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“Successful advocacy is like boxing. You score points for landing blows. Generally, it’s the cumulative impact of those blows that result in a knockout. The point is, you have to make contact to win.”

Q. Why am I here?
A. State senators make decisions that impact your well-being. If senators don’t know you or understand your issues, how are they to know what actions help or harm you? You’re here to make your issues “real” to them by making personal contact and providing them information that can help influence their decisions.

Q. What is the goal for today?
A. Today we’re going to:
- Learn how to effectively advocate.
- Put what we learn into action.
- Have a fun day at the Capitol while making a difference for agriculture.

Q. What can I expect to have done once the day is finished?
A. You most likely will have:
- Observed the Legislature in session.
- Watched part of a legislative hearing.
- Met with your state senator and other senators as available to advocate on an issue.
- Draft and send a brief letter to your senator and the Governor on an issue.
- Toured the Capitol.
- Visited with Farm Bureau staff on key legislative issues.
- Gotten to know fellow Farm Bureau members better.
- Helped Nebraska Farm Bureau’s lobbying efforts.
- Continue to help be an advocate for agriculture.
HISTORY OF THE NEBRASKA UNICAMERAL

The Nebraska Legislature is unique among all state legislatures in the nation because it has a single-house system. It wasn’t always a unicameral, however.

THE BIRTH OF THE UNICAMERAL
George Norris, a “New Deal Republican” who settled in McCook, wore out two sets of tires while he drove throughout the state campaigning for the unicameralism. He said the two-house system was outdated, inefficient, and unnecessary.

Norris’s influence, the Depression, and the other ballot issues summoned enough supporters for an overwhelming decision to make Nebraska the only one-house legislature in the country. The vote was 286,086 for and 193,152 against a unicameral system.

MORE EFFICIENT
Implementation of the unicameral legislature in 1937 cut government costs for obvious reasons. Legislative membership went from 133 in the bicameral to 43 in the new single house - nearly a 70 percent reduction.

Also, the one-house system was more efficient than its predecessor. The number of committees was pared down from 61 to 18, and 581 bills were introduced in 1937, as opposed to twice that many the previous session. The last bicameral session in 1935 ran 110 days, passed 192 bills and cost $202,593. The first unicameral session two years later ran 98 days, passed 214 bills and cost $103,445.

NONPARTISAN BODY
Another unique aspect of the Nebraska Legislature is its nonpartisanship. Before becoming a unicameral, the Nebraska Legislature was a partisan body. The change to nonpartisanship was included in the successful 1934 unicameral amendment.

Being a nonpartisan legislature means that a candidate’s political party is not listed on the election ballot. The two candidates who obtain the most votes in the primary election face each other in the general election. In other states, each party selects a winner in the primary, and the winners of each party run against each other in the general election.

Unlike other states, Nebraska’s legislative leadership is not based on party affiliation.
The Legislature has 14 standing committees that are organized around various public policy areas to facilitate the processing of legislation. Every bill introduced is referenced to a committee and receives a public hearing before the committee.

There are also two other types of legislative committees. Select committees are appointed for carrying out procedural matters related to the legislative process and the operation of the Legislature as a state agency. Special committees are generally established by state law for a specific purpose, usually focused on providing some form of legislative oversight of a policy area.

**Standing Committees:**

**Agriculture**  
Sen. Lydia Brasch,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Joni Albrecht  
Sen. Carol Blood  
Sen. Ernie Chambers  
Sen. Steve Halloran  
Sen. Bob Krist  
Sen. John Lowe  
Sen. Theresa Thibodeau

**Appropriations**  
Sen. John Stinner,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Kate Bolz  
Sen. Robert Clements  
Sen. Robert Hilkemann  
Sen. John Kuehn  
Sen. Mike McDonnell  
Sen. Tony Vargas  
Sen. Dan Watermeier  
Sen. Anna Wishart

**Banking, Commerce, and Insurance**  
Sen. Brett Lindstrom,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Roy Baker  
Sen. Tom Brewer  
Sen. Burke Harr  
Sen. Mark Kolterman  
Sen. John McCollister  
Sen. Paul Schumacher  
Sen. Matt Williams

