

Regents' strings tightened little by court ruling

By Mary Jo Pitzl

The Nebraska Supreme Court ruling heralded as a significant step in clarifying NU government has had little visible impact since the July 27 decision, say sources from both sides of the case.

"It really doesn't change anything drastically," NU Board of Regents chairman Robert Simmons said of the court case between the Board of Regents and the State of Nebraska.

The Scottsbluff regent said he sees "no changes of great significance" in the ruling, but added that it defines where the power and responsibility for NU government lie.

Last month the regents case went to court seeking settlement of a nearly two year debate with the Legislature over control of university purse strings.

The Supreme Court ruled that the regents are responsible for spending university-generated funds and determining NU employee raises. The ruling also reiterated the right of the Legislature to control all monies appropriated to the university through general state revenue.

Debate stewing

Debate has been stewing for several years over the

extent of legislative control of the university. Article VII, section 10, of the Constitution of Nebraska states that the Legislature may prescribe the duties and powers of the Board of Regents, but must vest general government of the university in the regents. This clause created a gray area outlining university responsibility in the past.

The July 27 ruling clarifies the duties of the Legislature and the Board of Regents, according to William Erskine, executive vice president of administration.

"The Legislature, as we saw it, was entering too far into the management of the university," Erskine said. "The decision has made it clear that the management of university funds is with the regents," he said, adding that responsibility for university dollars now stops with the regents, rather than the Legislature.

"Despite the court's ruling, they (the Legislature) will still want to know how the university is operating its money. We are still dependent on the state appropriation for the major part of the university budget," Erskine said.

Budget funding

The NU budget is financed by state tax dollars, tuition, federally supported dollars and a revolving fund, according to Erskine. The 1977-78 budget of \$161,701,952 includes \$101,009, 685 in state aid.

The regents' new authority over university funds will mean less detail on NU's legislative budget bill and less pressure on the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, according to Sen. Jerome Warner, committee chairman.

Since the regents now are responsible for university-generated funds, the need for an appropriation line for cash funds is eliminated from the budget bill, the Waverly senator said.

Warner speculated that the regents will feel the brunt of any criticism the ruling brings about.

"Criticism will be directed at the regents for the way

the money is appropriated," Warner said.

Issues formerly resolved by the Legislature now are transferred to the regents, Warner said.

"The Board of Regents will be the final court of appeals," Warner said. "The regents will come out with more responsibility and with that comes more pressure."

Although Warner agrees that the court ruling is a major decision in NU government, he foresees few problems between the regents and the Legislature.

Skepticism

While most state officials and NU administrators seem to share Warner's sentiments, one state senator is skeptical of the court ruling's benefits.

Utica Sen. Douglas Bereuter said he thinks repercussions of the court ruling may hurt students in the long run.

"I'm just not certain there will be as much confidence in the Legislature as a whole in the decision of the Board of Regents or any other policy-making body as there would be exhibited in one of the Legislature's own committees," Bereuter said.

This could result in lower legislative appropriations to the university, since the Legislature may be less generous in allocating state tax dollars over which they have no control, said Bereuter, appropriations committee member.

The impact of lower appropriation often results in cutbacks in academic services, according to Bereuter. Undergraduate students primarily would be affected by these cutbacks because they have no professional lobbying in their behalf, he said.

"Most of the things that have benefitted students have been a result of legislative initiative," Bereuter said.

Omaha Regent Kermit Hansen has voiced hope that the regents will receive the lump sum amount. Bereuter said another lawsuit may be necessary to clarify that question.

Intern program

A program offering economics and business students from foreign countries the opportunity to work in American companies has brought two students to UNL.

Maryann Rohner, 22, Schaffhausen, Switzerland and Manfred Bauer, 28, Koln, Germany, are here on internship programs.

In the program, firms and institutions in 55 countries make temporary positions available for students from other countries. This gives students the opportunity to observe how foreign businesses are managed.

UNL is the participating program in the U.S., from June 1 to Sept. 15. The students will be working through the Business and Finance Dept.

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