

Speakers jab Lewis inquiry

By Liz Crumley and George Miller

About 500 persons heard seven speakers Friday attack the investigation of the Sept. 24 shooting death of Arvid Sherdell Lewis.

The meeting, sponsored by the ASUN Senate, was called to "discuss in an orderly fashion" Lewis's shooting, according to Sen. Tony Williams.

Speakers included Omaha State Sen. Ernest Chambers, Lincoln City Councilman John Robinson, Lancaster County Commissioner Bruce Hamilton and Jimmi Smith, Charles Rogers, Roger Elliott and Ronald Massie of the Justice for Lewis Committee.

County Sheriff Merle Karnopp, City Councilman Robert Sikyta and a Lincoln Police Dept. representative had said they would address the crowd, but failed to appear.

Boosalis left

Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis said she would attend to answer questions but left before the question-and-answer period began.

County Atty. Ron Lahners refused to attend, saying it "was not in the best interests of his office to come."

Also attending the meeting was Barbara Kelly, Lewis's mother, who said she was

"deeply touched" by the turnout.

"If the death of my son is what it's taken to bring you all together, then this is a great day," she said.

Hamilton said, "If we are watchful, if we show concern, if we are responsible and continue to demand truth, the truth will emerge."

Chambers said Lahners's investigation of the Lewis shooting showed "disorganization, lack of competency and a total disregard of constitutional principles" by law enforcement officers.

"The police are creating an environment where anything a person in uniform does is acceptable," he said.

Chambers said the police "went after Lewis because he was black, because he drove a black Cadillac with a white top and diamond window in the rear and because he had a white girl friend."

Hamilton said information Lahners released raised more questions than it answered.

Grand jury alternative

"A grand jury remains our only responsible alternative to Lahners's investigation," he said.

All seven speakers stressed student involvement in a petition drive calling for

a grand jury investigation.

To force the calling of the grand jury by petition, 4,828 signatures are required from registered Lancaster County voters. The number represents 10 per cent of the county residents who voted in the last gubernatorial election.

Hamilton predicted that a grand jury would be called, "hopefully with a special prosecutor who will present all the facts to the grand jury."

Robinson advocated a review of the recruitment, training and enforcement policies and procedures of Lincoln and Lancaster County law enforcement agencies.

Elliott read a letter from the Justice for Lewis Committee in response to what Elliott said was a request by Lahners for committee cooperation in arresting black citizens in Lancaster County.

The letter, addressed to Lahners, accused police officers of "intimidation, harassment and coercion" and refused cooperation.

It requested Lahners's assistance in "removing all programs advocating 'police as a friend,' especially where black children are involved" in the Lincoln Public Schools.



State Sen. Ernest Chambers urged students to sign petitions calling for a grand jury investigation of Sherdell Lewis's death at Friday's open meeting.

Law-psych conference: commitment laws abused

By Theresa Forsman and Dick Hovorka

The so-called vagueness and abuse of civil commitment laws and the methods used to release inmates from prison headlined discussions during the concluding session of the Law-Psychology Research Conference at UNL's Law College.

Too many persons are committed to mental hospitals on the presumption that they may be dangerous, said Saleem Shah, who directs the Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency for the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington D.C.

He said he does not know why this reason for committing persons has not been challenged.

Judges commit persons because they are presumed dangerous, but many state laws don't include a definition of dangerousness or mental disorder, Shah said.

Any definition

"This makes dangerousness a many splendored thing," he said. "You can define it any way you want to."

"In Nebraska, a person could be committed for biting his fingernails," Shah said.

In the judge's mind, a dangerous act

becomes a dangerous trait which becomes a dangerous individual, he said. The act which started the whole irrational line of thinking is often nothing more than most of us do every day, he said.

Shah said dangerousness in one situation is not necessarily permanent dangerousness. If one of the factors which make a person act dangerously is taken away, it is possible he no longer will be a threat and commitment will be unnecessary.

R. Kirkland Schwitzgebel, of California Lutheran College, said commitment is the easy way to deal with mental disorders because mental institutions have a low improvement rate.

Schwitzgebel said many psychiatric institutions are unreliably rated because most are judged by the money they spend, not on quality. Institutions should be judged on the type, amount and effectiveness of treatment, he said.

Schwitzgebel has conducted a study of

several psychiatric institutions for his book, *Street Corner Research*. He cited a hospital in Missouri which gives mental patients about 20 minutes of therapy per week.

This helps prove that persons are being held for preventive detention under the guise of treatment, he said.

He said maltreatment in mental hospitals is difficult to sue against "because everyone knows the plaintiff is crazy."

"The time is long past due for the mental health profession to render accountability," Schwitzgebel said.

David B. Wexler, a law professor from Arizona University said few defendants plead insanity because if they are found insane, they will be sent to a psychiatric hospital for an indefinite time.

The hospital and court should work together to decide if a patient should be released from a hospital once he is committed, Wexler said. The institution should judge whether the patient is ready to be

released; the court should make the final decision, he said.

The hospital then would not have to consider moral aspects of the crime, he said.

Wexler said a prisoner should be allowed to voluntarily transfer to a hospital for psychological treatment. He said most prisoners now can transfer only "involuntarily."

Wexler also advocated an "objective method" of releasing a person from prison, in which a prisoner would work toward a predetermined goal during his sentence, such as attaining a high school diploma, he said.

The method contrasts with three others used to release prisoners, which include a straight time sentence; a "subjective ruling" (the prison determines if the inmate has "developed socially constructive ideas), and a sentence in which the prisoner is not told how he can be released, Wexler said.

Douglas rules vet school contract legal

By Terri Willson

Nebraska Atty. Gen. Paul Douglas ruled last week that NU's reciprocal agreement with regional and nearby veterinary schools does not violate Nebraska's constitution.

NU's Department of Veterinary Science offers two years of pre-veterinarian study and conducts research, teaching and educational extension programs. But students must take four years of doctorate work at another university.

The contractual program by which NU helps veterinary science students pay their way to veterinary schools in other states was examined last month by the Legislature's board to see if it agreed with Article 7, Section 11 of the Nebraska constitution. It states that no state or local money can be spent on any project not under the control of Nebraska or any of the state's local political subdivisions.

According to Marvin Twiehaus, chairman of NU's Veterinary Science Dept., the university now supports 67 veterinary students at Oklahoma, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Minnesota.

Douglas's ruling, released Oct. 10, states that the Legislature has provided that the NU Board of Regents may enter into agreements with schools or colleges of



Attorney General Paul Douglas

Photo by Ted Kirk

veterinary medicine and surgery in other states.

If NU's Veterinary Science Dept. makes contracts with schools owned or exclusively controlled by other states or political subdivisions of other states, the contracts are not in violation of the state constitution.

Nebraska Sen. Frank Lewis of Bellevue, chairman of the Unicameral's Education Committee, said last month Douglas would have no choice other than to rule the

program illegal. Thursday he said he was "surprised" to hear the attorney general's opinion, although he said he had not read it yet.

Meanwhile, the search for a five-state regional veterinary school site continues. The Old West Regional Commission decided in September, according to Twiehaus, that there is definite need for such a school in one of the five midwestern states of Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Colorado.

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Weather

Monday: Mostly sunny and mild. Highs in the low 70s.

Monday night: Temperatures ranging from 40 to 45.

Tuesday: Clear to partly cloudy. High temperatures in the mid-60s.