

Citizen advocacy

The importance of communicating with legislators



The importance of communicating with legislators

Have you ever wondered why your legislators voted the wrong way on an important bill? Bad legislative decisions are not necessarily evidence of malice against a particular group or industry. More likely, poor decisions stem from a lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding of the consequences of certain legislative acts. This is where you, the citizen lobbyist, can make a difference!

Legislators make decisions based on their core beliefs, on their knowledge of an issue, on input from experts, on personal counsel and on feedback from their constituents.

While we cannot do much about our legislators' core beliefs, we can have a direct impact on what they hear and what they know. If legislators have the facts and understand how their decisions will affect your hospital, patients, staff and community, then we are more likely to be successful. When our legislators cast their votes, they will understand the consequences of their decisions.



What can you
do to help?
**More than
you think!**

Start an advocacy team at your hospital

You, the member, are the most important voice we have in communicating with our state legislators. Advocacy team members might include the CEO, CFO, DON, HR director and your IT director. It is also a good idea to involve a board member. Do not limit involvement to those positions, however. If someone is interested, encourage them to join the team. **Power is in the numbers!**

Your hospital advocacy team is in charge of monitoring the actions of your legislator, encouraging donations to the NHA PAC, scheduling hospital visits, sending letters and making phone calls to your state legislator to keep them informed on how they can be a hospital advocate. In the sections below, you will see how your advocacy team can be an effective tool in advocating for all Nebraska hospitals!

Communicate with your lawmakers. It's easier than you think. Lawmakers and their staff want to hear from you because you are a constituent. At the same time, you are an expert that represents an organization that is vital to the well-being of thousands of people in their district.

Educate your lawmakers. Lawmakers vote on legislation that is often highly complex, yet they rarely have time to review each clause in every bill. They rely on good staff work, subject matter expertise and constituent contact to provide them with information on how legislation will affect their constituents – namely your patients, your community and your hospital.

Counter misinformation. The Affordable Care Act, professional liability, Medicare reimbursement, Medicaid funding, quality, coverage and access: the list of issues hospitals must grapple with every day is long and growing. Without accurate information from you and your colleagues, those who stand in opposition to hospital issues have the power to strain your resources and interfere with the delivery of care.

You must do your part to counter their messages. Consistently, clearly and frequently tell the hospital story – your story – to your legislators. The Nebraska Hospital Association does this every day, but direct communication from hospital leaders in a legislator's district carries significantly more weight and is almost always more effective.

Understanding the life of a legislator

Time. Elected officials are busy and time is a commodity that is in short supply, especially during the legislative session. Legislators have to write bills, speak for or against legislation, cast votes, research proposed legislation, attend committee hearings, address the press, meet with constituents, answer their mail and supervise their office staff.

Legislators, like the rest of us, also have family responsibilities – birthdays to celebrate, anniversaries to remember, school plays to attend, etc. They must also travel back and forth between Lincoln and the district they represent, which for some can be challenging and time consuming.

Making good decisions. Elected officials care about their communities and they want to cast votes that will benefit their constituents and Nebraska. Because they are beset by conflicting opinions and tugged at by various interest groups, they are often unsure just what the right decisions are. They are expected to be experts on many issues, but are usually only the master of one or two. A state senator votes on hundreds of legislative bills every session and must rely on others for advice and information.

Bottom line. The bottom line is your elected officials need you as much as you need them. They need information that will help them make better decisions, those that will help you serve your community. By creating a symbiotic relationship, you can both win.

The following are five proven means of creating a productive working relationship:

1. Arrange personal visits and meetings
2. Make phone calls
3. Send letters and emails that get noticed
4. Conduct hospital and community tours
5. Engage in political action

Need help finding your senator? Visit http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_find.php

For information about the Unicameral, legislative processes, bill information, other general information, legislative publications, or a subscription to the Unicameral Update, contact the Unicameral Information office at uio@leg.ne.gov or (402) 471-2788.

Nebraska State Capitol phone number: (402) 471-0448.

Personal visits and meetings

Personal contact with a legislator – whether through meetings, a hospital tour or some other means – can be the most effective way to make your case. Legislators, like everyone else, will be more likely to remember – and pay attention to – someone they have met face to face. Here’s how you do it:

Request a meeting. When you contact the office of a senator, you’ll probably speak to an administrative aide, who also does scheduling. Explain who you are and what organization you represent. Ask to speak with your legislator directly, but assume you may deal with the aide or another staff person.

Be flexible on the timing. Remember, legislators are busy and are continuously juggling priorities. Be as flexible as possible with your time in order to make the most of theirs.

Explain the purpose of the meeting and how long it will take. If you need 20 minutes, ask for 20 minutes. If you need 10, ask for 10. Don’t ask for more time than you need. Once you start the meeting, stick to your time commitment.

