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Jobless rate may help UNL gain new building

By Mary Jo Pitzel The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is taking advantage of the high unemployment rate in Omaha to qualify for \$7.1 million in federal funds to finance a Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) Bldg. on the UNO campus.

Title I of the Public Works Employment Act of 1976 establishes a \$2 billion national fund to be distributed to all governmental areas suffering from high unemployment rates. The purpose of the act is to lower the national unemployment rate, which now stands at 7.8 per cent.

Nebraska is allocated \$9.95 million under Title I of the act. Only Douglas and Sarpy Counties, which include the metropolitan area of Omaha, qualify for the Title I funds, according to William Kranda, Omaha Mayor Edward Zorinsky's administrative assistant.

Because UNO is a single-purpose government unit within an area of above-average unemployment, the uni-versity is eligible for federal assistance, Kranda said. Omaha unemployment is listed at 8.7% for the three month period from March to May of this year.

At their monthly meeting Friday, the NU Board of Regents approved UNO's request to apply for the \$7.1 million needed to finance the HPER Bldg. UNO's application "is essentially ready to go," said Charles Hein, director of university relations at UNO.

HPER has priority

The HPER Bldg. has first priority in the NU budget requests for this year, Hein said. Plans for the building have been under way since July 1973, when \$6,000 was allocated for planning. An additional \$226,000 was used to complete the building's design.

Title I rules limit each Nebraska application to \$5 million in assistance. Although UNO's request exceeds that amount by \$2.1 million, a provision in the act allows waivers to be granted, Kranda said. UNO will apply to the U.S. Commerce Dept. for a waiver, he said,

If the waiver is denied, UNO will "have to be able to assure the government that the money would come from state funds or some other source," Hein said. UNO has a list of several alternatives if the waiver fails, although Hein did not give any details.

The UNO request for Title I funds "is a one-time, oneshot hype into the economy of \$7.1 million," Hein said. The Title I program will run until the \$9.95 million is allocated or until the September 1977 deadline.

Filing date not set

Filing date for applications has not yet been published. Kranda said. Notification of the amount of Title I funds awarded to each applicant will be received within 60 days of the filing date.

UNO is not the only Nebraska government agency bidding for a share of the \$9.95 million of Title I funds. Larry Bare, director of the division of community affairs in the State Economic Development Office, said he can't determine how many applications will come from Nebraska until all applications are received at the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) regional office in Denver.

Bare said Omaha, Bellevue, Douglas and Sarpy Counties, and Millard public schools are among Title I applicants.

Some controversy arose among Omaha state legislators over UNO's application, Kranda said. The EDA, which sponsors the Public Works Employment Act, changed its policy to make general purpose government units such as city, county and state governments equal to single purpose units such as universities. Previously, the general purpose units received higher priority in federal funding than the single purpose units.

"We're not objecting to UNO (applying for Title I funds), we're protesting the EDA for changing their plans in mid-stream," Kranda said.

Kranda said there was no communication between UNO and the mayor's office concerning applications for Title I funds. "We all live in the same community," he said. "If our goals are to be the same, I think our planning should be too."

Hein said he and UNO Prof. Rex Engebretson, who worked on filing the application, saw no need to contact the mayor on UNO's application.

"The mere intent of the program is to put people to work where they are unemployed," Hein said. If that goal is kept in mind, he said, the highest service will be performed.





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