

Nebraska State Legislature

JIM SCHEER
Senator

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATURE

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To: Colleagues, Staff, and Interested Persons

From: Speaker Jim Scheer

Date: June 23, 2020

RE: Procedural Modifications for the remainder of the 2020 Session

I have been working with Senator Hilgers, Clerk Patrick O'Donnell, Legislative Services Coordinator Chuck Hubka, and other key staff to make modifications to the Chamber and to our procedures to provide us with a safer environment upon our return. These modifications are based upon the recommendations of Pat Lopez, Acting Director of the Lincoln/Lancaster County Public Health Department, and her staff who met with us in the Chamber to provide us with their public health guidance. The Floor practices implemented for the 3 days we met in March will be continued, along with additional physical and procedural practices. My goal is to cut down on the number of people on the floor at any one time and to provide a modicum of social distancing between members and staff on the floor. We will not be operating as usual when session reconvenes on July 20th, and it is important that you and your staff familiarize yourselves with the following practices. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me or Laurie in my office.

Norris Legislative Chamber Access

- Who will be permitted to come into the Chamber will be restricted. The list of persons who will have access to the Chamber will be limited to members of the Legislature, the Clerk and his floor staff which will include the Sgt. at Arms and a limited number of pages, the State Patrol, Legislative Services Coordinator, Executive Board Legal Counsel, my Procedural Advisor, and Legislative Technology staff when needed.
- Legislative staff permitted on the floor, other than those identified earlier, will be contingent upon each bill under consideration. When a specific bill is being heard, the following staff will be allowed in the Chamber: the Legislative Aide of the Principal Introducer,

the appropriate Committee Legal Counsel, and the Director of the Legislative Fiscal Office and one additional analyst when warranted. Legislative staff will be expected to wear a face mask while in the Chamber.

- Senators proposing amendments will not be allowed to have their staff on the Floor during debate of his or her amendment. Additionally, staff will not be allowed on the Floor for delivering items to or retrieving items from his or her senator (see delivery practices below).

- Media normally allowed access to the Floor will be allowed to observe the Legislature in session from the north balcony. Media representatives working out of the north balcony will be required to wear a face mask and to practice social distancing while in the balcony.

- The Chamber glass doors to the Rotunda will not be in use during session. For safety reasons, these doors will not be locked, but they will be roped off and unavailable except in an emergency. Additionally, the entrance into the foyer between the Chamber and the Rotunda will be roped off to the public given the area does not provide enough space for social distancing with normal use.

- All persons will enter and exit the Chamber through the back hallway. The door on the south side will be the single entrance to the Chamber and the door on the north side will be the single exit. Signage will be used to clearly identify exit and entrance doors.

- Leaving the floor to access the Women's Lounge or the cloak room will require a full exit to the hallway and then re-entrance to the Chamber through the south side door.

- All persons entering the Chamber will have their temperature taken prior to admittance. Anyone whose temperature registers at 100.4 or above will be asked to wait outside of the Chamber for 10 minutes at which time his or her temperature will be rechecked. Staff whose temperature again registers at 100.4 or above will not be allowed in the Chamber. Members whose temperature again registers at 100.4 or above, or who exhibit other symptoms of COVID-19, will be asked to not enter the Chamber but will be allowed to participate in debate from the east balcony. A microphone has been installed there to allow these members to engage in the debate.

- The south balcony will be reserved for any member of the Legislature who wishes to observe the session in person but also remove themselves from the floor where complete social distancing is impossible. However, this balcony has not been equipped with a microphone. Senators in the south balcony will not be able to participate in debate unless they return to the floor. Members choosing to sit in the south balcony are encouraged to wear a mask.

- Lobbyists and members of the public will not be permitted in the balconies.

- The Doctor of the Day program will be suspended, along with the Visiting Chaplain program. The opening prayer will be delivered by a senator each morning.

- Legislative Technology staff will not be sitting on the floor each day. For technology assistance, senators will need to notify Dick Brown or another member of the Clerk's floor staff who will contact someone from the Technology office to assist the senator.

Delivery of Items to and from Senators on the Floor

- Staff will not be allowed on the Floor to deliver items to or to retrieve items from their senator. A couple of pages will be located in the front office of the Clerk's Office (Room 2018) who will serve as couriers between senators and their staff. Senators' staff may deliver items to the Clerk's Office for delivery by a page to their senator on the Floor. Likewise, senators may give items to one of the few pages on the Floor for pickup by the senator's staff in the Clerk's Office.

- Pages will not be delivering posters from desk to desk in the Chamber for signatures as has been the practice in the last few days of prior sessions.

Interaction with the Public, Lobbyists, and Staff

- Sgt. at Arms will not be delivering messages from or to persons in the Rotunda.
- Senators wishing to speak to the public, a lobbyist, or their staff will need to exit the Chamber by the back north door and then re-enter the Chamber through the back south door once they have spoken to the person outside of the back hallway. Senators will want to utilize text messaging, their cell phone (in a phone booth) and their intercom for communication with persons outside of the Chamber.

Access to the Hallway behind the Chamber

- Members of the public and lobbyists will not be allowed to cross the secured, roped off hallway behind the Chamber (hallway situated between the west stairs and the Clerk's Office).
- Legislative Staff not allowed on the Floor will be able to use this hallway to travel to the other side as long as they are wearing a mask and wait until the hallway is not congested.

