

Published May 18, 2011  
Published Thursday May 19, 2011

## Teacher union blasts governor

By Paul Hammel  
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU



THE WORLD-HERALD

Gov. Dave Heineman

LINCOLN — The state's teachers union blasted Gov. Dave Heineman on Wednesday for signing a law to divert \$70 million a year for highway construction and for supporting a plan drafted by state business groups to reform a state labor court.

Jess Wolf, president of the Nebraska State Education Association — which endorsed Heineman last year for re-election — said the governor had “lost his bearings” in backing the two proposals. Both, Wolf said will harm teachers and students.

Heineman signed a bill into law Tuesday night that will funnel \$70 million in state funds to build new highways and city streets, which would divert that money away from K-12 education and other state programs.

The signing came after the governor, for several weeks, had criticized Legislative Bill 84 as “a risky financial strategy” that was premature until the state's economy had fully recovered.

Wolf, the NSEA head, said “a true fiscal conservative would never have signed this bill.”

“The state can no more afford this than it can afford the latest plan the chamber of commerce is cooking up — cutting teachers' salaries by 15 percent and effectively eliminating the right of public employees to collectively bargain,” Wolf said.

He added it was “irresponsible” to approve an increase of more than 20 percent in road funding while also signing a budget that cuts \$409 million from K-12 schools over the next two years.

Earlier this week, Heineman came out in favor of a plan by the Omaha, Lincoln and Nebraska chambers of commerce to limit the decision-making power of the State Commission of Industrial Relations. Under the proposal, elected officials — rather than the appointed CIR — would decide labor disputes if a comparison of compensation found that public employees were being paid within 15 percent, high or low, of a prevalent wage.

NSEA officials maintain that the provision would allow school boards and other elected boards to reduce employee salaries by 15 percent, dropping state teacher salaries, on average, to 49th in the nation.

The governor did not respond immediately to a message left Wednesday but has said he is convinced the Legislature will reverse course on the roads funding bill if economic conditions don't improve by the time it goes into effect in 2013.

On the CIR issue, his office provided a statement from the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce stating that its proposal does not require an employer to cut salaries.

“In fact, public employers can increase salaries, provide incentive pay and reward quality employees,” the chamber statement said.

Contact the writer:

402-473-9584, paul.hammel@owh.com

Copyright ©2011 Omaha World-Herald®. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, displayed or redistributed for any purpose without permission from the Omaha World-Herald.



**COUNT ON CHEVY EVENT**

**MALIBU LS**  
Low mileage lease example for very well qualified lessees

**\$179/MONTH FOR 39 MONTHS WITH \$2,499 DUE AT SIGNING**  
No security deposit required. Tax, title, license and dealer fees extra.  
Mileage charge of \$.20/mile over 39,000 miles

> SEE DETAILS