

# Prisoners' rights discussed

By Jim Zalewski

The majority of those testifying before the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature favored passage of three bills that would give prison inmates more rights in certain release procedures.

LB567, providing sentence reduction for "good time" served by inmates, by far drew the most controversy and discussion. Committee members and witnesses could not agree on the implications of the bill which would replace a law passed in 1969.

Charles Cunningham, administrative assistant for the State Department of Correctional Services (DCS), said LB567 gives the prisoner a discharge date if he keeps on "good behavior."

"This makes the inmate no longer completely dependent on the records office," Cunningham said.

"Good time" laws were enacted essentially as behavioral modification tools, according to Joe Vitek, DCS director.

### No release date

"A man never really has a

definite release date under the current system," Vitek said.

The "good time" allowance provides the prisoner with an incentive to get out earlier, which helps prevent discipline problems within the prison, Vitek said.

Under the present law, parolees are dealt with harshly if brought back for even a technical violation of their parole terms, Vitek said.

Though the governor hasn't openly stated approval of LB567, Vitek said Gov. Exon gave him the authority to establish the best program in the interest of public welfare.

### Governor agrees

"I believe the governor would be in concert with what I have said today," Vitek said.

The bill is constitutional, Vitek said, but making it retroactive may require approval of the pardon board.

Eugene Neal, a member of the State Parole Board, said the bill contributes greatly to the control of inmate discipline, but he does not favor LB567.

"I'm not in favor of the present law, but I'm not totally

in favor of 567 either," Neal said. "Good time shouldn't be awarded if a paroled man commits a new crime, but it would be under LB567."

An amendment is needed to assist the parole board in getting the parolee to meet his parole obligations, Neal said. An inmate should be given credit for all he has earned, but if he ignores his parole terms, Neal said, the inmate should be made to serve his full term.

### "Nobody understands"

"If a man disregards a parole officer's efforts and has to be returned to prison, it is hard to understand how that individual can be awarded good time from the day he broke parole," Neal said.

"We can't apply the law today because it is evident nobody understands it," Chairman Roland Luedtke said.

Times and penalties should be specified, said Robert Parrett, Nebraska Penal Complex warden, testifying in favor of the bill.

In other action, no opposition was voiced against LB567, a bill which would permit inmates to retain their driver's license if convicted for a non-driving crime.

### Higher premiums

The present law forces higher insurance premiums and other administrative problems on the inmate when he is released and re-applies for his license, according to Sen. Gary Anderson of Axtell, the bill's introducer.

Vitek said the State Department of Motor Vehicles favors passage of LB569.

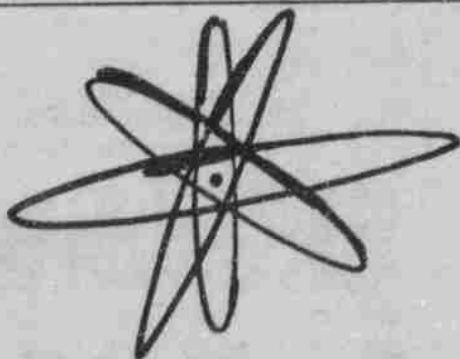
"It is a very cumbersome procedure getting every one of the former inmates a new license," Vitek said.

LB570, which would permit an inmate to retain his professional license if convicted of a felony not dealing with his profession, drew support from Vitek and Don Bell, a former inmate who was denied his barber's license when released.

## ASUN Agenda

Today, 6 p.m. Nebraska Union

- I. Senate action committee
- II. Roll call and approval of minutes
- III. Executive report
  - A. Minority affairs problems
  - B. Scheduling of ASUN election debate
  - C. Planning the anti-litter program
  - D. Discussion on library lending code
- IV. Old business-discussion on CSL members terms
- V. New business
  - A. Resolution no. 57 - support of LB 505 dealing with control of beverage containers.
  - B. Resolution no. 58 - support of UN Rowing Crew and a donation of \$500
  - C. Resolution no. 59 - support of national committee for the tax deduction of tuition fees and donation of \$175.
  - D. Resolution no. 60 - Clarification of when the proposed ASUN constitutional amendment takes effect
  - E. Resolution no. 61 - Supporting abolishment of the parking lots north of the union
- VI. Announcements - help is needed to arrange files in the office.



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