Confirm the meeting in writing. After you have scheduled the meeting, send an email to the legislator or relevant staff member confirming the date, time and location. This reduces scheduling errors and helps make you more visible.

Arrive early. If your legislator is running ahead of schedule, this may allow more time for the meeting. If he/she is running late, that may make him/her more attentive to your message.

Get to the point. Time matters. While exchanging pleasantries is important, get down to business as soon as possible. Make your points and then depart.

When appropriate, request feedback. Requesting feedback, such as an email or phone call, will help guarantee your concern receives more than a passing notice. While you don’t want to demand a response, simply asking “Can you let us know once you have made your decision to sponsor this legislation?” should not be objectionable. Also, a meeting would be a great time to request they be your guest for a hospital tour. “Perhaps we can discuss this further when you visit us?”

Follow Up. Following up will remind your legislator of the substance of the meeting and any actions either of you promised. A letter will also serve to remind staff that follow-up actions may be required.



**YOU are an
important
voice**

Phone calls

Talking with a legislator on the phone is nearly as effective as a personal meeting. You'll have the legislator's full attention, at least for a while.

Here are some quick tips that will give your call more impact:

- If at all possible, talk directly with your senator.
- Always leave a message.
- Go straight to the point.
- Be willing to talk with staff members.
- Follow up your conversation with an email or letter.
- Consider your timing. Call during office hours.
- Don't be a pest. Call when you need to, but don't abuse the privilege. Calling too often can be counterproductive.

Letters and emails

Communicating through the mail is less effective than speaking with your legislator in person, but it has the advantage of being potentially more comfortable for you, as well as carrying the power of the written word. All you have to do is sit down at your computer, type a letter and send it.

Use hospital letterhead. This lets the staffer who sorts the mail know that you are not just representing your own views, but also the interests of an important facility and hundreds, if not thousands, of constituents.

Personalize the letter as much as possible. If you've met your legislator recently, say so. If you have a long-standing relationship with your legislator or if you share something in common with him/her (grew up in the same town, went to the same college, etc.), reference that in the first part of your letter. You may want to add a handwritten postscript to the letter to make it more personal. Personalization may mean your letter is placed in the small pile of letters that your senator will actually read.

Get to the point. Remember, the senator receives a large volume of mail. **Succinctness is a virtue.**

Limit your key points. Don't cram too much information into the letter. Explain your position as clearly as possible. If the issue is complicated, enclose additional material. Also, include your telephone number so the legislator can call you with questions.

Alert your legislator to the consequences of a vote. For example, if a "yes" vote on a measure will mean more jobs in the legislator's district, the legislator will want to know that. Conversely, if legislation will erode the quality of health care in your area, he/she needs to know that, too. Also, if inaction on an issue will have a positive or negative effect on your patients, you must alert the legislator to that reality.

A note about email. The rules for writing good emails are the same as sending letters via "snail mail," though you need to consider that email is now often checked using a mobile device. The extra time it takes to open a message with graphics or attachments may prevent your message from being read at all. It is important to keep the format of your email as simple as possible. Depending on the senator, a staffer may read and sort this mail and only a handful of messages may get through.

Hospital and community tours

Tours of your facility and community can be a very effective means of communication. A good tour will make your legislator familiar with what you do and the problems you face. Of equal importance, spending quality time with your legislator will help build a much stronger relationship than you would ever achieve through mail or over the phone.

In order to make the visit a success, you must make the most of it. Set a goal for your visit and place the right person in charge of the preparation. After your senator accepts your invitation, the following are helpful points.

Be as flexible as possible. Propose a range of dates for the visit. Legislators' schedules can change with very little notice. Find out when your legislator will be back in the district. If possible, try to dovetail your invitation with a recess day if during session.

Make the hospital visit intriguing to your legislator. Making an office visit attractive doesn't mean putting up a new coat of paint or a star spangled bunting. Legislators want to learn and they want to meet and hear from their constituents. Make sure your legislator knows he or she will meet the people who work at your location.

Be persistent. Don't give up if you are unable to work out a visit on the first try. Time pressures often force changes in the schedule and even with the best of intentions, cancellations may occur. Be gracious and understanding. Don't be afraid to reschedule!

Prepare a fact sheet about your hospital. Include important information such as number of personnel, size of payroll, amount of taxes paid, other locations, community services, awards, information about key employees and interesting facts about the care you provide. This will give your legislator a quick look at your organization and why he/she is visiting.

Set aside time for discussion. Reserve some time before or after the tour for you and possibly some other key personnel to sit down for some frank face-to-face dialogue. The only way you'll get your points across during a tour is if you have your legislator's full attention; it's hard to concentrate over the hustle and bustle of a busy hospital or clinic.