**Business and Labor**  
Sen. Joni Albrecht,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Ernie Chambers

**Education**  
Sen. Mike Groene,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Laura Ebke  
Sen. Steve Erdman  
Sen. Rick Kolowski  
Sen. Lou Ann Linehan  
Sen. Adam Morfeld  
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks  
Sen. Lynne Walz

**General Affairs**  
Sen. Tyson Larson,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Carol Blood  
Sen. Lydia Brasch  
Sen. Bob Krist  
Sen. Dan Quick  
Sen. Merv Riepe  
Sen. Theresa Thibodeau  
Sen. Justin Wayne

**Health and Human Services**  
Sen. Merv Riepe,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Sue Crawford  
Sen. Steve Erdman  
Sen. Sara Howard  
Sen. John Lowe

**Judiciary**  
Sen. Laura Ebke,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Roy Baker  
Sen. Ernie Chambers  
Sen. Steve Halloran  
Sen. Bob Krist  
Sen. Adam Morfeld  
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks

**Natural Resources**  
Sen. Dan Hughes,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Joni Albrecht  
Sen. Bruce Bostelman  
Sen. Suzanne Geist  
Sen. Rick Kolowski  
Sen. John McCollister  
Sen. Dan Quick  
Sen. Lynne Walz

**Nebraska Retirement Systems**  
Sen. Mark Kolterman,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Kate Bolz

**Revenue**  
Sen. Jim Smith,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Lydia Brasch  
Sen. Curt Friesen  
Sen. Mike Groene  
Sen. Burke Harr  
Sen. Tyson Larson  
Sen. Brett Lindstrom  
Sen. Paul Schumacher

**Transportation and Telecommunications**  
Sen. Curt Friesen,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Bruce Bostelman  
Sen. Tom Briese  
Sen. Suzanne Geist  
Sen. Mike Hilgers  
Sen. Dan Hughes  
Sen. John Murante  
Sen. Jim Smith

**Urban Affairs**  
Sen. Justin Wayne,  
Chairperson  
Sen. Sue Crawford  
Sen. Matt Hansen  
Sen. Sara Howard  
Sen. Tyson Larson  
Sen. Dan Quick  
Sen. Merv Riepe
# Nebraska State Capitol Map

**Legend:**
- **E** - Elevator
- **H** - Hearing Rooms (1003, 1113, 1507)
- **W** - Women's Restroom
- **M** - Men's Restroom
- **E** - Accessible Elevator
- **E** - Accessible Entrance
- **H** - Hearing Rooms (1510, 1524 & 1525)
- **W** - Women's Restroom
- **H** - Hearing Rooms (1510, 1524 & 1525)
- **W** - Women's Restroom
- **M** - Men's Restroom
- **H** - Hearing Rooms (1510, 1524 & 1525)
- **W** - Women's Restroom
- **M** - Men's Restroom

**First Floor:**
- **1st Floor**
  - Bill Room
  - 1114-1101
  - 1023-1012
  - 1112-1126
  - Cafeteria
  - 1415-1424
  - 1401-1406
  - Pictures of Legislators
  - 1200-1210
  - 1207-1224
  - 1301-1314

**Second Floor:**
- **2nd Floor**
  - Senators' Lounge
  - 2108-2028
  - Speaker
  - 2110-2128
  - Attorney General
  - 2414-2410
  - Clerk of the Legislature
  - 2026-2010
  - Clerk of the Legislature
  - 2514
  - Legislative Chamber
  - 2515
  - Legislative Chamber
  - 2512
  - Legislative Chamber
  - 2502
  - Legislative Chamber
  - 2507
  - Legislative Chamber
  - 2503-2501
  - State Treasurer
  - 2306-2309
  - Vending
  - Governor
  - 2318-2309
  - Governor
  - 2309
  - Governor
  - 2300-2307
  - Secretary of State
  - 216-2226
  - 2216-2226
  - 2227-2234
  - Wherry Room

**Accessibility:**
- **Accessible Elevator**
- **Accessible Entrance**

**Public Facilities:**
- **Public Telephone**
- **Senator's Office**
- **Stairs**

**Security:**
- **Security**
TELLING YOUR STORY

There’s a well-known marketing saying that “people buy from people they know, like, and trust.” There is simply no more impactful way to have that occur than through the strategic use of storytelling. The same applies in advocating for your position.

