

Daily Nebraskan

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Wednesday, January 27, 1982

Vol. 109 No. 13

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Funds for building requested in cigarette tax bill

By Melinda Norris

An increase in the Nebraska cigarette tax to finance renovation of Architecture and Bessey Halls at UNL came under fire by the tobacco and cigarette industry Tuesday before the Nebraska Legislature Revenue Committee.

Introduced by Sen. Steve Fowler of Lincoln, LB712 requests a four cent increase on a pack of cigarettes to finance capital construction for higher education. The proposed increase would add about 7 million to the Capital Construction budget.

The method of financing the construction projects was attacked by the bill's opponents, who claimed that an increase in the cigarette tax is discriminating, would decrease cigarette sales and increase cigarette bootlegging.

Cigarette smokers make up 35 percent of the adult population, Larry Roth of the Nebraska Tax Council, said. The tax is "selective and discriminating," he said.

"Smokers are already paying their fair share," Roth said.

Cigarette taxes were temporarily raised to finance the State Office Buildings in Lincoln and Omaha and the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Roth said.

"This bill should be a reduction in the cigarette tax and not an increase," he said.

"A cigarette tax is a regressive tax," Bill Peters of the National Tobacco Institute, said.

Iowa already has an 18 cent tax on cigarettes, Peters said, and has experienced a drop in sales.

"Iowa's revenue has increased by 20 percent with a 38.4 percent tax hike," he said.

An increase in price encourages smokers to quit, cut down or buy cigarettes in other states or from boot-

leggers, Peters said.

The disparity in cost between Nebraska and other states is 70 cents to \$1.20 a carton, said Tom Henning of Cashway Distributors in Kearney.

Bootleggers fill trunks of cars with cigarettes and come back to Nebraska," he said.

Among those supporting the bill was Cal Solem, from the Association of General Contractors, who told the committee that the "time is now" to begin construction.

With the construction industry laying idle, Solem said, contractors are willing to work an average of 18 per-

cent below estimated cost.

Fifty percent of the construction cost goes for labor, he said, while the other 50 percent buys the materials from local suppliers.

Nebraska has produced four of the largest architecture firms in the United States, said architect Arthur Johnson, a 1954 UNL graduate.

The university has to maintain a competitive edge with the surrounding states which have new facilities," Johnson said. "Although the University of Nebraska has better professors, the environment to work in is terrible."

Energy conservation bill debated

By Alice Hrnicek

Several dozen students representing six Nebraska high schools crowded into a hearing room Tuesday to plead in favor of a bill creating energy conservation measures.

Gas and oil producers, however, protested the same bill citing the dangers of a proposed severance tax increase from 3 percent to 4 percent for their industry.

LB738, heard before the Nebraska Legislature's Banking Commerce and Insurance Committee, is sponsored by Sens. John DeCamp of Neligh, Don Wesely of Lincoln, William Nichol of Scottsbluff and Steve Fowler of Lincoln.

DeCamp, the committee chairman, called the bill the "first really big, bold step toward that concept of energy independence, where we are the controllers or providers of energy in Nebraska."

The proposal would set up tax credits, energy efficien-

cy programs and development of renewable energy resources, to be financed through sales taxes on "wind-fall" rate increases.

Judy Hoffman, a Nebraska City high school student, said her school has unsuccessfully applied for an energy audit which could inform school officials of ways to save energy.

Fullerton student Rod Wetovick said the net worth of his father's farm dropped \$26,000 last year, with more than one-third of the loss caused by rising energy costs. He urged the committee to help agriculture survive.

Claiming that oil companies are undertaxed and that other citizens are overtaxed, Herb Schimek of the Nebraska State Education Association said the severance tax increase "would be justified."

However, Vincent Brown, executive director of the Ne-

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Senate officers Wedekind, Krieser promise realism from Real Party

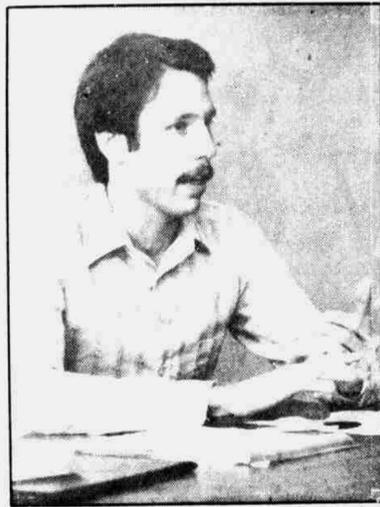


Photo by D. Eric Kircher
Dan Wedekind

By Betsy Miller

A party claiming to take a realistic approach to student government, was introduced Tuesday afternoon in the Nebraska Union.

