



**September 18,
2008**

**PLATTE INSTITUTE
TRANSPARENCY
CONFERENCE IS
NOV. 18**

What: Nebraska's first conference devoted to Government Transparency.

Where: University of Nebraska Union in Lincoln.

When: 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 18.

Presenters: John Stossel,

Co-Anchor of 20/20

Shane Osborn,
Nebraska State
Treasurer

Dr. Charlyne

Berens,

UNL Professor

Roger Lempke,

Platte Institute Executive
Director

Nicole Barrett, JD,

Unveiling Platte Institute's
Unicameral Votes Online
website.



For more details or for a conference brochure, visit www.platteinstitute.org. There are a limited number of tickets available and the event is sure to sell out. Ticket prices for the conference and luncheon together start at \$75 prior to Oct. 18.

PLATTE CHAT

TRANSPARENCY HIGHLIGHTS "THE FACTS OF LIFE"

Nicole Barrett, JD

Do you remember the theme song from the 80's TV show *The Facts of Life*? It's the one about taking the good, the bad, and getting the facts of life. Those words keep playing in my head as I sift through information for the Platte Institute's transparency projects. After a long summer of research, and with a cool chill in the air, I'm sifting through mounds of data while preparing to launch Unicameral Votes Online. In the process, I've found an abundance of interesting statistics.

Think about this for a moment: In the last session, Governor Heineman nominated 195 people for positions requiring confirmation and Secretary of State Gale nominated one. All total, only one nomination failed to be recommended for confirmation by the committee (the Governor then withdrew the nomination).

One out of 196? Taxpayers may wonder: How seriously does the legislature take its role in the confirmation process? Does it just rubber stamp nominations? Or might the near null rejection rate be indicative of the high quality of nominees selected? Nebraskans will only know if the nomination process is open to more in-depth analysis.

The Platte Institute's transparency website will do just

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ARE YOU NEW TO PLATTE CHAT?

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THANK YOU.

that—open the appointment confirmation process to greater examination than currently exists.

Here's a nutshell refresher on the process: 1) the governor (or other official) selects and announces a nominee for the position, 2) a legislative committee holds a public hearing, 3) the committee votes in executive session—which is closed to the public but open to the press—on whether or not to recommend confirmation, and 4) the legislature votes on whether to confirm the nominee. Nebraskans can affect this process, either in support or opposition, by attending the public hearing and/or contacting their senator regarding the impending votes. But how can this be effective unless details about the process are easily available to the public?

Come November (and ahead of the next legislative session) you will be able to find this information, and so much more, on the Platte Institute's transparency website [Unicameral Votes Online](#).

Another interesting fact: Rarely, if ever, do Senators vote "nay" during the confirmation of nominees. This last session many were confirmed by modest majorities. Senators unwilling to outright oppose them often choose to vote "present" versus "nay". Perhaps this is a courtesy—good Midwestern values—not wanting to hurt feelings. Come November you'll be able to track how *your* senator votes. You can hold him or her accountable for votes you may not agree with and express your gratitude for those you do. The choice will be yours and the information will be just a mouse click away.

Not to mention, [Unicameral Votes Online](#) will offer cross-reference and other interesting search capabilities. You will be able to double check nominees' names with political contributions. After all, transparency is about shining the light on the facts, and knowing if nominees "bought" their new government job may be important to you.

So how did this stack up for the 2007-08 session? Our research shows that of the 195 people Governor Heineman nominated, only 21 had donations that could be tracked to his 2006 campaign. Two-thirds of those donors gave \$1000 or less. Of the other seven, most were truly big political donors—not exclusive to the

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Thank you for your generosity and thank you for caring about Nebraska.

Governor—and a couple of them were reappointments (versus new nominees).

Two of the Governor's nominees did make the list of "Top 20 Contributors" to his campaign: Tamas Allan and Norman Riffel. However, during the 2006 election, Allan, who was a re-appointee, donated to 12 different candidates and Riffel, a new nominee, donated to four. Neither case should raise eyebrows—at least in my opinion. Later this year, you will be able to make your own assessments about nominations for state government positions. And if you're like me, you'll want to.

I'm interested in following the nomination process because those appointed play a key role in running our government, guarding or spending our hard-earned tax dollars, and making decisions that affect our daily lives. Unlike other decision makers in government, these men and women never appear on our ballots. I don't know about you, but I want to make sure I have a voice in the process. After all, the future of our state depends on it. Having greater transparency into the process will make it easier than ever for all of us to get involved.

With transparency you really do get the facts of life—the good and the bad. The Platte Institute's transparency website will provide the facts. Nebraskans can decide what's good and what's not.

Editor's note: The [Unicameral Votes Online](#) website will be unveiled at the Platte Institute's Transparency Conference on November 18, 2008 in Lincoln. Register now to attend and ensure that you're equipped to utilize this premier database website.

INTERESTING TIDBITS FROM OTHER STATES

Berk Brown

Last week a portion of the Platte Institute staff attended the State Policy Network's 16th Annual Meeting. One of the highlights of a meeting like this is the opportunity to speak with individuals from similar organizations in different states and learn about the work they are doing. I want to take this opportunity to pass along access to a couple reports from other states I thought our readers might find interesting.

First is a study from the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) entitled The Horizon Program: A Model for Education Reform. It's a report on the 10-year Horizon School Choice Program in the Edgewood School District in San Antonio. While there is no connection to Nebraska, I found the depth of research fascinating. While it has not been released to the public, it will be any day now and I suggest checking for it [HERE](#).

The [Freedom Foundation of Minnesota](#) just issued its first Government Transparency Report entitled Municipal Liquor Operations in Minnesota: Drinking on the Taxpayers' Dime. Here is a little excerpt from the report:

"In 2006, 44 cities lost money on their liquor operations. The unprofitable cities in 2006 combined for a total of \$888,901 in losses. Effectively, these cities force taxpayers to subsidize the purchase and consumption of liquor, which most people would agree is not a prudent use of taxpayer dollars."

To read the complete report, please click [HERE](#).

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