When the visit is finished, send follow-up letters. Send a letter thanking your legislator for making the visit, and use the opportunity to reinforce whatever points you made during the tour. Because of the vast array of information competing for your legislator's attention, you can't emphasize your positions too much.

Political action

In our system of government, many policymakers are running for re-election or election to a higher office. Because elections are always around the corner, they must continually think about earning votes, forming coalitions and raising funds necessary for a campaign. Most legislators enjoy serving in the Legislature. There are actions you can take to help them continue in their role, and your assistance will be appreciated and remembered.

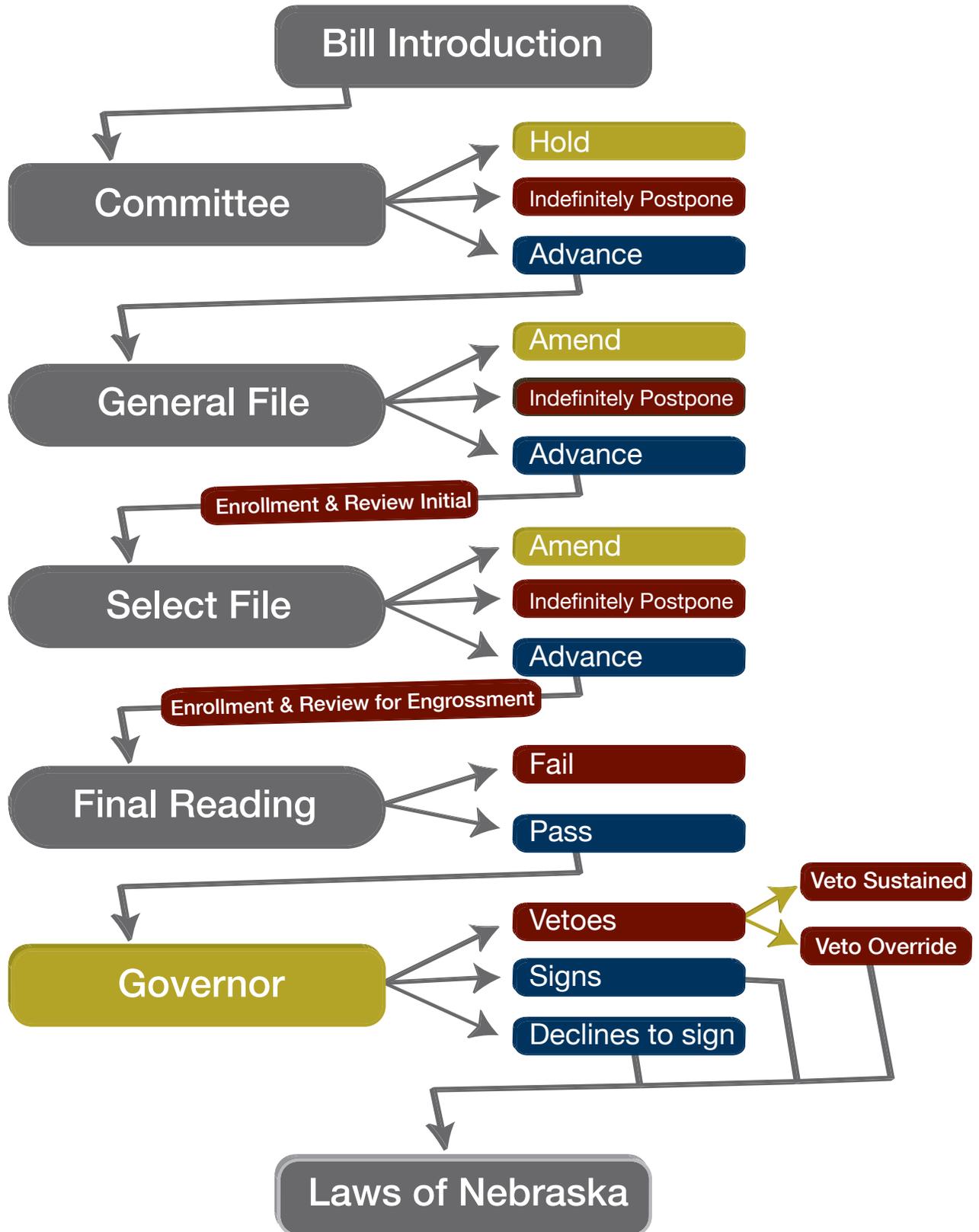
The Nebraska Hospital Association Political Action Committee (NHA PAC) supports the efforts of the NHA to advocate on behalf of Nebraska hospitals by participating in the political process. Through your contributions, the NHA PAC is able to financially support the campaigns of candidates whose philosophies, actions and voting records reflect an understanding and concern for hospital and health care issues, regardless of political affiliation.