Stories are a “shared experience” and humans are hard-wired to receive information through storytelling. Storytelling brings people into a natural state of primal listening.

Because of that, stories also powerfully connect us to others. When we share our own real-life stories or the stories of others, the people we are talking to get to know us as authentic people – not just a random voice in the crowd.

When you can meld the use of stories with data-based information that helps verify, your influence and engagement become more powerful. It helps move people to action.

In short, human connections need to go before business. Connect first with your elected official – then get down to business.

Example:

Fact-based argument:
“My property taxes have gone up 170 percent in the last 10 years. That’s not sustainable for my farm. Property taxes are now 20 percent of my operational costs. Residential taxes haven’t gone up that much. It’s not fair.”

Story/value based argument using facts:
“Our farm has been in our family for four generations. My youngest son is finishing up at the university next year. It’s always been his dream to come back to the farm. He wants to do this for a living. But the reality is we’re dealing with a depressed farm economy and our property tax bill just keeps going up with no end in sight. The taxes on our farm have gone up 170 percent in the last 10 years. I want what’s best for my son. How do I look at him and honestly tell him he should come back? To keep young people and young families in agriculture, we need to do something on property taxes. It’s influencing life decisions for him, our family, and other families like ours.”
TALKING TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

There is no better way to influence your state senator than talking to them directly. Here are a few things to remember when engaging them in a conversation.

1. **Tell them your name, where you’re from, and what you do for a living.** Doing so reinforces the fact that you are their constituent, and it gives them a point of reference.

2. **Personalize your relationship.** Have you ever contributed time or money to his or her campaign? Are you familiar with him or her through any business or personal relationship? If so, communicate that to them in a positive way. The closer your legislator feels to you, the more powerful your argument is likely to be.

3. **Start by thanking them for their service.** Serving can be a difficult job. Most will appreciate you recognizing that fact and respond positively.

4. **Be clear and concise in what you want to discuss and the action you want them to take.** Elected officials get pulled in many directions. Most appreciate you getting to the point quickly.

5. **Personalize your issue.** Lobbyists use talking points, but constituents can tell stories that give real life examples of how a policy positively or negatively impacts them. Giving elected officials real life examples of why they should or shouldn’t support a measure is more powerful than any talking point.

6. **You are the Expert.** Remember that your legislator’s job is to represent you. You should be courteous and to the point, but don’t be afraid to take a firm position. You’re the expert on how legislation will impact you.

7. **Don’t just talk, listen.** Communication is a two-way street. Once you share your thoughts, give them the chance to respond and listen closely. What they say and how they say it, will give you good insight into where they’re at. It also opens the door for you to ask more questions.

8. **Give them your contact information.** Make sure you give them or their staff your contact information, so they can get back in touch with you if they need to down the road. The more interaction the better.

9. **Share your findings.** At the Capitol, information is king. The more Farm Bureau’s lobby team knows what senators are thinking, the better they can engage with them. Sharing what you learned is extremely valuable to Farm Bureau’s lobby efforts.
WRITING A LETTER TO YOUR SENATOR OR THE GOVERNOR

Even in the age of technology, a short, hand-written letter still carries weight as an advocacy tool. It’s more personal and people recognize it takes time to write. The act of writing a letter is often more powerful and convincing than the message itself.

1. **Keep it brief.** Letters should never be longer than one page, and should be limited to one issue. Elected officials and staff read many letters on many issues in a day, so be as concise as possible.

2. **Make it legible.** The power of the handwritten letter is diminished significantly if it is difficult to read. Make sure it’s easily legible for a senator or their staff.

3. **State who you are and what you want.** In the first paragraph, be clear that you are a constituent and identify the issue about which you are writing. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, it helps to identify it by its bill number.

4. **Hit your three most important points.** Choose the three strongest points that will be most effective in persuading legislators to support your position and amplify them.

