

# Pop tax bill amendment would raise tobacco taxes

By Tam Lee

Cigar and pipe smokers may get an extra incentive to kick the habit if an amendment approved Tuesday by the Nebraska Legislature becomes law.

Lincoln Sen. Wally Barnett's amendment to LB109, the so-called "pop tax" bill, would impose a use tax equal to 15 percent of the wholesale price on all tobacco products except cigarettes, which already are taxed 13 cents a pack. The amendment, adopted 28-12, was criticized by some senators because it had not been through public hearing.

Legislative rules require all bills to have a public hearing, but amendments do not require one.

Big Springs Sen. Jack Mills suggested Barnett submit the proposal as a bill so it could be scheduled for a public hearing.

Omaha Sen. Bernice Labeledz said it was improper to impose a tax without having a public hearing on the subject.

Bellevue Sen. Frank Lewis, puffing on his trademark, a big cigar, declared to the Legislature, "I come to you with no biases on this particular piece of legislation." He later admitted his conflict of interest and said he did not oppose the tax, but thought it should get a hearing.

Lewis at first voted no on adoption of the amendment, but when he saw Barnett had the required number of votes said, "I give up," and changed his vote to aye. LB109, introduced by the constitutional revision and recreation committee, was given second round approval after the amendment adopting the tobacco tax was adopted.



Photo by Ted Kirk

Bellevue Sen. Frank Lewis, with his "trademark" cigar, does not oppose an amendment to the so-called pop tax bill which would raise tobacco taxes.

If the bill is passed, an excise tax of one-fourth cent would be collected for each four ounces or less of soft drinks and soft drink syrup.

All the tobacco tax revenue would be placed in the Nebraska Capital Construction Fund. Eight percent of the revenue from the soft drink tax would be used to create a Nebraska Outdoor Recreation Development Cash Fund. The other 20 percent would be placed in the Nebraska Habitat Fund.

## Hearings begin

The Nebraska Legislature breaks today for two weeks of committee hearings on new bills.

Thursday, the Miscellaneous Subjects Committee will hear a proposal to require utility companies to give notice to customers before discontinuing service. LB604 will be heard at 10 a.m. in room 1019.

The Public Works Committee will hear a proposal to raise the speed limit from 55 mph to 60 mph. LB619 will be heard at 10 a.m. Thursday in the East Chamber.

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# New center provides job training for handicapped

By Becky de la Motte

Paula Jurgensen is blind. Three months premature at birth, she had a problem which is known as Retrolental Fibroplastic (RLF). Her eyes received too much oxygen at a critical point in their development.

Though her doctors understood what caused the condition, there was nothing they could do for her.

She had some vision until the age of six—she could see light and dark, and some colors "if they were right next to my eyes." But her impairment made public school attendance impossible.

She attended the School for the Visually Handicapped in Nebraska City for five years. The fact that her brothers and sisters could live at home and lead normal lives frustrated her.

"The weekends were hard," she recalls. "I had to go back to school after the weekends." Because of the pain this caused her, she completed junior and senior high school in Omaha public schools.

Then she began to search for a skill that would allow her to be self-supporting. She tried a semester of college, but found it intolerable. She attended a few business

schools, but couldn't seem to accomplish anything.

"They were unrealistic. They didn't meet my needs at all. They were very impersonal and just didn't give me the individual attention I had to have," she explains.

"And I couldn't—well, master my own attitude. I didn't do things that I didn't feel I'd be capable of; like, I didn't answer phones or take filing procedure." And rather than pushing her to learn, her instructors took it for granted she couldn't.

Then she met Betty Wilhelm.

Betty Wilhelm is with the UNL Personnel Office. She interviews applicants for on-campus jobs. Wilhelm warmly refers to a program called the Employment Development Center as "our mission."

"After sitting in an interviewer's chair for so long," she says, "it bothered me that so many people couldn't compete with the normal flow of applicants."

The Employment Development Center was formed to solve this problem. Its purpose is to "provide on-the-job evaluation, experience, and training for unemployed persons who have been out of



Photo by Bob Pearson

Paula Jurgensen is a student at the Employment Development Center.

the job market for some time," Wilhelm said. It is primarily designed to help the disadvantaged or handicapped.

There are two problems: funding and office space. The first was solved by a grant from the Lincoln City Comprehensive

Employment and Training Act (CETA) office. The second problem dissolved when the UNL College of Engineering loaned the center a four-room office area in Nebraska Hall. The Center opened in October of 1977.

"I went and talked to Betty Wilhelm about this idea I had of getting a job with the university," Jurgensen said. "She told me about the Employment Development Center's Work Training program, and I thought I'd like to try it."

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## Flu spreads across state

By Deb Shanahan

If you have a high fever, sore throat and body aches, you probably have one of the two types of influenza currently spreading through Nebraska, according to a Lincoln physician.

Paul A. Stoesz, director of the division of disease control at the Nebraska Department of Health, said that although the virus appears widespread in Nebraska, there is not an epidemic.

"We don't know yet if the influenza is going to reach epidemic proportions," said Stoesz. "Our surveillance was interrupted by Christmas vacation because we depend on attendance records from the schools."

"But doctors across the state are reporting cases and it appears to be very widespread."

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