Legislative process

Knowledge is power. It's important when talking to your legislator to understand the legislative process. On the next page is a schematic of how bills become law in Nebraska. On the following pages are some commonly used terms that will help you better understand the Nebraska Legislature and its process for considering the issues that come before it.



UNICAMERAL PROCESS



Legislative glossary

"A" Bill - see Appropriation Bill.

Act - The proper term for a bill after it is enacted into law. Also, a term used to refer to a group of laws addressing a particular subject, such as the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act.

Agenda - A daily order of legislative business set by the Speaker.

Appropriation Bill ("A" Bill) - A bill to appropriate funds to finance another bill bearing the same number.

Attorney General's Opinion - A written analysis of a question of law prepared by the attorney general for the governor, the head of an executive department or any state senator.

Biennium - The two-year period in which a single Legislature, such as the 104th Legislature, exists. Also, the two fiscal years for which a single Legislature does budget planning and makes appropriations.

Bracket - To delay consideration of a bill.

Call of the House - A procedure used to compel attendance of unexcused senators in the chamber. Any senator may move for a call of the house and a majority of senators voting is required to place the house under call.

Carry-over Legislation - Bills and resolutions introduced during the regular session in an odd-numbered year and held over for consideration during the regular session in an even-numbered year.

Chair - The presiding officer. The lieutenant governor or speaker normally serves as chair, but other senators also may preside. The senator presiding is said to be "in the chair."

Cloture - A parliamentary action to cease debate on a bill and vote immediately on its advancement.

Committee on Committees - The select committee that proposes appointments of senators to other legislative committees at the beginning of each biennium.

Committee Statement - A statement indicating whether a committee voted to advance or indefinitely postpone a particular bill. Includes the roll call vote of committee members, a summary of the bill and any proposed committee amendments, and a list of who testified at the bill's hearing.

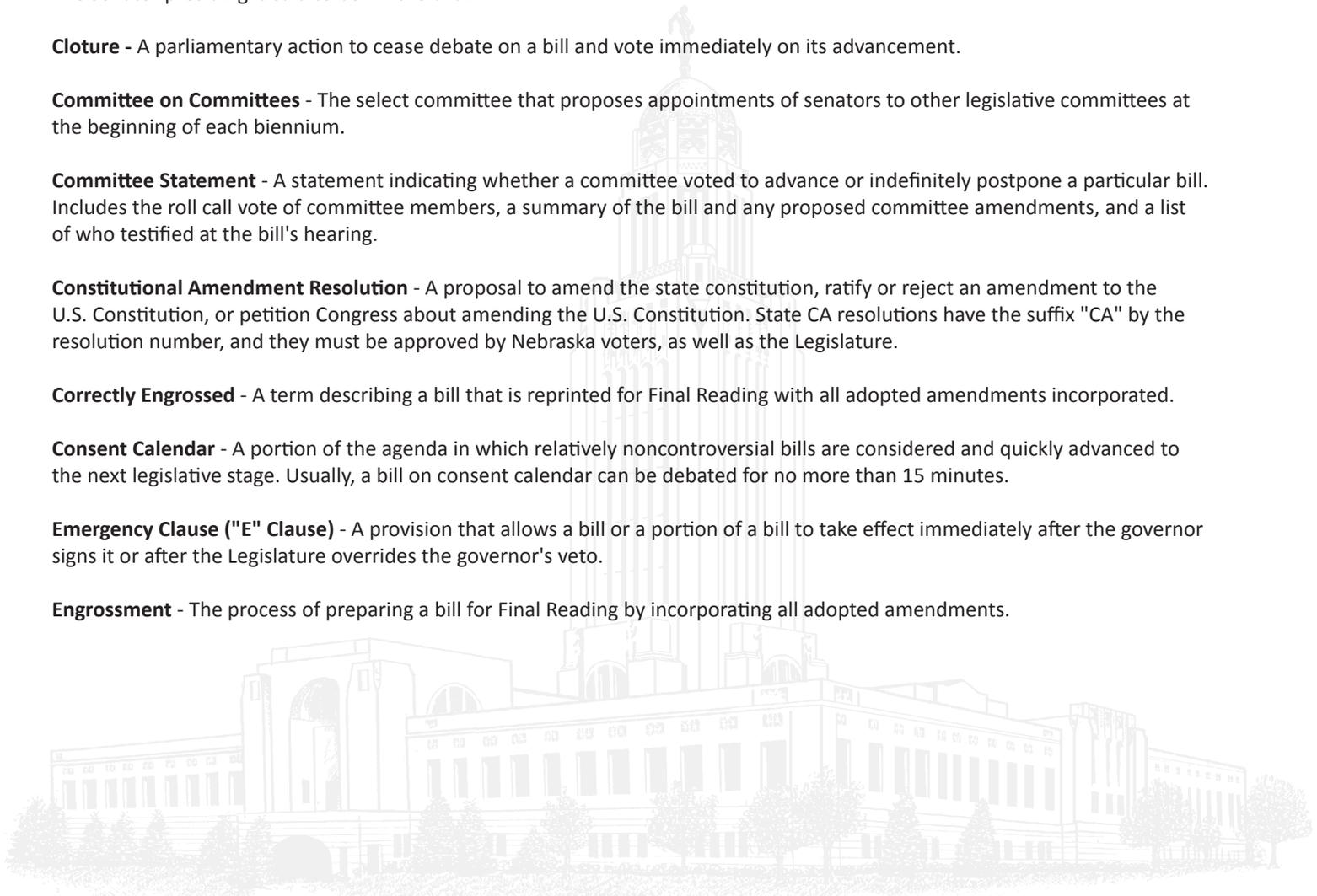
Constitutional Amendment Resolution - A proposal to amend the state constitution, ratify or reject an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, or petition Congress about amending the U.S. Constitution. State CA resolutions have the suffix "CA" by the resolution number, and they must be approved by Nebraska voters, as well as the Legislature.