5. **Personalize your letter.** Tell your elected official why this legislation matters to you. If you have one, include a personal story that shows how this issue affects you and your family. A constituent’s personal stories can be very persuasive as your legislator shapes his or her position.

6. **Personalize your relationship.** Have you ever contributed time or money to his or her campaign? Are you familiar with him or her through any business or personal relationship? If so, include this in your letter in a positive way. The closer your legislator feels to you, the more powerful your argument is likely to be.

7. **You are the expert.** Remember that your legislator’s job is to represent you. You should be courteous and to the point, but don’t be afraid to take a firm position. Remember that often your elected official may know no more about a given issue than you do.

8. **Use the proper title.** If writing to your state senator, address them as Sen. Jones, etc. If writing to the governor, the mailing address should be titled “To The Honorable Governor Pete Ricketts”, but the opening and reference should be written as “Dear Governor Ricketts,”

**Example:**

The Honorable Pete Ricketts  
P.O. Box 94848  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4848  

Dear Governor Ricketts,  

My name is.....
Providing testimony at a legislative hearing is the most direct form of providing public input on a legislative proposal. Farm Bureau often works to coordinate testimony with members on key pieces of legislation.

**The process:**
Public hearings are typically held in the afternoon during the first half of the legislative session. Committees have regularly scheduled rooms and meeting days, although that can change. Committees may consider several bills in an afternoon. The order of bills to be heard might not be made official until the afternoon of the hearing.

Each bill is presented to the committee by the bill’s sponsor. After the sponsoring senator finishes, the Chairperson will typically ask for proponent testimony first, followed by opponent, and neutral testimony. Before testifying you must fill out the testifier sign-in sheet provided in the hearing room.

**Tips for testifying:**
1. **Changes to the bill.** Be aware that the bill’s sponsor may offer amendments when presenting the bill to the committee. Amendments may change the way you feel about the bill and affect your testimony.
2. **Be ready to answer questions.** Committee members are free to ask you questions; however, as a testifier, you are generally not allowed to cross examine or question the committee.
3. **Written copies.** Provide written copies of your testimony to distribute to the committee. This helps ensure an accurate record of your testimony. Bring enough copies for the committee plus three additional copies for staff. 20 copies will cover most communities.
4. **Limited testimony.** Be prepared to limit your testimony and try not to repeat what others have said. The committee will want to give every testifier an opportunity to speak so always be ready to summarize your testimony.
5. **Be courteous.** Addressing committee members or testifiers from the audience is prohibited. Applause and other public demonstrations are also prohibited during hearings. Always be sure to silence your cell phone.
6. **Don’t be offended.** Don’t be offended if senators come and go during a hearing. They have other commitments including presentation of their own bills.
7. **Get help.** Farm Bureau staff is always available to help members write and prepare testimony on legislative measures if consistent with Farm Bureau policy.
ENGAGING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is rapidly becoming the premier way to advocate on policy issues. Many elected offices are on social media and use it to gauge public sentiment. Integrating Facebook and Twitter into your advocacy efforts is a major opportunity to reach officials and build relationships in a direct and public way.

1. **Your account.** Before posting anything, make sure to review your own account. Be sure that your account includes a profile picture, bio, and location. Include any credentials you have earned, job title, or position you have held that can boost your credibility.

2. **Keep it short and sweet.** A few words or a short sentence will go a long way and generate the highest engagement. The basic formula for writing a post to your elected official is the following: location + elected official name or handle + the issue.
   a. **Example:** I’m a farmer from Syracuse and my property taxes increased 15% from last year. @DanWatermeier we need action to reform our current tax system.

3. **Personalize your posts.** Tell your elected official why this legislation is important to you. Include a personal note about how this issue affects you and your family. If you need multiple tweets to tell your story, be sure to tag your elected official in each tweet.

4. **Make it visual.** Photos and videos are overwhelmingly the most engaging type of content on social media. Try to include an image whenever possible. Snap photos on your farm or ranch, and don’t forget, you can always share and retweet photos and videos from Nebraska Farm Bureau’s social media channels.

5. **Stay positive.** Office staff for elected officials will regularly monitor accounts for derogatory remarks or posts that include personal attacks. These posts will be disregarded and deleted. Remember to be respectful, credible, and seek to help instead of harm.