Coffee, Tea, Water and Sponsored Food

- Pages will not be utilized for getting coffee, tea, and water for members. We will be operating under a self-serve protocol for refreshments.
- Pages will be routinely sanitizing the coffee and hot water handles and the general refreshments area. Additionally, wipes will be available for senators to use in this area.
- Food sponsored by groups or senators will not be distributed to members of the Legislature in the Chamber or to their offices.
- Senators are asked to eliminate sharing candy or other food items from their desk.

Modifications to Voting Procedures

- Call in votes will be allowed in lieu of a machine vote from members with assigned seating at a side table, or members sitting in the east or south balconies, as long as the senator is standing and visible to the Clerk.

Speaking Queue

- In order to prevent congestion at the Presiding Officer's desk, a laptop will be positioned at the front of the Chamber on the south side front desk and one on the north side back row of the Chamber for members to check who is in the speaking queue.

- The Presiding Officer will be announcing the senator recognized to speak in addition to the next two members in the speaking queue in order to minimize senators needing to check one of the two laptops for the speaking queue list.

- Senators sitting in the east and south balconies will be provided with a method to add their name to the speaking queue. Senators in the east balcony will be allowed to participate in debate from the balcony. Senators in the south balcony will need to return to the floor in time to address the body in their speaking queue order.

Legislative Chamber Social Distancing and Cleaning Practices

- Senators' desks and the front staff desks have been modified to provide a Plexiglas barrier in front of each row.

- The tables on each side of the Chamber (along with the addition of two small extra tables on each side) have been repurposed as temporary members' desks. I am asking the senators who sit on the outside aisle of both the north and south sides of the Chamber, in each row of three members, to utilize the side table next to their row as their Chamber desk. These senators will be able to return to their row for addressing the body and for a machine vote. While the request is made of the members sitting on the outside aisle, the three members in each row may agree to identify a different member for relocation to a side table.

- Two chairs on each side of the Chamber (two in the front and two in the back) have been situated for temporary seating for the senator and committee staff persons allowed in the Chamber during the debate of a bill. (The Legislative Aide of the Principal Introducer whose bill is being debated and the appropriate Committee Legal Counsel.) When not speaking to their senator, these chairs are available for the staff allowed on the floor. Two additional locations at the back of the Chamber under the north balcony are reserved for the Director of the Fiscal Office and one additional Fiscal Analyst when their presence is warranted.

- Senators are encouraged to wear a mask while on the floor when interacting with others.

- The Legislature has hired an outside cleaning crew to sanitize the Chamber, the Senators' Lounge and the balconies each evening. To that end, each member will need to clear off their desk (including side tables used as temporary work stations) of all items, including papers, to allow for proper cleaning. Pages will be tasked with clearing off any member's desk for those members who fail to remember to do so before leaving that evening.

- Each member will have hand sanitizer available at their Chamber desk, including temporary desks, and hand sanitizer will be available at each microphone and in the phone booths.

- Hand sanitizing wipes will be available at each microphone for use on the mic stem.

Cloak room

- We are advising only 3 people in the Cloak room (refreshment and exit area behind the Chamber) at one time.

Senators' Lounge

- We are advising only 10 people in the Senators' Lounge at one time and that 6 feet of social distancing be maintained.

Confirmation Hearings and Executive Sessions

- During the final days of the 2020 Session, only one hearing room will be in use for Committees which need to conduct confirmation hearings. Room 1525 has been modified to allow social distancing between senators on the committee and between the audience members. The public capacity for the room is 27 audience members which should not pose a problem for the remaining confirmation hearings. Currently, five committees will need to hold confirmation hearings (Education, General Affairs, Health and Human Services, Natural Resources, and the Transportation and Telecommunications Committees). Given the availability of only one hearing room for this purpose, Chairs and Committee Clerks will need to plan ahead and be flexible.

- During the final days of the 2020 Session, only two hearing rooms will be in use for Committees which desire to hold an executive session. The first option will be room 1113 which has been set up to allow social distancing between members. If this room is in use, a second option will be room 1524, also which has been arranged to allow social distancing. Again, pre-planning and flexibility on the part of Chairs will be appreciated.

- Each hearing room used during the remainder of this session (other than room 1113) will have one door identified as the single entrance and one door identified as the single exit from the room.

Test Nebraska

- Testing for COVID-19 is now available through Test Nebraska (www.testnebraska.com) to anyone wishing to be tested. You do not need to be exhibiting symptoms in order to get tested. While I am recommending everyone be tested the week prior to our reconvening on July 20th, one needs to keep in mind that the test results only indicate that one does or does not have the virus *at that point in time*.

CDC and Public Health Department Guidelines Recommended Throughout the Legislature

- All senators, staff, lobbyists, and members of the public interacting with the Legislature are encouraged to wear a mask. This includes when you are walking in the hallways, standing in the Rotunda, and when speaking to others either in your own office or when visiting another office.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Additionally, use hand sanitizer frequently in between washing your hands.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Avoid shaking hands.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue in the trash.

Senator Offices

- Senators are encouraged to implement social distancing in their offices between staff and with members of the public visiting their office.

- If desired, staff will be able to have their temperature taken each day at the back of the Chamber. However, we ask staff to avoid the start of session each day and when the Legislature reconvenes in the afternoon since the hallway will be heavily traveled with members entering the Chamber.