Correctly Engrossed - A term describing a bill that is reprinted for Final Reading with all adopted amendments incorporated.

Consent Calendar - A portion of the agenda in which relatively noncontroversial bills are considered and quickly advanced to the next legislative stage. Usually, a bill on consent calendar can be debated for no more than 15 minutes.

Emergency Clause ("E" Clause) - A provision that allows a bill or a portion of a bill to take effect immediately after the governor signs it or after the Legislature overrides the governor's veto.

Engrossment - The process of preparing a bill for Final Reading by incorporating all adopted amendments.



Legislative glossary

Enrollment and Review (E&R) - The process of incorporating adopted amendments into a bill, reviewing the bill for technical and grammatical accuracy, and making recommendations relative to arrangement, phraseology and correlation.

Enrollment and Review Initial - The Enrollment and Review process that a bill undergoes after it is advanced from General File.

Enrollment and Review for Engrossment - The process that a bill undergoes after it is advanced from Select File. During this stage, the bill is engrossed and reprinted for Final Reading.

Executive Board of the Legislative Council - A nine-member special committee that oversees legislative services, personnel and other internal affairs of the Legislature. The Executive Board also serves as the Reference Committee.

Executive Session - A closed meeting of a committee to discuss and act on bills and resolutions. An executive session is open only to committee members, committee staff and the media.

Final Reading - The third and last stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. The clerk reads the entire bill aloud, unless final reading is waived, and senators vote without debate on whether to submit the bill to the governor.

Fiscal Note - A statement prepared by the Legislative Fiscal Office estimating the effect a bill would have on state and/or local expenditures and revenue.

Floor - The area of the legislative chamber where the senators sit. When a committee advances a bill "to the floor," that means the bill is being sent to the full Legislature for consideration.

General File - The first stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. Bills on General File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Select File.

Germane - Relevant to the specific subject of the bill being considered. Any amendment that is not germane is out of order.

Hearing - A regularly scheduled committee meeting to receive public comment on proposed bills and resolutions.

Indefinitely Postpone (IPP) - To suspend all further activity against a bill or resolution.

Initiative - The power of the people, through the petition process, to enact laws and adopt constitutional amendments independently of the Legislature.

Interim - The period between regular legislative sessions.

Interim Study Resolution (ISR) - A resolution authorizing a committee to study an issue following adjournment of a legislative session.

Laid Over - A term used to describe a motion or bill on which action has been postponed.

Laws of Nebraska (Session Laws) - Bound compilation of all laws and constitutional amendment resolutions passed in a legislative session, the state Constitution, and subject and section indexes.

Legislative Bill (LB) - A proposal to create, change or delete one or more laws.

Legislative Council - A council consisting of all members of the Legislature. The Legislative Council examines information relating to state government and the general welfare of the state and recommends legislation.

Legislative History - The committee and floor debate records for any bill. A history includes transcripts of the bill's hearing and all floor debate, the introducer's statement of intent and the committee statement.

Legislative glossary

Legislative Journal - Official record of legislative floor action, including all motions, the number of yeas and nays on each vote, how each senator voted on record votes, etc.

Legislative Resolution (LR) - A proposal to make a formal expression of opinion, intent or recognition; amend the state or federal constitution; or authorize a study of an issue during the interim.

Line-item Veto - The power of the governor to make specific reductions in any part of a budget bill passed by the Legislature.

Machine Vote - A vote taken by electronic voting system. The voting board shows how each senator voted, but only vote totals are entered in the Legislative Journal.