The Party, led by presidential candidate Dan Wedekind and first vice presidential candidate Greg Krieser, can provide that approach, Wedekind said.

Wedekind is currently the ASUN Senate's first vice president; Krieser is currently the parliamentarian.

Wedekind said the senate is a very service-oriented organization, but it must

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"make an organized effort to establish direct lines of communication with the students this coming year."

The senate should document its activities annually so future senators can see what type of action was effective and what did not work, he said.

"In an initial step to establish a direct line of communication with students, the Real Party proposes that ASUN have a

newsletter printed on a regular basis," Krieser said.

The newsletter would include reports on student government activities and legislation, as well as request student feedback on some issues, Krieser said.

"We've learned in the past that until ASUN organizes an attempt to bring communication about, it just won't occur," he said.

Wedekind, 21, a senior and agricultural engineering major from Newman Grove, said the students' situation "is one of the most serious they have been faced with."

He cited overcrowded classrooms, reduced library funds and an unresponsive administration as UNL's main problems.

He said the recent success of some lobbying groups in the Nebraska Legislature provides hope that the students can work effectively with legislators.

An increase in the library's funds could result from students working with legislators, Wedekind said.

"People will respond to a call to help their library. This is a very winnable project for the Legislature," Wedekind said.

Dealing with the NU Board of Regents requires a student body president "to do his homework before going into the meeting," he said.

He said the senate lacks credibility in the eyes of students and that it must decide if it is to function as a high school student council or an effective voice for the student body.

Wedekind said the Real Party's idea to document senate activities is one way the senate could regain student respect.

Krieser, 20, a sophomore and mechanical engineering major from Eagle, agreed that "the gravity of our current situation demands more of ASUN."

The Real Party's realistic campaign emphasis contrasts the more flamboyant senate parties that have been formed in other years, Wedekind said.

"Every year some parties come up with flashy acronyms or quick solutions to big problems, I think it's important that we take a realistic approach," Wedekind said. "The students are interested in seeing results."

Wedekind said the Real Party is looking for a second vice presidential candidate, and will have regular meetings to continue to define the party's platform.

Presidential candidates for ASUN working for restructured senate

By Ward W. Triplett III

Two of ASUN's self-professed, "most visible and vocal senators," junior Dave (Milo) Mumgaard and sophomore Fran Grabowski Tuesday announced their candidacy for ASUN Senate president and first vice president, respectively. They will run on the Working Coalition ticket.

"The coalition part is because we're bringing in all aspects of people from all

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around the campus," said Mumgaard, a 20-year-old political science and history major. "We're bringing in opposition groups, nonrepresented groups, and traditional students to work in this coalition."

At the press conference, which was in the Harper Hall basement, Mumgaard and Grabowski revealed their plan to rebuild the senate. A constitutional amendment that will be presented to the senate Feb. 3, outlines the basic viewpoint of the Working Coalition.

According to the amendment, senators would be elected from different living units, such as Greek houses, residence halls and cooperatives. Off-campus and non-traditional students would have equal representation as well, and 15 percent of the senate, which would be expanded from 35 to 46 members, would be non-white students. If passed by the senate, the amendment would appear on the ballot on March 3.

"Right now, ASUN senators have no student accountability and little student representation," Mumgaard said. "The people who get elected get elected from colleges, and they run not to be representative, but just to be elected."

"We went back and studied the figures, and we've found 54 percent of the university students live off campus, 24 percent in dormitories, and 18 percent in Greek houses or cooperatives," he said. "Seventy percent of the current ASUN, however, is Greek." He said that 5.4 percent of the total enrollment is non-white, yet none of the senators are.

Mumgaard and Grabowski also are plan-



Photo by Dave Bentz
Dave (Milo) Mumgaard

ning a petition drive to get their constitutional amendment on the March ballot. Five percent of the student population — or 1,500 students — would have to sign it.

But even if the petition fails and the senate votes down the amendment, the Working Coalition candidates plan to continue to promote their plan to rebuild the senate.

"We are going to change ASUN," said Grabowski, a 19-year-old political science and psychology major. "Anyone who tries to fight this is really imposing a dictatorship, by saying they want it to stay the way it is to make sure they can always run."

Grabowski said he and Mumgaard have been very involved in this year's senate, adding that his outspokenness has caused him to be branded a liberal.

"I think the debates are where we'll shine and show our strongest points," he said. "I'm really looking forward to those."

Mumgaard said his intent is not to be a student regent.

"The regents obviously have very little regard for what a student regent says," he said. "So I'm not going to campaign with 'I'm going to work with the regents.' I want to be pro-active for the students, and I think I can help most by being a strong student president."