Legislative forum examines bills affecting women

By Margaret Reist

"Women got the right to vote in 1920 but only in the last few years have we gotten our act together on how to vote," said Virginia Walsh, one of four lobbyists for the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women, at the 10th annual Women's Legislative Forum Saturday.

Walsh stressed the need to work together as a group to get bills of concern to women passed and to have women's needs and rights known and better understood.

"You have a responsibility after you elect someone to public office to let them know your view," Lincoln Sen. Shirley Marsh said.

"How can I represent you if you don't take the time to contact me and let me know how you feel?" she asked.

Speakers discussed 26 bills concerning women, trying to inform and involve the women in Nebraska.

A women's legislative caucus made up of representatives from 21 organizations reviewed the bills and chose four lobbyists from the commission.

Legislative bills that were discussed included LB581 concerning pay equity. This is not really a pay equity bill but a philosophical statement, a door opener to a new, fairer system, said Jean O'Hara, executive director of the Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women.

The bill introduces the idea of equal pay for work of comparable worth, she said. All jobs would be evaluated on the basis of four objectives: know-how, problem solving, accountability and working conditions of the job. Salaries and wages would be assigned according to those results, O'Hara said.

Many businesses and industries decide their wages according to practices of other businesses so the biases are only reinforced, she said.

Most jobs are separated into female or male dominated categories, she said. In Nebraska, 560 jobs are male dominated and 192 are female dominated. The female dominated jobs are located on the low end of the pay scale, she said.

O'Hara cited a 1977 study by the commission that found women in managerial positions earned 61 percent of men's wages for comparable work, sales workers 34 percent of men's wages, and even in the traditionally dominated area of clerical work, women earned only 93 percent of what men did.

The concept that women are in the work force primarily to make money to supplement their husbands' income has become imbedded in women's salaries and wages, she said.

Yet figures show that more than half of Nebraska's women work full-time and of those, half are single parents, she said.

The economy today makes it impossible to begin making the wage changes that would be necessary, she said. But perhaps the bill could eliminate some of the biases, she said.

NCSW lobbyist Betty Peterson explained the need to expand procedures for child support collection LB371. As it stands now, if a noncustodial parent is more than 30 days late with a child support payment the money can be taken directly from his or her paycheck. But as soon as the delinquency is taken care of, the wage assignment is removed, she said.

Because most deliquent noncustodial parents are repeatedly delinquent and because wage assignment involves a lot of paperwork and time, it would save time and money to be able to continue the wage assignment to repeated offenders, even after delinquency is cleared, she said.

The bill would also allow tax refund interceptions for child support, she said.

City Councilman Eric Youngberg, representing the Lincoln Food Advocates, spoke on legislative bills 317, 363 and 520, dealing with food sales tax and tax credit repeals.

Many politicians say that increased food sales tax credit would make the tax more equitable, Youngberg said. But when low income households are paying an average of $250 in food tax, a tax credit of $34 does not reimburse them, he said. LB 317 would raise the tax credit from $28 to $34.

The food sales tax is immoral and inequitable, he said. The tax credit only compounds the problem and makes you more dependent on the system, he said.

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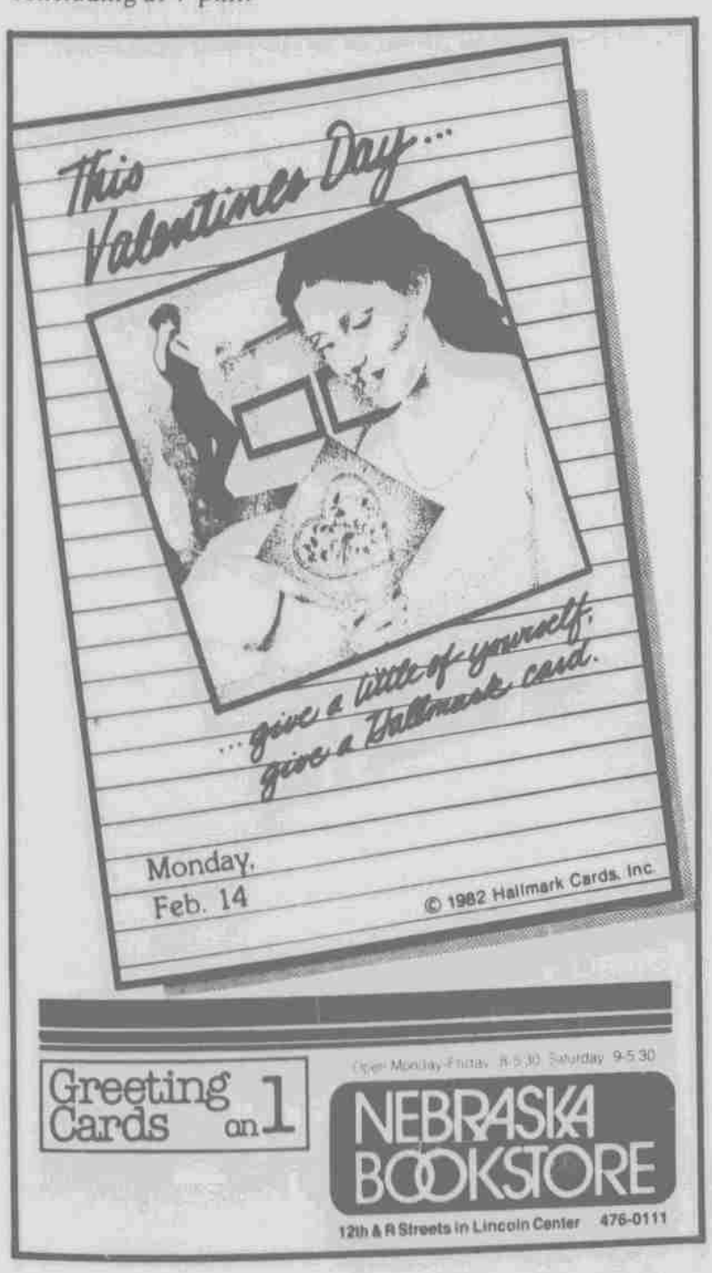
Applications for delegates to the 1983 Model United Nations at UNL are still available in the University Program Council and Campus Activites and Programs offices. The UNL conference, in its 16th year, begins with a keynote speech by Hatem Hussaini, director of Palestine Liberation Organizations Information Office in Washington, D.C., Wednesday at 8 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Centennial Room.

Another keynote speech will be delibered by Yehuda Blum, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, at 8 p.m. Thursday, also in the Centennial Room.

Delegate registration is from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday. The Nebraska Model United Nation's delegations will be divided into three main committees and will debate on their committees' issues Thursday and Friday, starting at 8 a.m. and 8:30 a.m., respectively. The committees will meet in General Assembly Friday at 3 p.m. The conference continues Saturday, starting at 9 a.m. and concluding at 7 p.m.



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