

Sen. Landis provides bill views and bow tie humor at meeting

By Pat O'Leary

Sen. David Landis of Lincoln, wearing a bow tie, offered his views on several legislative bills at the Government Liaison Committee breakfast Tuesday.

A good bill, Landis said, is LB135, which would allow cities to negotiate the zoning of particular developments. If passed, the bill would give builders the discretion to combine housing, light-commercial and open spaces into a flexible plan that would suit the community and meet the approval of local officials if the bill passes.

Judges' salaries will increase if Landis' LB269 is

approved. Landis said that judges' salaries have not been raised for four years, and that the neglect has "had an effect on the quality of who is selected."

One of the unpredictable moves during this legislative session, Landis said, is that LB372 — called the Community Assistance Act — passed out of committee.

"It was a freak," Landis said. "The only reason it got out is because a bad jobs bill got out before it, and I think the senators felt guilty."

The bill would establish a 40 percent tax credit to companies for charitable contributions. It is an incentive for companies to contribute to community organizations, Landis said. The tax credit would generate more state funds that would compensate for Reagan's federal program cuts, he said.

Two other bills, LB455 and LB489, deal with developing statewide sentencing guidelines. The first bill would set the guidelines, and LB489 would establish a commission to oversee the rules. Landis said that because sentencings now are based on broad laws and the judge's discretion, offenders within the state are treated quite differently.

"The state Supreme Court has agreed to study the issue, and so I promised not to press the issue this year," Landis said.

In other states that have set similar guidelines, the senator said the support of the judges was crucial, so the study should prove productive.

Landis' LB101, which already has become law, changes the time period for allowing claims by the tax commissioner. More importantly, Landis said, it denies the state Board of Equalization the power to hear second claims in tax-due discrepancies. The board was supposed to act as a mediary step, but instead was simply "ignoring the law", particularly the statute of limitations, Landis said.

The senator also introduced LB370, which would reorganize the provisions under which companies would be rewarded contracts with cities, counties and villages. Landis said the bill would replace an old law.

"Sometimes you have to rip out a law that doesn't work and try something new," he said. "That's what this bill will do."

Instead of using an arbitrary contract derived from some contracting record, the local officials could reward the contract based purely on price and quality, Landis said. The business still would be done in private, but the terms of the contract would be printed in a public notice, he said. What would result, Landis said, is a fair and open exchange and contract.

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Staff photo by Craig Andresen

Sen. David Landis



Staff photo by Joel Sartore

Jack Shively of the Lincoln Telephone Co. watches while co-worker Scott Sneller splices cables behind the protection of a giant umbrella Tuesday.

Winged tourists flap north for summer

By Dan Shattil

They can be heard from two miles away. Standing in the midst of them, you would have to shout to be heard.

From Grand Island to Kearney along the Platte River, between 200,000 and 500,000 Sandhill cranes are congregating like a scene from Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds." Taking a break from their migration from Texas, New Mexico and northern Mexico, they are on their way to Canada, Alaska and eastern Siberia.

About 30 percent to 40 percent of the cranes have arrived, according to Paul

Johnsgard, foundation professor of life science at UNL. He said he expects that most of the Sandhill cranes will be at the Platte River by Sunday.

The cranes fly to the river non-stop in a one-day trip from their winter homes. Weather permitting, they stay in the Grand Island area for five weeks before leaving by the beginning of April.

The birds arrive at their summer breeding grounds in mid- to late May. The Platte River is the only place they all congregate during their migration north.

The Sandhill cranes can be spotted

standing on the sandy islands around the Platte River at night. During the day, they spread out to search for food. They usually stay within three miles of the river and can be seen feeding in cornfields.

The cranes go back and forth from the river to the cornfields about three times a day. At dusk, they patrol up and down the river in flocks ranging from 10 to hundreds of birds looking for a place to spend the night.

After an estimated 40,000 years of this annual migration, the sandhill cranes may be losing their Nebraska rest stop because of the decreasing flow of water

in the river.

"If much more water is diverted from the Platte River, it may not remain a suitable area for the Sandhill cranes," Johnsgard said.

In the last few years, the cranes have become more concentrated around Grand Island because of the smaller size of the river.

The cranes will return to the river in the fall during their migration south, but not in such great numbers. Many of them will congregate in Alberta, Canada, before heading further south.

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