures that clear committees on a divided vote due to persistent differences of opinion. They include as many as 20-40 of the 500-700 bills considered each session, and they tax the resources of the legislature and its leaders considerably.

The Nebraska legislature features nearly unparalleled openness at every stage of the process. Among American legislatures, one study found that Nebraska

was one of the best examples of decentralized institutional authority (Rosenthal, 1973). Thus, legislators are able to confront with ease bill managers and supporters if they choose to do so, and many do. The proponents must then decide, usually on the spur of the moment during heated floor debate, whether to accede to critics and amend the measure or continue to push their bills along over repeated attempts to amend, postpone, or defeat them. In the end, about 100 of these more controversial measures pass through the legislature. Many pass only after the most privileged of all bills (the appropriations bill which funds the programs and agencies of state government) clears the calendar.

Beyond the agency spending bill rests another 150-200 committee approved bills, and it is here that the legislature strives to align them for floor consideration. Realistically, not all can be accommodated, and because political party discipline is absent and the designated floor leader (speaker) is not empowered to designate priorities, an alternative system evolved. Thus, each senator, at about the midpoint of the session, may designate one bill as a priority measure. Priority bills have special standing on the floor calendar; similarly, each committee can designate two bills and the speaker as many as 25. The legislature, in 1981, devised this practical but rather arbitrary solution for a persistent problem.

Within this circle of priority bills are some that enjoy another political advantage because they come recommended by important outsiders, such as the governor, major private interest groups, or state administrative agencies. The impetus behind these bills ensures, no doubt, that they will be considered on the floor regardless of the scheduling system used by the legislators.

Final Enactment and Gubernatorial Action

Bills that receive majority approval after debate and possible amendment during two preliminary stages, and are read and approved a third time, have nearly made it into law. Next, they are sent to the governor for approval or rejection, in full or part.

Nebraska's governors possess slightly higher than average formal veto powers, but like their counterparts in other states, they have learned that it is more effective to involve themselves early in the legislative process if they do not support a measure or some aspect of it. Vetoing can be the least effective way to change a legislative proposal, because it complicates the negotiating or compromising process that accompanies most executive-legislative interaction.

Still, Nebraska's governors have occasionally resorted to their veto powers. The number of vetoes varies greatly, but averages about 12 per session, a rate somewhat higher than in other states. In 1987, Governor Orr vetoed 19 bills or appropriations items, while former Governor Exon vetoed a record 31 measures in 1973, and former Governor Morrison did not veto a single bill in 1963.

Legislative overrides are possible on all vetoes, but they require a three-fifths majority vote, and the legislature, in most instances, is unable to muster the needed level of support. In 1987, the legislature overrode the governor 5 times, but in each instance the effect (on money or policy) was minor compared with the vetoes that were accepted or sustained.

In recent sessions, the governor has made major reductions in spending measures through line-item vetoes, and the legislature has restored some, occasionally much, of the reductions. No single statement can relate how the

legislature responds to executive vetoes, but the governor is much more often sustained than overridden, both on substantive policy enactments and on spending and appropriations items.

Citizen Lawmaking

Nebraska is one of about twenty states that allows the citizenry to respond directly to legislative action or inaction using two direct democratic tools--the referendum and the initiative, both adopted in the early 1900s. The referendum power allows citizens to repeal any law, and it is triggered by petition signatures equal to 5 percent of the vote cast in the previous election. If the signers number 10 percent, a new law is postponed until the voters determine its fate. The use of the referendum has been episodic over the years. In just over half the instances (8 of 14), the referred measure has been rejected by the voters.

The initiative represents another restraint on the legislature; it is based on the premise that the legislature is reluctant or unwilling to act on some matters of public concern. In this circumstance, the petitioners must accumulate signatures that are equivalent to 7 percent of the vote cast, and then the measure is put on the ballot for popular approval or rejection. In only 2 of 11 instances when this device was used did the voters accept the petitioners' proposals.

In Nebraska, the record is mixed regarding the impact of the legislative initiative and referendum. Both devices have been implemented occasionally. The voters often side with the petitioners on referred laws (especially if they deal with tax increases or more spending), but rarely support petitioners who advocate new legislation using the initiative.

Summary

Given the range of legislative outcomes (from speedy enactment to casual rejection) for bills in the Nebraska Unicameral, it may be helpful to categorize the fates of bills. The simplest to describe are the few dozen noncontroversial bills that remedy or clarify some aspect of current law. A measure is drafted, introduced, and referred to committee; an early hearing is held with perhaps only the bill's introducer appearing; it is promptly given a favorable report, moves through the various floor stages without opposition, is enacted, and the governor signs it into law.

