

UNL carpenter's suspension ends in firing

By Brenda Moskovits

A carpenter in the UNL Maintenance Department who claims his suspension and subsequent firing were intended as punishment for publicly criticizing the department said he will contact his attorney and the UNL ombudsman about appeals procedures.

James Young, who was on six-month probation on insubordination charges, Wednesday received a certified letter informing him of his termination. He was placed on three-day suspension without pay Monday because he didn't come to work Friday.

Young said a storm delayed his return flight from a vacation in Hawaii and he alleged the suspension was intended as punishment for writing a letter in December criticizing the department to the Lincoln Star.

Young said he will contact UNL Ombudsman Al Dittmer about all avenues of appeals within the university system before initiating legal action. He also said he will consult with his lawyer on Thursday.

UNL Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance Ron Wright said "the (Star) letter has nothing to do with this action. It's strictly an internal action."

"He (Young) was on probation from a period in October," Wright said. Conditions of the probation included no work deterioration, improved relations with supervisors, avoiding unnecessary absences and always informing supervisors of an absence, Wright explained.

"In terms of the total operation of that department, he's not working out," Wright said. "That individual, working with those other people, did not get the job done."

"That doesn't mean you have to like them (supervisors)," Wright said. "... you must respect the authority of supervisors" by following their directions.

Firing imminent

Wright decided to fire Young Tuesday based on

recommendations from the UNL Personnel and Maintenance Departments and from Young's performance reports. He said Young probably would have been released within two weeks, even if he hadn't been absent.

"At the halfway point (of probation), he should have been showing progress one way or the other," Wright said.

"If you're not showing satisfactory progress, it's pointless to continue that (employment) relationship," especially considering ongoing university budget problems.

Young agreed that "I would have been fired if I came back from Honolulu later or not. . . . That's because the evaluation program they have is inappropriately administered. That has been a bone of contention with the people there from the beginning."

"I don't think the issue here is my job," Young said, adding his complaints were published more than a month ago, but "my charges have never been answered fully."

"... There are still 89 men down there risking their limbs," Young said.

Wright said Young's complaints about the maintenance department are being addressed. During the past month, maintenance and personnel officials have met with UNL Physical Plant Director Harley Schrader and have formed a concerns and communications task force composed of elected representatives from each trade.

Representatives are to be elected for six-month terms by Friday and an organizational meeting will be at 3:30 p.m. Jan. 23.

'One person's perception'

Wright described Young's charges as just one person's perception. Those allegations include: that there is no safety program, that management is unresponsive and that an apprenticeship program employs experienced tradespeople to get around hiring women.

"He has one voice in 90 they (maintenance supervisors) have a responsibility to listen to," Wright said.

"'No safety program' is a perception," Wright said. "You'd have to go over and ask the other 90 about the program."

Wright said the Personnel Department's Environment Health and Safety division is in charge of safety programs, but added "it's one thing to provide the gear; it's another thing to wear it."

Young replied: "I wasn't thinking of gear. I was thinking of an educational program," one that reviews recurrent problems found in department safety reports, such as eye and hand safety.

"I think the men use the gear that's provided," Young said, adding that it took him three months to get plastic face shields and that "their (the department's) idea of a First Aid kit is a box of Band-Aids."

"These men (the supervisors) don't even acknowledge there is a safety problem," he said.

Regarding Young's allegations that the apprenticeship program is administered to exclude women, Wright responded: "I do not believe that statement. . . . We are an affirmative action institution. Even if we wanted to, we could not design a program to exclude any class of perception."

He said, however, apprenticeship programs must deal with the type of applicants available in the particular town and trade.

Young also charged that the apprenticeship program has never been properly put together "in black and white" and that graduates of Southeast Community College-Milford often "have to take over classes," already attended in Milford.

"Some of them had to take an economics course that had nothing to do with their trade, just a time killer," Young said.

'Preacher' from Grand Island is the man behind the bill

By Gordon Johnson

"Hey preacher Kelly. Did you see your picture in the Star?" a fellow senator said jokingly.

A picture in the newspaper showed Ralph Kelly of Grand Island, head bowed and hands clasped in prayer during the opening ceremonies of the Legislature.

Sen. Kelly—a preacher? Almost.

Kelly, sponsor of LB221, a bill to raise Nebraska's drinking age from 19 to 21, said being a Christian has had a great impact on his life and dealings with others.

LB221 is scheduled for debate today. Sen. Peter Hoagland of Omaha said Wednesday he had 22 signatures on an amendment to LB221 which would allow 19 and 20-year-olds to drink in bars but make it illegal for them to buy alcohol off-sale.

Nebraska support

In recent years Kelly has gained recognition for taking a strong position on LB221 and, according to Kelly, he has the support of Nebraskans behind him.

And what Nebraskans, particularly his constituents, want is often how he votes, Kelly said.

Barbara Koch, Kelly's legislative aide, said he pays attention to his mail. He often has initiated a bill for a concerned constituent even though he knew it wouldn't have a chance of passing, she said.

Kelly's main motivation, Koch said, is his respect for other people.

"He is very anxious to do anything he can to help people out," Koch said about the 59-year-old senator.

His concern for others is a direct result of his Christian views, she said.

Positive effect

"It has a positive effect in that it is such a deep part of his life," she said.

Kelly, who was first elected to the Legislature in 1972, shares ownership of a

plumbing supply firm in Grand Island with a brother.

After graduating from Grand Island High School, Kelly attended college. He spent one and a half years at NU and two years at Utah State College. However, World War II cut short his civil engineering studies.