6. **Resources.** Nebraska Farm Bureau will help you stay up-to-date on agricultural issues, legislative votes, and advocacy efforts. Sign up for action alerts.

7. **Timing is everything.** Make sure to look for chances to respond to posts from your elected official’s account. Likes and retweets are tallied by office staff to gauge support. You can voice displeasure or support by replying or commenting on posts. The timelier your reply, the more likely you are to get a response.

8. **Say thank you.** When your elected official has taken the right action on an issue, social media can be a great tool to acknowledge their work and thank them publicly.

- /Nebraska.Farm.Bureau
- @NEFarmBureau
- /nebraskafarmbureau
- /nebraska_farm_bureau
Letters-to-the-editor are a good advocacy tool because they can be used in many ways. Letters can be used to not only share your position on an issue, but they provide a public forum to influence and draw attention, positively or negatively, to the action or lack of action by an elected official. Most senators and other elected leaders monitor their local papers to get a pulse on constituents. Letters-to-the-editor are widely read, particularly in smaller community papers. Letters-to-the-editor pages differ from newspaper to newspaper. Monitor your newspaper to get a feel for what they do and don’t publish. View a sample letter-to-the-editor and write your own using these tips:

1. **Letters should be short.** Most letters should be no more than three or four short paragraphs. Note that some papers reserve the right to edit for length if your letter is too long. Always start your letter with “Dear Editor,”.

2. **Advance your message.** Letters present an opportunity for you to influence others. Use storytelling and verifying facts to make your case. If you want an elected official or entity to take a certain action, be clear in what you want done and make sure you name them. If you want to build a relationship with the official, however, it’s always better to have contacted them to share your position with them first before doing so publicly with a letter.

3. **Responding to misinformation.** Letters can be used to respond to articles with misinformation. Begin your letter by identifying the article to which you are responding to and then move on to your point. The classic first sentence for a letter-to-the-editor is some variation of “Your recent article on ___________ missed the point.” From there, move on to your message and make your case.

4. **Signers make a difference.** Are there others who share your position? Sometimes it helps to have multiple signers on a letter if the paper allows it. Having well respected or well-known community members collectively sign onto a letter can help influence others.

5. **Provide contact info.** Make sure to sign your letter-to-the-editor and include a phone number and address. If the letter is chosen for publication, the newspaper staff can call to confirm that the letter is indeed from you. The newspaper will not print your phone number.

6. **Send your letter.** Always make sure your letter is addressed to “Letters-to-the-Editor,” to the newspaper. Some papers take letters by fax, email, or on their website; others do not. Check your newspaper’s policy.
PROTECT YOUR FARM AND RANCH INTERESTS!
JOIN FARM BUREAU’S AGRICULTURE CONTACT TEAM (FB-ACT)

What is FB-ACT?
Farm Bureau’s Agriculture Contact Team (FB-ACT) is Nebraska Farm Bureau’s program to engage and assist farm bureau members in advocating for agriculture on the key issues that impact farm and ranch families.

How does it work?
As a member of FB-ACT, you’ll join other volunteers from across the state in periodically receiving “Action Alerts” via email or text message. These alerts are issue-based and sent on an as needed basis. For example, if there’s a critical vote coming up on a key bill, you’ll receive an alert providing you background information on the measure and the means to contact your elected official to encourage them to vote in a way that supports agriculture.

What’s the time commitment?
Being a FB-ACT member takes a little or as much time as you want it to. Farm Bureau “Action Alerts” are designed to make it easy to engage with your elected officials with a few clicks on your phone or email. If you’re more comfortable talking to the individual over the phone or writing a letter, the alert will provide you with the means to communicate in those ways as well.

Why should I join?
Elected leaders can’t do what’s right for you, if you don’t tell them. No lobbyist can match the power of constituent contacts to elected leaders. By being a member of FB-ACT, Farm Bureau makes it easy to put your power as a constituent to work for you in advocating for the well-being of your farm or ranch operation.

How do I join?
Contact Jay Ferris, Nebraska Farm Bureau’s director of grassroots program at (402) 421-4409 or email him at jayf@nefb.org.