At the other end of the spectrum are measures that engender controversy from start to finish; in a typical session they number from 20 to 40 bills. There may be a dispute about which committee should receive the bill; the public hearing tends to be long and spirited, with repetitious claims and charges regarding the bill's merits or demerits. A divided committee forwards it to the floor after a review of the various options. On the floor, the committee amendments, as well as others, are considered in order to refine the measure and win over some of its detractors. The bill advances after strenuous debate, and is enacted over the objections of many opponents. Finally, the governor signs the bill, but voices some disagreement with certain provisions.

Between these extremes are about 200 other measures which proceed, some haltingly, others steadily, through the committee tests and floor hurdles.

The following are examples of each type of bill introduced in the 1987 session of the Unicameral. Early in the session, a measure allowing school districts to establish lines of credit with financial institutions (LB 147) was enacted unanimously before the session was 3

weeks old. Another issue (petition requirements in the initiative and referendum processes (LB 716 and LR 188)) was discussed often in and out of committee; eventually, it was sent to the floor with the understanding that it would be studied during the interim and acted on during the next session. A controversial measure was discussed throughout the session--liability insurance limits (LB 425). Disagreement erupted regarding the committee to which it should be referred (judiciary or banking); it became stalled after the public hearing, and it remained in committee throughout the session, despite numerous indirect attempts to force it from the Judiciary Committee. Its prospects for the next session are difficult to assess.⁴

An example of midstream executive-legislative compromise occurred over the bill separating the federal and state personal income taxing systems (LB 773). When the measure appeared to be in some jeopardy, the governor and Revenue Committee members compromised on some of its provisions. The reworked support base was sufficient to ensure its enactment, despite persistent opposition on the floor by a few senators.

An example of a reverse strategy took place with a measure to continue a diversion of some tax revenues on auto sales to the general treasury from the highway trust fund (LB 470). The same leaders (Revenue Committee members and governor) advocated its adoption, but recanted after significant opposition formed inside and outside the legislative chamber.

The common factor in these examples is the extent to which controversy, real or latent, envelops legislative proposals, and, once it emerges, the way in which it is dealt with by the bills' advocates. Strategies vary widely for dealing with opponents. Attempts to allay them are no doubt always considered. Acceding to opponents'

criticisms and altering a proposal in a basic way is a crucial decision because it could speed the measure toward enactment or, conversely, make it unlikely, or impossible, for the proposal to maintain the majority support needed to advance in committee and on the floor.

Thus, the management of conflict is the major challenge and opportunity the sponsors and advocates of policymaking proposals face in the Nebraska Unicameral. The absence of political parties and a second chamber in the legislature changes the nature of the challenge. On balance, it is somewhat easier for proponents, given the minimal structural and partisan constraints in the Nebraska Unicameral.

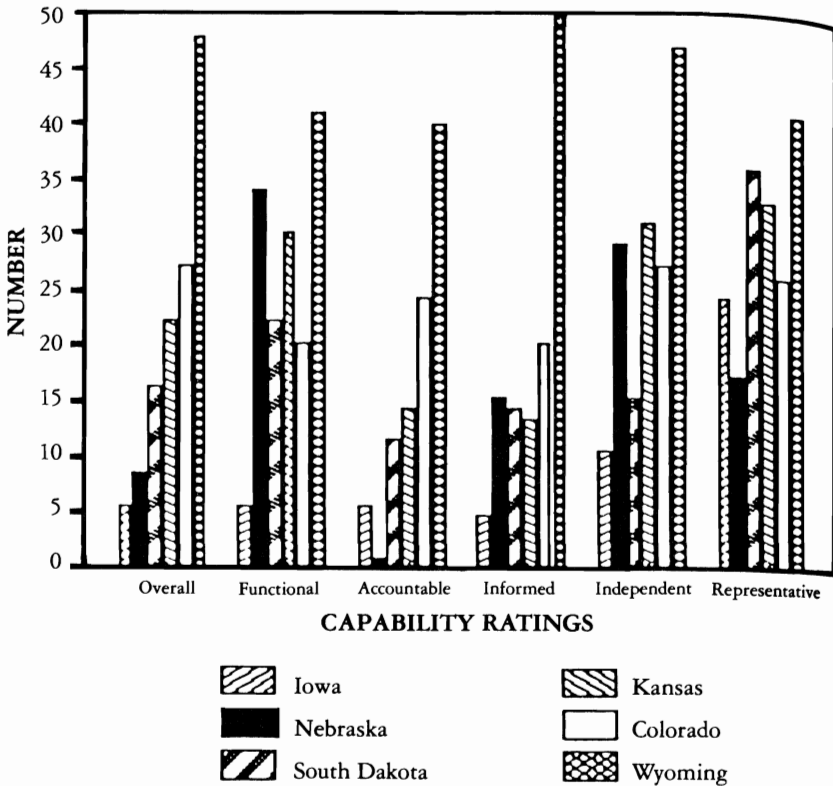
Evaluating the Unicameral

In the early 1970s, a citizen reform group examined all state legislatures to measure their capabilities (figure 2). The Unicameral was rated ninth in the country and much of the high rating stemmed from the simplified structure and procedure inherent in unicameralism. More recently, the Unicameral has been evaluated by the public through polling devices, and the ratings assigned are slightly favorable and somewhat higher than those achieved by legislatures in other states.

