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Nebraska News Service

The second session of the 102nd Legislature adjourned on April 18, after passing bills that address a wide range of issues in the 60-day session.

Nine term-limited state senators bid farewell to their colleagues on Wednesday. They were Sen. Abbie Cornett of Bellevue, Sen. Deb Fischer of Valentine, Sen. Tony Fulton of Lincoln, Sen. Lavon Heidemann of Elk Creek, Sen. Gwen Howard of Omaha, Sen. Chris Langemeier of Schuyler, Sen. LeRoy Loudon of Ellsworth, Sen. Rich Pahls of Boys Town and Speaker Mike Flood of Norfolk.

Here are some of this session's highlights.

Budget

State senators tweaked the two-year budget by providing \$17 million for child welfare shortfalls and \$80 million for higher education projects, including \$50 million for a cancer research center at UNMC, among other provisions. The projects also include \$15 million to expand the nursing program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and \$14.2 million for Chadron State College and Peru State College to improve their athletic centers.

Child Welfare

Several changes were made to the child welfare system. They include:

LB820: The Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee will be tasked with developing a statewide standard for foster care payments.

LB821: This bill creates the Nebraska Children's Commission—which will create a statewide plan for child welfare reform.

LB961: This bill ends case management privatization throughout most of the state and sets standards to reduce caseloads, but allows the state to contract with the last remaining contractor in the eastern service area through a pilot program.

LB1160: This bill will lead to the development of a statewide Web-based child welfare information system.

LB239: This bill would have required voters to show government-issued photographic ID at their polling places, but was filibustered on the floor of the unicameral and did not pass.

LB357: Municipalities can raise their sales taxes one-half percent to two percent with voter approval and approval of 70 percent of their governing board. Gov. Dave Heineman vetoed the bill, but state senators overrode his veto.

LB599: State senators overrode a gubernatorial veto on this bill, which will provide prenatal medical services for women not covered by Medicaid, including illegal immigrants.

LB806: This bill would have allowed the State Racing Commission to regulate pari-mutuel wagering on historic horse racing. The bill was passed by the Legislature but vetoed by the governor.

LB970: Nebraskans will receive about \$97 million in income tax relief over the next three years. The bill would have originally provided \$327 million in tax relief, which was the governor's intention, but was trimmed down during debate.

LB996: This bill requires students who want to drop out of high school to have an interview with the principal, superintendent and their parent or guardian before dropping out.

Constitutional amendments:

Nebraska voters will have the opportunity to amend the state's constitution on the November

2012 general election ballot.

Issues up for approval include:

LR40CA: Deciding if the rights to hunt, fish and harvest wildlife should be added to the state's constitution.

LR358CA: Deciding whether to let state senators serve three consecutive four-year terms, instead of the two terms allowed by current law.

LR373CA: Deciding if state senators get their first pay raise since 1988, from \$12,000 to \$22,500.