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Testimony heard about lobbyist accountability

By Alice Hrnicek

Another chapter was written Thursday in the six-year battle over the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Act voted into law in 1976 and amended in 1981.

Opponents of the so-called Sunshine Law testified in favor of a bill that would eliminate most provisions of the law and reinstate part of a 1943 accountability law.

LB689 would bring accountability law under the control of the secretary of state, and disband the Nebraska Political Accountability and Disclosure Commission, appointed to regulate disclosures.

Sen. Peter Hoagland, who led a lobbyist's movement for the 1976 act, said the law now provides that public officials disclose a minimum amount of information each year about their campaign finances and conflicts of interest. The law also says that lobbyists must register and fill out reports.

The information is essential, he said, so that the public can check on its officials, making them more careful in their dealings.

Hoagland cautioned the Nebraska Legislature's Miscellaneous Subjects Committee not to vote that the bill be

considered by the Legislature because he is "terrified of this taking up a day or two days."

Long debate possible

Last year's amendment to the law, LB134, prompted 6½ hours of debate and a barrage of other attempted amendments.

"If this gets out on the floor of the Legislature and gets decorated like that Christmas tree last year, LB134, then it could be a disaster," Hoagland said.

However, Lawrence Eickhoff, a member of Save Your Home Committee in Falls City, said the law invades private business affairs of lobbyists.

People are discouraged from lobbying because of forms they must submit to the Political Accountability and Disclosure Commission, he said.

"I feel the commission should be abolished," Eickhoff said. "The funds provided for the commission are not enough return for what we get."

But Thomas Burke, executive director of the commission, said that lobbyists should be controlled by an "independent agency" rather than the Legislature.

Too much persuasion

"A lobbyist's sole reason for existing is to influence legislation," Burke said. The "special relationship" be-

tween lobbyists and senators could mean that senators would be persuaded in favor of lobbyists in regulatory matter, he said.

Burke said he saw no reason to exempt certain local officials from financial disclosure, as recommended in LB689.

The bill would exempt county appointed and elected officials, he said.

The commission is charged with enforcing compliance and reviewing reported disclosures, duties no other agency has been given, he said.

"LB689 is not consistent with what Nebraskans are entitled to," Burke said.

Walter Radcliffe, an attorney for some 40 lobbyists, said he agreed that regulation should be outside the Legislature.

He suggested that lobbyists should be allowed to make campaign contributions and that there should be a better definition of who must register as a lobbyist. Radcliffe said he favors increasing the \$25 semi-annual filing fee for lobbyists and increasing penalty violations for not submitting reports.

ASUN rejects moves to increase members, alter senate structure

By Betsy Miller

Another attempt to change the structure of the ASUN Senate was rejected by the senate at its Wednesday night meeting.

Organic Act 20, which would enlarge the size of the senate from at least 35 to 40 members and make it mandatory that at least 15 percent of the senators be non-traditional and nonwhite members, was voted down by a 15-10-1 vote. To pass, two-thirds of the senators present would have had to vote in favor of the proposal.

This proposal came right after the senate defeated Organic Act 19, which called for election of senators from living units rather than by college. This act failed by a vote of 13-12-1.

However, the issue could still be on students' election ballots March 3 if 858 signatures are received on a petition drive now under way.

Sen. Dave Mumbaard, one of the petition drive sponsors, said he is confident they will have the necessary number of signatures.

Mumbaard along with Sen. Fran Grabowski introduced the two acts to the senate.

Mumbaard and Grabowski are running for senate president and vice president of the Working Coalition Party. Their involvement with the acts have prompted some senators to label their action as political moves.

"I don't think this is the appropriate time to discuss these things. It's not fair or proper for the senate to be passing them or giving them an appearance of approval," Sen. Kathy Roth said.

Sen. Brian Stonecipher, who indicated he will run for ASUN president, said the proposal would hurt his constituents, students in the engineering college. He said if engineers were elected from living units, concerns of engineering students might be overlooked.

Stonecipher said he thought Mumbaard and Grabowski were using the proposals to get more publicity for their campaign.

"Mumbaard and Grabowski are getting all the press time and using it to their advantage," Stonecipher said.

Grabowski said the important thing about the acts was that they made an attempt to change the system, which he said is not perfect.

"I don't care if it is a political move, at least we're moving," he said.

Grabowski defended the living-unit election of senators. He said over half of the senators in ASUN are members of fraternities and sororities, but if living units got proportional representation, only 18 percent of the senate would be fraternally affiliated.

"The interests of the Senate are academic in nature," Roth said. She said she favors the current representation that selects senators from colleges.

Sen. Becky Stingley said the acts have some merit and, if some time is taken to smooth out proposals, she would not mind seeing them on the ballot. However, they are not ready for a vote this year, she said.

"I would commend them if they get signatures (on the petition). I think that's the way they should have done it all along," Stingley said.



Photo by Dave Bentz

The worst winter in years hasn't destroyed the beauty of the Bronze Torso sculpture in the sculpture garden by the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

Student views wanted about insurance

By Vicki Ruhga

Alternatives for a different UNL student insurance policy were discussed at Wednesday's University Health Center Advisory Board meeting. According to health center business manager Gary Wilkinson, this is the first time students have had an opportunity to participate in developing the plan.

Board president Roy Miller said the current student insurance policy with Mutual of Omaha is "basically a piece of junk."

"You have to get hurt substantially before it does you any good," said Miller. "The policy does not offer any options for students, either."

According to the 1981 UNL student handbook, students are "strongly encouraged to have health insurance. A UNL student group hospital and accident insurance policy is available" if students are not covered already by their parents' or one of their own. The UNL student policy covers only accidents, hospitalizations and surgeon's fees, not costs of illnesses, according to the handbook.

Wilkinson said the student policies operate on a yearly basis. Single student coverage from Aug. 15, 1981, to Aug. 16, 1982, costs \$83. Policies also are offered for stu-

dents with spouses and children.

The current policy allows the insurance company to define emergency situations, rather than allowing a physician to determine the patient's status, Miller said. Students with fewer than four credit hours are not eligible to buy it either.

Other problems with the plan are its lack of definition for dental treatment, allergy shots and preventative medication, Miller said. The areas of sports injuries, elective surgery and minor surgery also are not covered, he said.

"It's not equipped to handle smaller, everyday illnesses," Miller said. "Only 9 percent of UNL students have purchased a policy, compared with a national average in similar schools of 30 percent for policies which sometimes cost twice as much."

"Either our people don't know about it, or it's not worth the money; it's probably the latter," Miller said. "I don't think most people would mind paying more for better coverage."

Board member Mike Grier said students' views would be used to help determine the additions and changes for next year's policy. Bids will then be sent to various insurance companies to determine the lowest price.

Miller encouraged all students with suggestions for policy changes to attend a brainstorming session Wednesday at 3 p.m. in the health center conference room.