

Forum looks at bills affecting women

By Melinda Norris

The status of more than 25 bills pending in the Nebraska Legislature was discussed at the 10th annual Women's Legislative Forum Saturday at the Lincoln YWCA.

Thirteen sponsors, including the UNL Women's Resource Center and the American Association of University Women, presented the day-long seminar updating about 80 attendants on bills ranging from revenue to child care.

The most important task in this session's Legislature for the Nebraska Coalition for Women is establishing a state Title IX, said Virginia Walsh, lobbyist for the NCW.

The Equal Opportunity in Education Act, sponsored by Sen. John DeCamp of Neligh and five other senators, would replace the national Title IX outlawing sex discrimination. The national law, instituted in 1972, is expected to expire this year.

The Nebraska bill would give women equal educational opportunities in admissions, programs, activities and student services.

However, the bill is worded to give women athletes "comparable opportunity" rather than equal opportunity, Walsh said.

LB628 faced no opposition in committee, Walsh said, and was advanced Wednesday to the second round of floor debate over the objections of six senators.

Sen. Howard Peterson of Grand Island opposed the

bill, claiming women's athletics caused his sister's sterility and a daughter-in-law to have four miscarriages, Walsh said.

Dental hygienists and dental assistants also have the support of the coalition as bills pertaining to their profession face the Public Health and Welfare Committee Feb. 23.

LB920, introduced by Sen. Shirley Marsh of Lincoln, would increase the duties of a dental hygienist by expanding the term "supervision" to mean authorization and not just physical presence.

The bill would also enable hygienists to provide oral health education and fluoride applications, and perform charting and screening for oral diseases.

Jacque Rhodes, president of the Nebraska Dental Hygienist Association, said the redefining of "supervision" will enable hygienists to work in areas such as nursing homes, hospitals and physically-handicapped or mentally-handicapped care centers besides the dentist office, public institutions or schools.

Hygienists will not be able to give local anesthetic under the act, Rhodes said, but the act provides for the Board of Dental Examiners to delegate the responsibility.

LB853 provides for the registration of dental assistants and the appointment of a dental assistant to the Board of Dental Examiners.

Alcohol policy...

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Larry Williams, residence director at Cather Hall, also said he wonders about the assumption that a minor's room is his permanent residence.

Williams said most students vote by absentee ballots, indicating that their residence hall rooms are not considered their permanent residence.

Williams also said he doubted the new policy would decrease vandalism. He said he has talked to residence hall directors from campuses that allow alcohol and their vandalism and disturbance rates have not declined.

Williams said the policy is not likely to be supported by university or state officials.

"I don't think the state legislature is anxious to lower the drinking age or to make drinking legal on state property," he said.

Carol Lohmeier, an SA in Sandoz Hall, said allowing alcohol in the halls would be a mistake.

"I think the halls would smell like a brewery," she said. "There's enough alcohol in the halls as it is."

Lohmeier said SAs can recognize and counsel alcohol abusers under the current policy.

"SAs, if they're keen enough, should be able to tell if a person is a problem drinker or if he has been drinking on the sly," she said.

Lohmeier said the main goal of SAs and the residence director in Sandoz is not to scold or punish students for drinking, but to help them determine why they have an alcohol problem.

"I have faith in the present system," she said.

But the SA for Cather Hall's fourth floor, Don Miller, disagreed. He said the current policy is constantly violated and hard to enforce.

"We keep playing these cat and mouse games," he said. "It's ridiculous."

Although he favors a change in the alcohol policy, Miller said he sees some problems in the proposed policy.

"I don't see how it can get around the problem of letting minors drink," he said. "And I don't know if it would cut alcohol abuse or vandalism. I personally don't

think so."

Bruce Glover, residence director in Schramm Hall, said he likes the proposed policy better than the "strictly punitive" policy UNL now has.

"We need a more education-oriented policy," he said.

Glover said he used to work at Penn State, where students of legal age were allowed to drink in their rooms. The system there worked smoothly, he said, largely because the policy emphasized alcohol education.

Students become responsible drinkers when they are educated about alcohol, Glover said.

Karen Madeja, Sandoz Hall's residence director, agreed, saying that "even people who don't drink need to be educated about alcohol issues."

Madeja agreed that UNL's current policy is negative.

"It forces students to be covert and sneak around, and I hate that," she said. "It also tells students 'You can't be responsible and drink,' and I disagree."

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