Major Proposal - A bill or constitutional amendment resolution that the speaker designates as important enough for scheduling priority. Each session, up to five bills may be chosen as major proposals, all of which must be senator priority bills and must get the approval of two-thirds of the Executive Board.

One-liner - A brief, one-line description of a bill or resolution.

President of the Legislature - The lieutenant governor. While senators address whomever is in the chair as Mr. or Madame President, the lieutenant governor alone holds that official title.

Presiding Officer - The president or senator currently presiding over legislative proceedings.

Priority Bill - A bill that has priority status and generally is considered ahead of other bills in debate. Each senator may select one priority bill, each committee may select two priority bills, and the speaker may select up to 25 priority bills.

Record Vote - A vote on which a record is kept of how each senator voted. The vote is taken by electronic voting system, and the senators' names and corresponding votes are then printed in the Legislative Journal

Reference Committee - The committee, made up of the nine Executive Board members, that refers bills, resolutions and gubernatorial appointments to other committees.

Referendum - The power of the people, through the petition process, to repeal or amend any act or part of an act of the Legislature.

Regular Session - The annual legislative session that begins the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January. Regular sessions generally last 90 legislative days in odd-numbered years and 60 legislative days in even-numbered years.

Revisor Bill - Prepared by the Office of the Revisor of Statutes, proposing a technical correction or the repeal of an obsolete statute.

Roll Call Vote - A vote during which the senators vote one at a time as the clerk reads their names. Senators cast their votes verbally, and their names and corresponding votes are printed in the Legislative Journal if the house is under call.

Select Committee - A permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to the administration of the Legislature.

Select File - The second stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. Bills on Select File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Final Reading.

Session - A period of time, usually a number of days, during which the Legislature meets and transacts business.

Session Laws - Compilation of all laws and constitutional amendment resolutions passed in a session.

Legislative glossary

Sine Die - Without setting a future date for reconvening. When the Legislature adjourns sine die, the legislative session is finished for the year.

Slip Law - A bill or constitutional amendment resolution printed individually in its approved form after being enacted into law or submitted to voters.

Speaker of the Legislature - The officer of the Legislature, elected from among the senators, who prepares the daily agenda and the session calendar and who presides in the absence of the lieutenant governor.

Special Committee - Created by law for a specific reason. Except for the Executive Board, special committees generally have no jurisdiction over bills or resolutions.

Special Session - A limited legislative session called for a specific purpose by the governor or two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

Standing Committee - A permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to an area of public policy. Almost all bills and resolutions are referred to one of the 14 standing committees.

Statement of Intent - Prepared by the sponsor of a bill that briefly describes the bill and the reasons why it is being introduced.

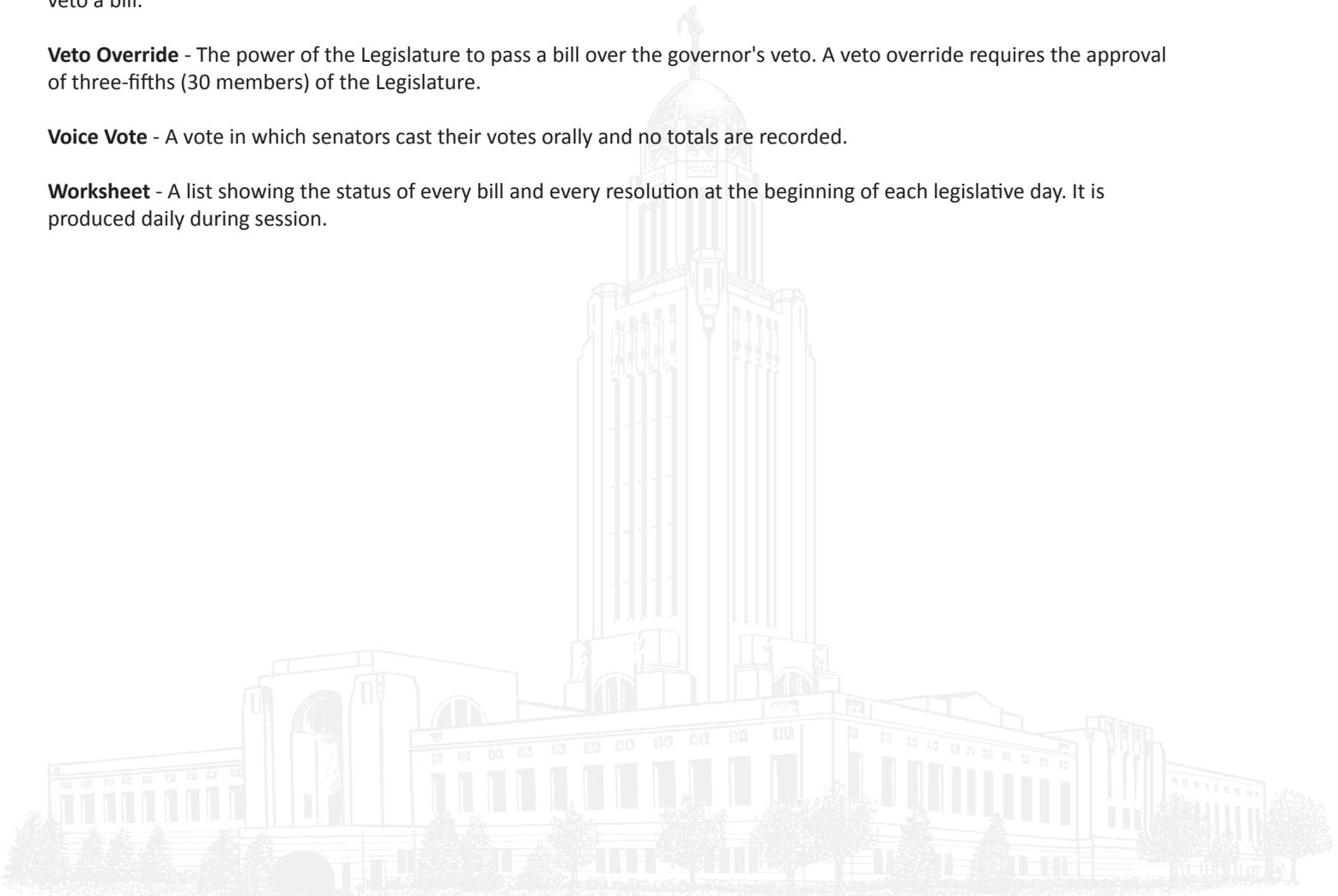
Summary Sheet - Compiled from the daily Journal at the end of each legislative day. It includes a description of bill and resolution activity that day and is available the following morning.

