

Students face constitution question on ballot

UNL students will have a choice between two forms of student government blueprints in next week's election.

A vote for the new constitution, recently drawn up, is actually a vote for a 15-member executive board form of student government. A no vote is, in effect, a vote to continue the present 35-member senate form of student government.

A constitutional convention was called this semester by a three-fourths majority vote of all the elected members of the ASUN Senate. The convention was made up of ASUN senators and executives. Little doubt seemed to exist among ASUN senators at that time that the present constitution needed remodeling.

According to ASUN President Steve Fowler, "everyone was convinced that the new constitution was the way to go." However, it appears everyone doesn't think the new constitution is faultless.

There is a controversy among candidates running for ASUN executive positions as to the merit of the revamped document.

The intention of the new constitution's authors was "to decentralize the power in student government and provide for greater involvement and participation in decision making."

According to the present ASUN executives, "the Executive Committee (three executives, speaker protem and three senators) does most of the planning and originating. The senate merely acts as a rubber stamp."

Said Fowler: "This has been the general rule in ASUN for several years."

The ASUN president said the members of the constitutional convention felt the senate has not been a very effective body. The size now is too large for in-depth discussion, he added.

Fowler said the new constitution is a more consistent and workable document than the old one, which he said is difficult to follow and sometimes ambiguous.

ASUN second vice presidential candidate Doug Voegler said too little time was spent investigating various forms of student government. He said he is against the new constitution because he doesn't think it will help make student government any more effective.

ASUN presidential candidate Bill Schwartzkopf said he doesn't think student representation would be as good with the introduction of a 15-member

Executive Board. He said that the College of Arts and Sciences would have too much power while the smaller colleges might lose some representation.

According to ASUN Electoral Commissioner Duane Sneddeker, seats on the board would be, as they are now, by direct apportionment from all UNL colleges. He said representation will depend on the number of students enrolled in each college when elections are held for board members.

Sneddeker said representation on the Executive Board would probably consist of about four representatives from the College of Arts and Sciences, four from graduates and professionals, three from Teachers College and one each from the other four colleges.

Sneddeker said the Executive Board would be a much more representative group because "as far as I can see now the decisions are made by the Executive Committee. It could probably be said with some justice that the present senate has no function."



Presidential candidate Steve Christensen said a 15-member Board would give one party an opportunity to sweep the elections.

"A 15-member Board would be an elitist body," he added.

Minorities would lose whatever representation they have now, he said. "We are confident that the new constitution is going to fail."

Presidential candidates Bruce Beecher and Roy Baldwin are both senators, and were members of the constitutional convention that wrote the controversial document. Baldwin supports the adoption of the new constitution.

At a debate of ASUN presidential candidates Wednesday, Beecher reversed his position and said he would not vote for or support the passage of the new constitution.

He said his major objection to the new

constitution is the provision for recall of any executive board appointee by a two-thirds vote of the body.

Schwartzkopf found fault in the present constitution as well as the new. The current constitution requires that two-thirds of the senate vote either for or against a bill or it fails for lack of voting.

"A lot of bills failed with 23 senators voting for and none, against," Schwartzkopf stated.

The authors of the new constitution changed the voting requirement. For a piece of general legislation to pass, all that would be required would be a simple majority of all board members present.

Chairman of the Executive Board would be elected by other members of the Board. Sneddeker said he at first objected to the chairman not being directly elected by students.

"Later I became convinced that direct election of the chairman would only encourage the same type of senate-executive relationship we have now," he said. If the board finds it can't work with the chairman they can remove him and elect another board member to the position, he said.

Baldwin said the new constitution's most important advantage is changing from a very strong president to a situation in which the real power comes from the Executive Board.

In the spring of 1969 a less revolutionary constitution was put on the ballot but failed because of lack of voting. With 1,273 students voting that spring, 1,098 favored the new constitution and 154 voted against it. At least 2,700 voters were needed to make the elections valid, but only 7.2 per cent of the students on the Lincoln campuses voted.

That constitution's major difference from the old one was that it would have changed senate seat apportionment from a college system of representation to a mixed system of at-large district and advisory board representation.

This spring's new constitution will face the same test as that ill-fated document did. The current constitution has the advantage and it will win by default if too few students vote.

The present constitution requires that a majority vote, with at least 30 per cent of the eligible students voting, is needed to enact a new constitution. Or, an affirmative vote of 15 per cent of the eligible voters when less than 30 per cent of the eligible students vote.

Suter moves into ombudsman position

After only a few days in office, UNL's new ombudsman concedes it would be "easy to blow the whole thing."

"The situations which an ombudsman must mediate are often emotion-charged and delicate," said James T. Suter. "If he's to retain credibility with the University community, the ombudsman must be objective and fair in his negotiations."

Suter, associate professor of planning and architecture, was appointed Saturday



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by the NU Board of Regents, the result of a drive by ASUN for the creation of an ombudsman position.

In 532 Oldfather, students, faculty and administrators can reveal their gripes in strict confidence. And there will be no forms to fill out, no administrative red tape.

The ombudsman's role is to use persuasion and reason to mediate conflicts which formal University channels have been unable to resolve, Suter said.

"Access to information is power," he said, and he's been assured access to all information available to the chancellor. Although the ombudsman can't force members of the University community to negotiate or accept recommendations, his ultimate weapon lies in the public forum, Suter added.

"The office doesn't align with any group," he continued. It doesn't report to the administration, students or faculty but serves them, he said.

"The only way to serve divergent groups' interests is to seek equity, not to satisfy one group's needs at the expense of another."

"Although often described as an advocate, the ombudsman shouldn't be a crusader until all the information is clear and the alternatives are outlined. Perhaps then he can be an advocate of a solution," Suter said.

The proposal passed by ASUN doesn't stipulate that the ombudsman must be a faculty member. However, Suter said he thinks the ombudsman should at least qualify for a faculty appointment.

"Unless he has faculty status, the ombudsman can't deal with faculty," Suter said. He added that if a faculty

member becomes permanent ombudsman, he'll lose credibility with the faculty.

That's why Suter agreed to continue as ombudsman only for the rest of this term and next school year.

"The function and position of the ombudsman is important, but the person isn't important," he said. No one should stay in the office long enough to become an institution, he said.

Suter was nominated for the appointment by a search committee of students, faculty and administrators which solicited names from the University community. The ombudsman can be removed by a majority vote of the committee.

Currently, the office is supported by University funds, Suter said. ASUN voted Wednesday to allocate \$500 to support the ombudsman office.

However, Suter said he would like ASUN next year to finance five to ten per cent of the \$17,000 ombudsman budget to solidify the ombudsman's independent position, he said.

"If student input is proportionately too little, then the aura that the office is supported by the student body is lost," Suter added.

One of the few rules he's made, Suter said, is "this office will never function so the ombudsman is hard to reach."

Although part-time ombudsman now, Suter said it might be a full-time job next year, depending on the work load.

The office is open every day with a secretary on duty at least five hours a day. Suter is in the office Monday mornings, all day Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. He also intends to have the office open in the summer.