

Wightman back in saddle for 2013 session

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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State senator recovers from September stroke

For the last month and half, state Sen. John Wightman has worked in his Lexington tax office.

“There’s been a lot of real estate deals before the end of the year,” Wightman said.

That might not seem unusual, especially since the Nebraska Legislature hasn’t been in session.

Or that Wightman and wife, Jan, will pack up and move to Lincoln on Jan. 7 for the 2013 session which begins Jan. 9.

What could be described as extraordinary is that in mid September a blood vessel near Wightman’s brain ruptured. He was hospitalized in Lincoln and later underwent rehabilitative care.

“Two weeks I have no memory of and I couldn’t talk for a week,” Wightman said.

Fast forward a couple of months and the senator said he’s doing just about everything he did before the stroke.

Although he admits wondering whether he’d be able to return to the Legislature, recovery was in the cards.

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Wightman also decided he could continue as chair of the legislative executive council, a seat which is now unopposed.

“I’ve chaired a few meetings recently with help,” Wightman said.

Because of the stroke, he admits being “out of the loop” as far as new legislation.

“I haven’t been to as many legislative meetings as in the past,” the senator said.

Nonetheless, Wightman said funding for education and health and human services issues will be at the forefront.

“Education always is as far as the total cost we pay out in the course of a year,” he said.

Medicaid expansion to cover all low-income Nebraskans, under the Affordable Care Act, will also be debated.

Expansion is optional for states so senators will need to decide whether or not to participate and study the costs involved, Wightman said.

The senator said legislation concerning guns is likely to come up as it does every year.

But because of the shooting in Newtown, CT, Wightman said anti-gun legislation may meet with more favor.

“It’s becoming a big issue nationwide,” he said.

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However Wightman said he thinks arming security officers in schools, as suggested by the National Rifle Association, creates more problems than it solves.

Under Nebraska law, only on-duty police officers can carry guns in schools.

On a fiscal note, Wightman said he's pleased that state revenue projections were revised upward by \$57.9 million for this fiscal year. The Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board said the majority of the increase is from a projected \$52.8 million in individual income tax payments.

He cited Nebraska's low unemployment rate, business and industry expansion and a robust agricultural economy as revenue boosters.

"I hope it (healthy revenue) stays there," Wightman said, alluding to increased taxes and if Congress doesn't stop the nation from going over the fiscal cliff. "That's frightening."

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