During World War II he served four and a half years as a pilot for the Army Air Corps.

A registered Republican, Kelly said he would not call himself an extremist. However, he does claim title to being a fiscal conservative and at the same time a "social progressive."

People mixed up

"People get mixed up on what government should do for them. Government should only do what the individual can't," Kelly said.

Kelly defines being a social progressive as being interested in performing human services, but not going overboard. Social programs must be made better not more numerous, he said.

And, again, Kelly said his Christian background shapes his reasoning.

"I am responsible for my brother and I want the privilege to discharge my duty in that area (social programs)," he said.

Political observers point out that Kelly is his own man and that it is often difficult to predict how he will vote on a bill.

Drives people nuts

"My voting record must drive everyone nuts," Kelly said with a grin.

On a scale of 1 to 10, Kelly places his skill as a politician at 5.

However, Koch said: "He can be as good a politician as any of them, but he tries to stay with what he feels is right while many of the other senators may be willing to make trade-offs."

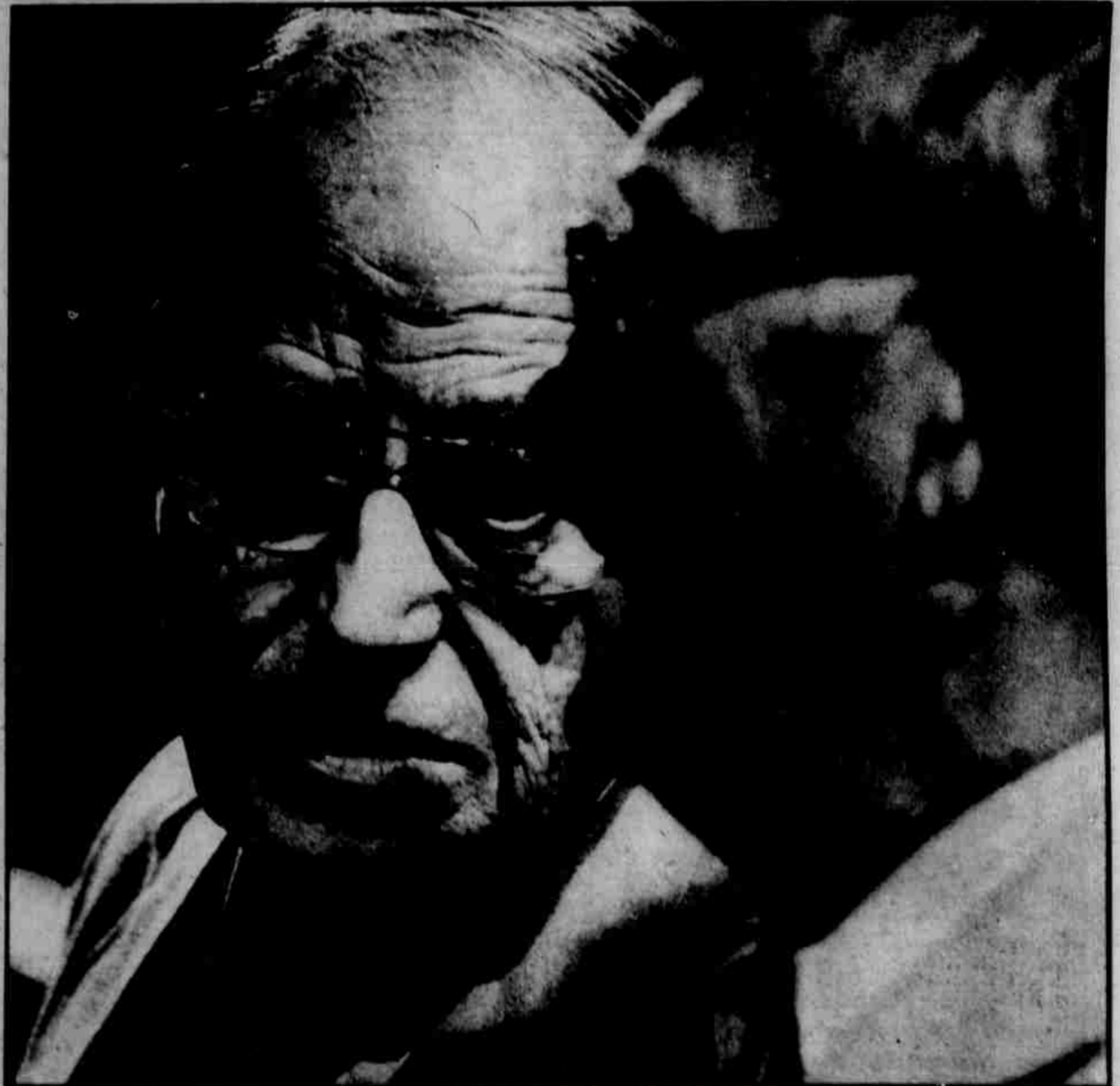


Photo by Mark Billingsley

Sen. Ralph Kelly, sponsor of LB221

Kelly agrees with this remark.

"I don't trade very well. It isn't my style," he said. "People know they can take advantage of me in that area so I don't place the ball game."

Kelly divides politicians into two different groups, the politically nimble and the sledgehammers. He said he leans more to the side of the sledgehammers.

Even though he is trying to raise the drinking age to 21, Kelly said he is not a teetotaler. Kelly said he enjoys an occasional glass of wine. But, he said, his three children were not allowed to drink at home before they reached the legal age, a rule which applies to a daughter still living at home.

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