

Legislature to consider gambling, taxes, drinking age

By Randy Essex

While most UNL students relaxed in their hometowns or left the plains in search of sunshine between semesters, the wheels of the Nebraska Legislature began to turn for the 86th time.

During the first seven days of the 90-day session more than 200 bills were introduced, including a bill that would raise the legal drinking age from 19 to 21, a bill reducing all gambling crimes to misdemeanors and a plan to set a maximum level for property taxation.

Sen. Ralph Kelly of Grand Island introduced LB221 to raise the drinking age, citing the deaths of 50 Nebraska youths in alcohol related accidents last year.

The bills dealing with gambling and property taxes were introduced by Neligh Sen. John DeCamp, who, on the first day of the session, emerged as a major power among the lawmakers.

DeCamp and Bellevue Sen. Frank Lewis, who are legislative allies, captured the top positions on the Legislative Council Executive Board, the Legislature's administrative body. Lewis was elected chairman of the board, and DeCamp was elected vice-chairman.

Another Lewis ally, Sen. Gerald Koch of Ralston, was elected chairman of the Education Committee.

Of the bills introduced so far, DeCamp's LB188, which proposes a maximum property tax rate of 1.5 percent of actual value, promises to be one of the most discussed.

Nebraska's property tax has been calculated to average 2.4 percent of actual value, and Waverly Sen. Jerome Warner said the rate of taxation is too high and substantially greater than most states.

Some senators, however, have criticized the measure as a political gimmick that will be popular with voters.

Besides DeCamp, 12 senators signed the bill.

Most senators agree the bill is only one part of a possible solution to the state's property tax woes. Unequal assessments and tax bases statewide prompted DeCamp to file suit as a citizen this summer against the State Board of Equalization for its order to counties to use 70 percent of appraised value as the tax base.

DeCamp said LB188 is only one of several bills designed to deal with the tax problems.

Koch (of Ralston) has introduced LB8, which would establish a central computer system to annually update and equalize property values and tax bases in the state's 93 counties. A similar bill was defeated last year.

Infraction concept

Another DeCamp proposal, LB152, which eliminates felony penalties for gambling, is also part of a series of bills DeCamp can be expected to introduce.

In December DeCamp said he is planning to introduce legislation that will apply the infraction concept to "a

dozen areas." DeCamp said he plans to "refine and better define" the concept.

The infraction concept is what DeCamp incorporated in his marijuana bill last year. Possession of less than one ounce of marijuana is no longer a criminal offense in Nebraska.

It is a civil offense, or an infraction. However, the gambling legislation, if passed, may make it impossible for federal authorities to conduct gambling investigations in Nebraska.

A federal statute requires that state laws against gambling carry penalties of more than one year in prison before federal authorities can investigate illegal activity.

But all misdemeanor penalties, by definition, are less than one year in prison.

Other bills introduced so far include:

- LB46—Participation in aid to handicapped options.
- LB54—Terminate the Political Accountability and Disclosure (Sunshine) Commission (Defeated last year).
- LB74—Require use of gasohol in certain vehicles.
- LB80—Change terms based on gender.
- LB93—Reduced utility rates for the elderly.
- LB100—Repeal park entry fee.
- LB101—Create commission for the deaf.
- LB109—Allow independents to vote on a partisan ballot.
- LB222—Establish State Coroner's Office.
- LB231E—Change mandatory retirement ages to 70.
- LB214E—Place a seven percent ceiling on state appropriation increases.

legislature

But Kearney Sen. Martin Kahle, who was nominated by DeCamp for chairman of the Public Health and Welfare Committee, was defeated by Sam Cullan of Hemingford.

Sen. Bill Burrows of Adams, another member of the DeCamp coalition, lost his bid for the chairmanship of the Business and Labor Committee to incumbent chairman, Richard Maresh of Milligan.

Marvel elected

Sen. Richard Marvel of Hastings was unanimously elected speaker of the Legislature.

Marvel said he would like to improve the image of the body during this session. He explained that the public generally does not like government, and in some cases there is distrust.

In order to remedy that, Marvel said he would like the Legislature as a body, and senators as individuals, to carry on public relations activities.

For example, he said, someone (not a senator) should greet visitors to the Legislative Chamber and explain what is happening.

"There is usually a lot of commotion on the floor, and it seems (to a visitor) like nobody is paying attention, and that creates a bad impression," Marvel said.

The senators have been criticized for not moving through their business as quickly as they should, but Marvel disagreed.

"We move things more rapidly than other state legislatures," he asserted. "Very few bills here don't get public hearing, which is not the case in other states."

Heated debate

The most heated debate during the first days of the session occurred when the position of legislative chaplain was decided.

Rev. Robert Palmer of Lincoln has held the \$300-a-month position for 13 years, but this year he was challenged by Rev. Alvin Peterson, a retired campus minister. The chaplain begins each legislative day with a brief prayer.

Omaha Sen. Ernest Chambers wanted to eliminate the chaplain position and the daily prayer. During the debate Chambers nominated himself for the position and suggested the body hire a chorus composed of every denomination and let them "babble" at the same time.

But, when the discussion was over, only Chambers voted against retaining Palmer as the chaplain.



Photo by Mary Anne Golon

Jack Herndon and Marlon Lowell give cross-country skiing lessons to interested observers at Pioneers Park.

Regents approve 9,000 seats for stadium and raise dorm rates

By Brenda Moskovits

A 9,000-seat addition to the east section of Memorial Stadium should be completed by the 1980 football season.

The NU Board of Regents Saturday gave the go-ahead for the seats, which will cost about \$6 million. The regents also approved an \$80 increase for room and board contracts for residence hall students in 1979-80.

The stadium addition was approved in a split vote, 5 to 3. Regents Robert Prokop of Wilber, Kermit Wagner of Schuyler and Robert Simmons of Scottsbluff opposed the expansion, favoring Prokop's recommendation of building a new 105,000-seat stadium near the Lincoln Air Park.

Prokop said his stadium proposal would cost between \$10 and \$12 million, based on the cost of a similar structure at Kansas State University.

His estimate came from a presentation made to the regents by Topeka architect, John Frazier.

On the basis of costs versus benefits, "the 9,000 (seat addition) is the worst possible alternative the university could have," Prokop said.

Prokop made nearly an hour-long slide presentation to the board's business affairs subcommittee on the stadium proposal. The new stadium would be built into the ground using dirt fill in place of as much concrete and steel. Prokop said the air park was a logical location because the water table is 150 feet below ground level.

The 9,000 seat expansion will cost about \$575 per seat according to its specifications. Prokop said a new stadium would cost about \$75 per seat.

Regent Kermit Hansen of Omaha said Prokop's estimate, taken from Frazier, did not include land acquisition, a press box, v.i.p. section, nor AstroTurf.

Student regent Ken Marienau told the board that students are "very strongly opposed to an increase in the size of the stadium."

Marienau said he assumed that included opposition toward building a new stadium.

"Student ticket prices are also very high. The surcharge for student seats would be an injustice," he said.

Marienau said students want to be assured that their section would not be moved to the new addition.

Continued on Page 9

inside monday

- Iranian students give Bakhtiar government little chance:** See related story on same page page 8.
- Not so sweet:** Neil Simon's *California Suite* needs polish page 16.
- Florida didn't break off and sink with the extra weight of Nebraska and Oklahoma fans:** Quite the contrary, the state is doing well, which is more than can be said for Nebraska fans page 18.