

Senator's ideas promote stronger state economy

By John Koopman

Nebraska's economic future depends on attracting high technology industries to replace traditional "smokestack" industries, State Sen. Chris Abboud of Ralston said Tuesday.

Speaking to a sparse crowd at a breakfast sponsored by ASUN's Government Liaison Committee, Abboud said that to attract such industries, the state will need a labor force with a strong background in math and science.

The Legislature had given first round approval this week to LB585. The bill would establish a student loan program for math and science students enrolled in teacher training programs who agree to teach in the state following graduation.

A tremendous growth will occur in high technology fields such as computers and telecommunications, he said. Jobs requiring a college degree will increase by as much as 50 percent to 80 percent. In jobs that do not require a college degree, the big opportunities will be in servicing and operating computers and other data processing equipment.

The Joint Economic Committee of Congress recently did a study titled

"Location of High Technology Firms and the Regional Economy," Abboud said. The study points to three major factors that high technology industries use when considering a location:

—Availability of a highly skilled work force.

—Taxes, which eat into profits and affect the ability of the company to attract skilled workers.

—Accessibility to high quality universities and technical institutions.

Nebraska should concentrate on keeping graduates in the state and shifting more of the state's present college and university allocation into engineering and computer-related fields of study, he said.

Abboud introduced LB570 in an attempt to keep college students in Nebraska after graduation, he said. The bill, which was postponed indefinitely, offered tax incentives to businesses that offered part-time on-the-job training for college students, particularly in the fields of engineering, computer science and business.

Abboud encourages students to provide him with their ideas and views on legislative matters.

Lawyer requests dismissal in Anarky's 'purple flag' case

At a pre-trial hearing Monday morning, public defender Gerald Soucie filed a motion requesting the complaint against former Conceptual Anarky Party presidential candidate Joni Jacobs be dismissed.

Lancaster County Judge Robert Camp will rule on the motion May 2. At that time, Camp will review Soucie's motion and any additional motions that might be filed, Soucie said.

The law that Jacobs is charged with

breaking is over-broad, Soucie said. She is charged with defiling the American flag.

As the law now is written, Soucie said, it is unclear what exactly constitutes a flag. He also said it is unclear what constitutes defiling a flag.

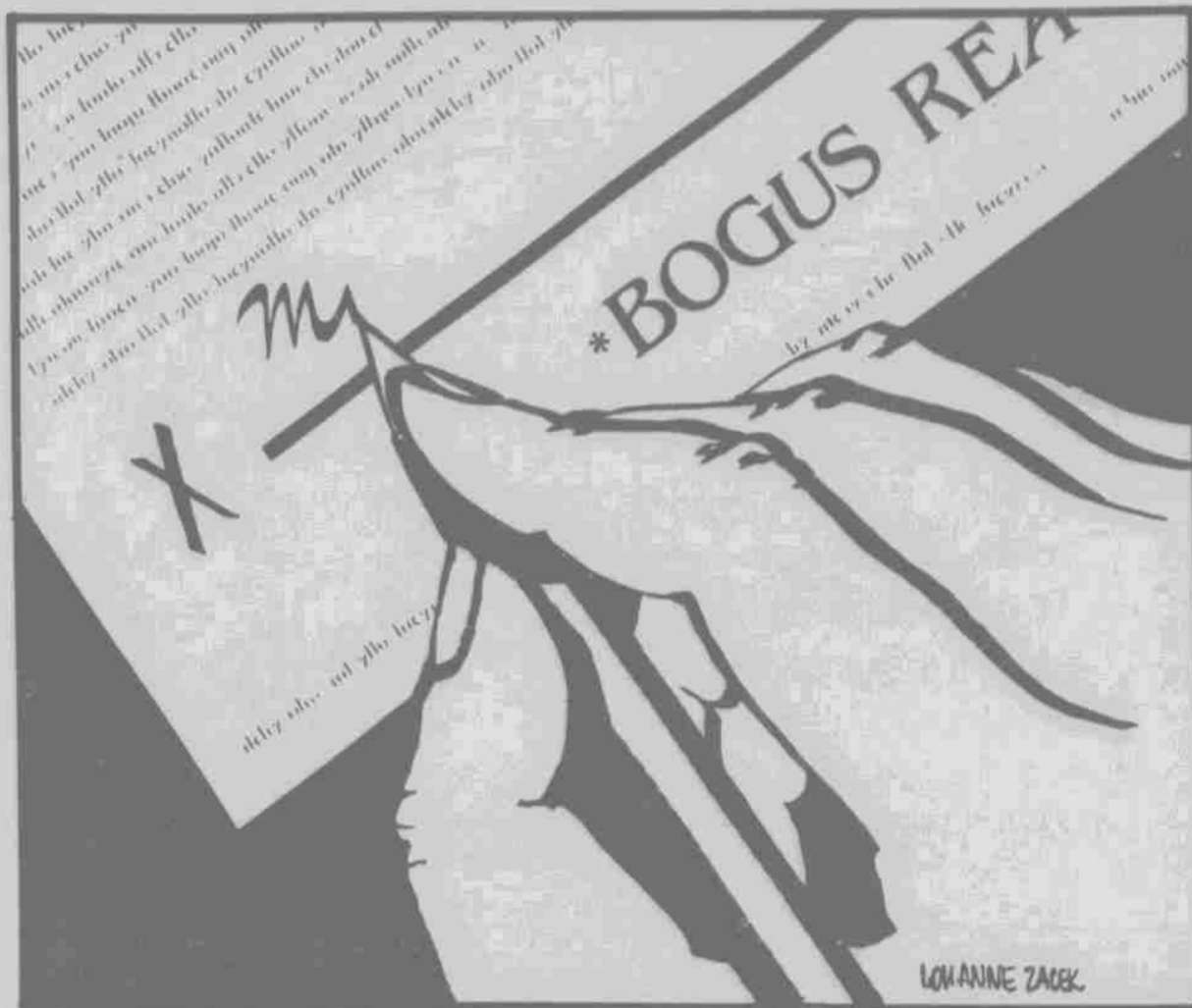
Soucie said the charges against Jacobs may be in conflict with the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