Veto - The power of the governor to reject bills passed by the Legislature. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to veto a bill.

Veto Override - The power of the Legislature to pass a bill over the governor's veto. A veto override requires the approval of three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature.

Voice Vote - A vote in which senators cast their votes orally and no totals are recorded.

Worksheet - A list showing the status of every bill and every resolution at the beginning of each legislative day. It is produced daily during session.



Effective tools for year-round advocacy

Traditional ways of doing business in the development of health care policy are quickly becoming obsolete. Term limits in Nebraska's Legislature and health care reform, coupled with the current economic conditions, have intensified and accelerated the need for innovative and resourceful efforts that advance the NHA's advocacy agenda.

Hospital leaders must be proactive in public policy development—identifying important issues and developing strategies to address them. When Nebraska's hospitals adapt, adjust and respond to new health care policy initiatives in a timely and informed manner, they position themselves as reliable, trusted resources and empower policymakers to make informed decisions.

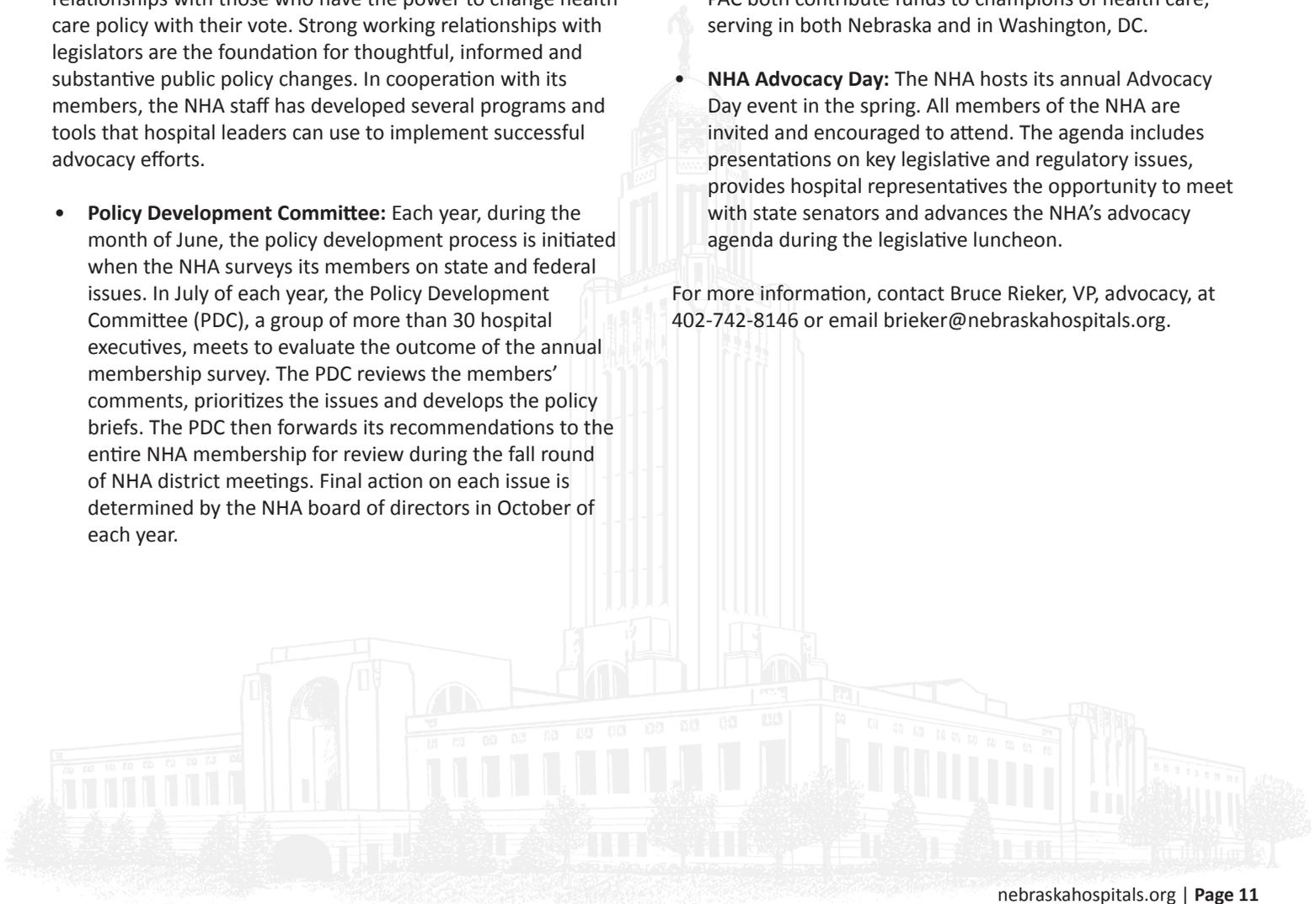
Effective advocacy that produces substantive change is a year-round effort. During the legislative session, NHA members and staff take active roles on numerous bills by promoting those that positively impact the delivery of health care and opposing those that would have an adverse affect on the health of the Nebraskans served by our state's community hospitals; however, there is a great deal more to be done.

The NHA encourages all of its members to participate in activities throughout the year that build stronger working relationships with those who have the power to change health care policy with their vote. Strong working relationships with legislators are the foundation for thoughtful, informed and substantive public policy changes. In cooperation with its members, the NHA staff has developed several programs and tools that hospital leaders can use to implement successful advocacy efforts.