Senator Norris promised the citizenry that the reform would improve legislative performance. Norris' goals are restated, and table 4 shows the extent to which they have been achieved.

Norris believed that an effective legislature should be small in size, provide members a long term of office, compensate them for full-time service, and be chosen on a nonpartisan ballot. Norris also urged that the legislature's bill deliberation process be open and

FIGURE 2
Capability Ratings of Selected State Legislatures



Source: Citizens Conference on State Legislatures, *The Sometime Governments: A Critical Study of the 50 American Legislatures*, (2nd ed.). Kansas City, MO. 1973.

unstructured. He was opposed to delegation of bill review powers to the committees or officers, and he recommended that all bill votes be recorded and publicized. He thought these changes would provide representatives and a system that would best allow the public's interest to be pursued.

Table 4 - Extent to which Norris' goals have been achieved in the Nebraska Unicameral, 1987

Goal	Achievement ¹			
	Fully accepted	Nearly accepted	Some disparity	Wide disparity
Chamber:				
Open-floor process		---->X		
Weak leaders/committees			---->X	
Curtail special interests		X---->		---->X
Eliminate secrecy				
Legislators:				
Small number	X----			
Full-time compensation				---->X
Long term in office	X----			
Nonpartisan selection		---->X		

¹ Arrows indicate the historical direction of change.

Which of Norris' goals have been realized? The nonpartisan selection of a small number of legislators serving a long term has become a reality, especially since the term was increased to 4 years. Originally, Norris preferred a body of 25, but later agreed to a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 50, as stipulated in the proposal. When the size was set at 43, and later raised to 49, seemingly, he would have dissented. The nonpartisan feature continues to draw criticism from most political party leaders and some outside evaluators; conversely, support for the nonpartisan system remains very high among senators and the public.

The greatest variances between Norris' plan and current practice are the influence of lobbyists and the compensation of legislators. The impact of lobbying is especially difficult to measure, but studies indicate that Nebraska is a strong lobby state, one where both the potential for and activity of lobby groups is comparatively high. The reasons for this include: The lack of a diversified economy, weak political parties outside the legislature and their absence inside it, and the

relatively low level of citizen involvement in state governmental activities. Legislative salaries continue to veer from Norris' ideal; since 1968, the voters have rejected nine proposals to increase legislators' compensation. Originally, legislative salaries were commensurate with their time commitment.

Moderate departures from Norris' recommendations are evident within the chamber. Floor procedures are somewhat more controlled now than they were, and the standing committees and the speaker have watched their roles increase. Senators have chosen to delegate increased powers to the committees and leaders, despite Norris' admonitions.

Overall, the Norris legacy remains intact in the Unicameral. Certain of his ideals seem to have become unrealizable (such as, tight control over the special interests) or unattainable (such as, high compensation for legislators). It is in these areas that the legislative reform agenda in Nebraska is most in need of review, assessment, and possible remedial action.

Endnotes

1. Unicameral legislatures at the state level were in occasional use until the 1840s when Vermont adopted a bicameral system. All states used bicameralism until Nebraska's change to unicameralism in 1934. The Minnesota legislature was, by statute, a nonpartisan body for many years, but the lawmakers switched to a partisan arrangement in 1971 after an extensive system of unofficial partisanship evolved in the election, organization, and operation of that body. (Mitau, 1960).

2. Occasionally, the geographic pattern is deviated from on certain committees. Senators from urban areas are disinclined to serve (or stay) on the Agriculture Committee, and rural senators react similarly to the Urban Affairs Committee. Senators with approval can exchange posts. This means the regions lose or gain some committee representation. More inexplicable is the presence of only one Omahan on the important Revenue Committee in 1987, whereas four are on the equally important Judiciary Committee. (*Omaha World-Herald*, 1987).

3. A national sampling of state legislators showed that most decisions are made at regular committee meetings (39 percent). (Uslaner and Weber, 1977).
4. Bills that have not been enacted in the first session carry over to the next session in each 2-year legislative cycle.

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