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Staff photo by Craig Andersen

Junior Judy White, left, and sophomore Steve Wilhelm were two of the many runners competing Tuesday in the Mastodon Marathon, a fund-raiser for Morrill Hall.



Housing codes enforce landlord, tenant rules

Editor's note: This is the final article in a three-part series on apartment rentals.

By Lori Sullivan

The phone rings non-stop at the City Housing Code Office, and it's little wonder — the office is responsible for ensuring that more than 20,000 apartments comply with city codes.

Director Harold Hansel says both the landlords and the housing available in Lincoln are getting better. He said he doesn't mind seeing some of the older buildings that "were unfit to live in" bulldozed. In the recent past, he said, he remembers rooming houses with 10 rooms sharing the same bathroom.

Some landlords don't like his office, but repairs that are required are usually in their best interests, too. Enforcing the codes has not increased the price of housing significantly, he said.

"Basically the cost of apartments today is because of the utilities, taxes and the insurance rates going up — it's not the enforcement of codes that drove the price up."

The Housing Code Office is necessary because some landlords don't care about the health and safety of their tenants, Hansel said. However, most of them are willing to make any repairs needed, he said.

"Out of 100 landlords, there are usually only about two or three that always stand out as not being as good about making repairs as the rest of them are," Hansel said. In Lincoln, about 5 percent of the landlords are like that, but that 5 percent keeps his office "running all the time," he said.

If his office receives a complaint, it sets up an appointment to inspect the property. Based on the Title 21 Housing Code, anything that is in violation is cited in a repair letter to the owner, he said.

Some common check points are: plumbing, plaster falling, roof leaks, missing screens from windows, overfusing the fuse box, hot water heaters, foundation caving and broken windows and doors. All aspects of tenant health and safety are checked.

When a landlord receives a repair letter, he has between 20 and 90 days to make the repairs. The time limit is based on how critical the violations are, Hansel said.

Any structure with three or more units must have a license to operate. The Housing Code Office also ensures that the landlord's property meets all codes before the license is granted. After a license is granted, the property is put on a sliding scale time schedule for inspection, based

on the condition of the property. Older buildings are usually inspected once a year, and newer ones less often, he said.

Usually when a building needs repairs, the Housing Code office follows up with a visit in 30 days to check the progress on the repairs.

If a landlord doesn't make the requested repairs, the Housing Code Office can revoke his license and he may no longer rent out the building in question.

Both landlords and tenants have responsibilities, Hansel said. If they work together problems can nearly always be avoided. Some tenants make unreasonable requests for improvements that are not really necessary, after living only a short while in an apartment. Or, they do not care for the property or abide by sanitation rules.

Often student tenants run into problems when a landlord promises to make improvements and doesn't follow through. Tenants need to be educated in that area, Hansel said.

"If the landlord tells you he's going to do this and this and this and he's going to have it done before you move in, then tell him you're not going to give him a dime until he in fact does do it," Hansel said.

Another alternative is to put it in writing and specify that repairs must be done by a certain date. If they aren't done, get a different landlord, he said.

Landlords should be more sensible about guaranteeing things they will do and they should also hire maintenance people who are qualified to make necessary repairs, he said.

In his 11 years in the Housing Code Office, Hansel has found that people are not very well educated in housing and the associated legal matters. Students in particular are often afraid to make waves with their landlords.

His experiences with student tenants have been good, he said, only a few have not been willing to carry out their responsibilities as tenants.

"I find that certain landlords don't want to rent to students — they hate them with a passion — they've probably had one bad experience and they just put them all in the same package, and really, that's discriminating, the way I see it," he said.

Hansel says he also has seen discrimination against women who are single parents.

Most records at the Housing Code Office are open to the public; people can call or come in and check to see if a certain landlord or apartment address has a lot of complaints listed, Hansel said.

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