- **Policy Development Committee:** Each year, during the month of June, the policy development process is initiated when the NHA surveys its members on state and federal issues. In July of each year, the Policy Development Committee (PDC), a group of more than 30 hospital executives, meets to evaluate the outcome of the annual membership survey. The PDC reviews the members' comments, prioritizes the issues and develops the policy briefs. The PDC then forwards its recommendations to the entire NHA membership for review during the fall round of NHA district meetings. Final action on each issue is determined by the NHA board of directors in October of each year.

- **Advocacy Teams:** Advocacy teams are employees selected by the hospital's chief executive officer to serve as advisors, planners and active participants in the hospital's political and community advocacy efforts. The team gathers information and helps develop and implement strategies to influence policymakers at the state and federal levels. Advocacy teams also coordinate grassroots political action, such as letter writing, meetings with legislators and hosting policymakers when they visit their facility.
- **CEO/Policymaker Meetings:** CEO meetings with state senators and members of Nebraska's congressional delegation are designed to educate policymakers about health care issues and further develop comfortable working relationships. Such meetings may take place at the hospital, Nebraska State Capitol, Washington, DC or other locations.
- **American Hospital Association Political Action Committee (AHAPAC) and Nebraska Hospital Association Political Action Committee (NHA PAC):** Contributions to the AHAPAC and NHA PAC are crucial for electing champions of responsible health care policy. As the premier vehicle for collecting candidate contributions, the AHAPAC and NHA PAC both contribute funds to champions of health care, serving in both Nebraska and in Washington, DC.
- **NHA Advocacy Day:** The NHA hosts its annual Advocacy Day event in the spring. All members of the NHA are invited and encouraged to attend. The agenda includes presentations on key legislative and regulatory issues, provides hospital representatives the opportunity to meet with state senators and advances the NHA's advocacy agenda during the legislative luncheon.

For more information, contact Bruce Rieker, VP, advocacy, at 402-742-8146 or email brieker@nebraskahospitals.org.





3255 Salt Creek Circle, Ste. 100
Lincoln, NE 68504-4778
p: 402.742.8140 | f: 402.742.8191
nebraskahospitals.org
Laura J. Redoutey, FACHE, President