

Citizens air views on public radio

By Marella Synovec

The public hearing Tuesday night before the Nebraska Educational Television (NETV) Commission was dominated by supporters of a public radio network in the state.

NU regents vote not to endorse Neb. public radio

By Theresa Forsman

The NU Board of Regents Saturday instructed Steven Sample, university vice president for academic affairs, not to support the establishment of public radio in Nebraska.

Sample is the university's representative on the Nebraska Educational Television (NETV) Commission, which is expected to decide later this summer whether to approve a commission subcommittee report outlining procedures for establishing public radio in the state.

Grand Island Regent Robert Koefoot said that based on information he received from broadcasters there is no need for public radio in the state.

NETV Commissioner Edwin Nelson, chairman of the subcommittee which has been studying public radio in other states for the past year, said the subcommittee's study showed that public radio does not duplicate commercial radio services.

Cost to taxpayers

Koefoot said he did not think taxpayers should pay for education by public radio. "I do not think we can afford it," he said. He added that he did not think many Nebraskans watched NETV.

Costs to Nebraskans of operating the public radio system proposed in the subcommittee's report would be about \$350,000 initially and \$656,000 annually, according to the report. Koefoot said these cost estimates could be misleading. He cited NETV's original budget compared to annual NETV operating costs now.

Lincoln Regent Ed Schwartzkopf, who voted against endorsing public radio in Nebraska, questioned whether money for public radio would cut the state allocation for NETV.

Robert Simmons, NU regent from Scottsbluff, said he did not think public radio would be in competition with commercial radio.

"The University should want a facility which could take education outstate," he said.

Service good, valuable

Simmons said people in the western part of Nebraska are ignored by commercial television but that according to the subcommittee's report, public radio would "cover the whole state." Simmons also praised NETV, saying service was "very good and valuable for what it costs."

Besides Koefoot and Schwartzkopf, other regents voting not to approve public radio for Nebraska included Robert Moylan and Robert Prokop of Omaha and Kermit Wagner of Schuyler.

Omaha Regent Kermit Hansen did not vote, saying the subcommittee report was too new and complex to vote on without studying it. He and other regents had not seen the subcommittee report, which was made public July 14.

Minden Regent Robert Raun voted against disapproving public radio. He said he could see advantages and disadvantages of having public radio in the state, but said he felt "inadequate to vote against public radio, having just heard the report."

Simmons also voted against disapproving public radio for the state.

Sample said the NETV Commission will vote whether to accept or reject the report. If the report is accepted, he said, the commission will prepare recommendations for the Legislature and Gov. J. James Exon, and the matter would be part of future legislation.

The hearing was broadcast live from the NETV studio.

Testimony given by John Hansen, a farmer from Newman Grove, drew laughter and applause from the audience at the NETV studio. Speaking in support of a public radio network in the state, Hansen said the public radio offers programming not available on commercial stations.

"I would rather listen to the squeaky bearings in my combine than hear the same AM radio tunes played 10 times a day," Hansen said.

In a more serious vein, Hansen said public radio could offer special interest groups detailed information of concern to them. Farmers, for example, could hear detailed market reports, he said.

Hansen also suggested that the commission reconsider the use of AM radio bands. Previously, the commission had said that the use of the FM bands were the only feasible methods of broadcasting public radio.

Commissioner Ed Nelson said FM frequencies had been considered for public radio because they offer a greater transmission range and better sound quality. Also, public radio stations could transmit from television towers already existing at locations across the state, Nelson said.

Ron Kurtenbach, founder of the *Lincoln Gazette* newspaper and *Sunrise Communications*, both not-for-profit media, said he supported public radio but was concerned that a clearly structured means of public access would not be included.

Public opinions on controversial issues are not heard on commercial radio stations, Kurtenbach said, and public radio could allow this.

Raymond Haggh, UNL music professor, said the educational aspect of public radio is extremely important.

"Public radio would be an effective means of making the state's cultural diversity known to its people," Haggh said.

Haggh added that the opposition to public radio based on reasons of cost, unfair competition with commercial radio and duplication of programming is not valid.

"Federal funds would pay 75 per cent of the initial cost," Haggh said. "After the first year, it would cost each Nebraska tax payer about 50 cents per year. Maintenance costs for one year would be less than a year's cost for maintaining the university's new sports complex."

Most of the testimony, calls and letters from individuals and representatives of interest groups, supported public radio. Most commented on the scope of cultural, informational and educational programming public radio would offer.

The main opposition heard at the televised hearing was a statement prepared by Richard Chapin, chairman of the public radio committee of the Nebraska Broadcaster's Association.

Chapin's statement outlined the following reasons for not having public radio:

-The ETV Commission (who would be the licensee for the proposed station serving the Lincoln and Omaha area) has no legal right to spend time and money on radio.

-The governing body of public radio should be separate from the governing body of public television.

-The proposed stations would interfere with television frequencies in certain parts of the state.

The NETV Commission subcommittee on public radio announced its recommendations last week for a Nebraska Public Radio Service, which is proposed as a confederation of educational licensees representing post-secondary schools in Nebraska.

The subcommittee studied public radio nationwide.

Philip Heckman, commission chairman, said the testimonies, calls, letters and petitions would be reviewed and put before the commission at their regular meeting Thursday, July 22.

UNL employes encouraged to enroll in driving course

More than 1600 UNL employes have completed the defensive driving course mandated by Gov. J. James Exon last October, according to Phillip Cross, campus police officer, who teaches the course.

About 400 UNL employes still have to take the course, he said.

Cross, Robert Myers and Michaela Callahan, Campus Police Training and Safety Education staff members, began teaching the course to university employes in February.

The course will be available from Campus Police for an indefinite time because some new employes will be required to take the course, Cross said. Also, employes who have vehicle accidents must retake the course.

According to Exon's decree, all state employes who drive state vehicles or ask for mileage costs from the state when driving their own vehicles, must take the defensive driving course.

"Some laxity"

"But the university has allowed some laxity" concerning those who must take the course, Cross said.

Winn Sanderson, assistant vice president for budget and personnel in the university systems office, said only those university employes whose job description "primarily involves" driving a state vehicle are required to take the course. No faculty members must take the course, Sanderson said, because their primary work is not driving state vehicles.

Cross said the department heads decided who in their department should take the course.

Del Maier, general services director for the State Department of Administrative Services, said each state agency is responsible for having employes

take the course and for keeping records about who has taken the course.

Sanderson said though the university has a low accident rate, all employes are encouraged to take the course.

"Good program"

"I think it is a good program but it causes limitations in terms of work force, budget and time off," Sanderson said.

He estimated the course would cost the university about \$75,000 if every employe took it.

The \$5 fee for the course is paid for by the employe's department.

The eight-hour course includes films, lecture and discussion on traffic accidents and how they can be avoided, Cross said. Cross said that his impression is that many employes are not "pleased about coming to the course, but they change their minds by the time they have completed it." He said he has received many favorable comments from employes who completed the course.

Course's effectiveness

The purpose of the course is to save lives and money, he said, though there are no statistics on the course's effectiveness in Nebraska, according to Thomas Carroll, executive director of the Nebraska Safety Council.

Carroll said he does not "pay any attention to statistics. Any course which has been taught since 1965 to millions of people must be good or it wouldn't have survived."

The National Safety Council is a private, service organization which provides the course to various agencies.

National Safety Council statistics show that nationwide the course reduces accidents by over twenty per cent.