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Drinking age debate continues; Beutler introduces amendment

By Brad Kuhn

Debate continues today on LB56, a bill that proposes to raise Nebraska's legal drinking age to 21. Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln will introduce an amendment in today's 10:30 a.m. session that would keep the drinking age at 20 and specifically address drunken driving.

LB56, sponsored by Sens. William Nichol of Scottsbluff and Howard Peterson of Grand Island, gained first-round approval by a 28-13 margin two weeks ago. If it survives the second round, it must pass one more floor vote before it can go to Gov. Bob Kerrey for approval.

Kerrey announced last Monday that he would sign the bill if it reached him.

Wednesday, Nichol amended his bill as a compromise to push back the effective date of the new drinking age from Jan. 1, 1984, to July 1 of that year. Two other amendments were defeated.

Sen. John DeCamp of Neligh failed 19-16 in his effort to push the effective date of LB56 back to July 1, 1986.

Sen. Dave Newell of Omaha, who previously protested LB56 by proposing that the legal drinking age should be 99, proposed Wednesday that the bill include a clause that would allow the sale of 3.2 beer to persons between 18 and 21 years of age. This proposal was killed 24-9.

Nichol and his supporters in the Legislature say LB56 is designed to save lives by reducing drunken driving.

Advocates of LB56 have repeatedly referred to studies by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the National Transportation Safety Board, various state reports and the findings and suggestions of the Reagan Administration's Commission on Drunken Driving released last November.

The studies show that drunken driving fatalities

can decline by an average of 28 percent by raising the legal drinking age. The national reports strongly recommend establishing a uniform, national drinking age at 21.

Opponents suggest raising Nebraska's drinking age to 21 would encourage 20-year-olds to join the stream of 18- and 19-year-olds already driving to neighboring states for 3.2 beer and lower legal drinking ages. They claim this might actually cause more alcohol-related deaths and injuries. Many senators say they would favor the bill if the higher drinking age would take effect only if contiguous states also raise their legal drinking ages to 21. Others argue the bill will not change the problem one way or another but will serve only to deprive 20-year-olds of the right to drink.

Beutler's amendment would leave the drinking age at 20, but would place strict provisions on the driving privileges of persons between 16 and 21 years old, a group frequently shown to have the highest drunken driving fatality statistics in independently-conducted studies.

The amendment would require the suspension of driving privileges for anyone less than 21 years of age convicted of driving while intoxicated. Once convicted of DWI, the offender could not legally operate a motor vehicle until his or her 21st birthday. The amendment further calls for the two-year suspension of driving privileges for anyone less than the legal drinking age found to be driving with a blood-alcohol content of as little as .02. DWI is defined as driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of .10.

Tennessee and Maine adopted similar programs last year.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad is expected to unveil a provisional driver's license proposal next week. According to Sven Sterner, director of the Iowa Department of Highway Safety, public meetings on drunken driving laws yielded a positive response to the provisional licensing proposal.

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Craig Androsen/Daily Nebraskan

What a day . . .

With the temperature in the mid-40s on Wednesday Laurie Ihm, a junior international relations major, rides her bike between classes. Today's weather calls for more of the same with a high expected in the 40s with partly cloudy skies.

Reagan urges Americans to keep Marines in Lebanon

From The Reuter News Report

WASHINGTON — President Reagan, seeking to defuse a bitter election-year debate over his Middle East policy, urged Americans Wednesday night to back him in making sure that terrorism does not drive the United States out of Lebanon.

He said in a State of the Union address to Congress that U.S. troops were helping the Lebanese to break a "cycle of despair," despite charges by Democrats that their presence was unnecessary and might drag the United States into war.

"We are making progress in Lebanon," Reagan said.

The president's address included proposals de-

signed to overcome criticism that his budget-cutting plans were at odds with the social welfare needs of Americans.

It could serve as a blueprint for his election campaign if, as expected, he announces in a scheduled speech on Sunday that he intends to seek a second term in November.

Reagan, who 10 days ago made a conciliatory speech urging the Kremlin to open a dialogue for peace, said in remarks aimed directly at the Soviet people:

"There is only one sane policy, for your country and mine, to preserve our civilization in this modern age — a nuclear war cannot be won and cannot be fought."

Reagan appealed to congressional leaders earlier Wednesday to support his Lebanon policy but was strongly challenged by Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives.

"We are making progress" in overcoming the crisis in Lebanon and moving toward reconciliation among warring Christian and Moslem factions, Reagan said.

"There is hope for a free, independent and sovereign Lebanon," he said. "We must have courage and give peace a chance, and we must not be driven from our

objectives by state-supported terrorism." Reagan said he was seeking support from allies for concerted action against terrorism. The goal is to banish the "ugly specter" seen last year when a suicide bomb attack killed 241 U.S. servicemen in the peacekeeping force in Beirut, Reagan said. The French and U.S. embassies in Kuwait were later hit by blasts, and several South Korean Cabinet ministers were killed in a bomb explosion in Rangoon.

On domestic policy, Reagan announced new initiatives including a proposal to build a permanent, manned space station at a cost of \$8 billion over 10 years. The state of the union is "much improved" as a result of his program in his three years of office to reduce the size of government and cut taxes, spending, inflation and interest rates, he said. He again opposed a tax increase to reduce federal spending deficits approaching \$200 billion annually, saying more spending cuts were needed to ease the deficit problem. He asked Congress to join the White House in creating a special committee to negotiate measures that he said could produce \$100 billion in savings over three years. But he ruled out any proposal by such a panel for major tax increases, which he called "a band-aid" solution threatening the current recovery from recession.

Bill calls for evaluation of colleges

By Stacie Thomas

State Sen. David Newell of Omaha introduced a bill Wednesday that calls for the evaluation of Nebraska's public colleges and universities every five years.

The Nebraska Coordinating Commission is already set up to examine the funding, administration and activities of the public and non-public higher education systems in Nebraska. Newell's LB857 would provide criteria for the commission to "determine whether the institution continues to serve a valuable purpose to the state."

Newell said the bill would help schools do a more thorough and thoughtful systems analysis.

Under LB857, a school would be required to receive a favorable assessment in at least five of 10

areas. These include reaching the minimum enrollment needed to be cost-effective, having stable or increasing enrollment, keeping the average costs per student within 25 percent of costs in other states, and keeping faculty salary levels equal to or better than faculty salaries at similar institutions in neighboring states.

The criteria also cover library facilities, square feet of instructional space, the percentage of tenured faculty and the amount of educational and general funds spent for teaching.

The commission would publish its report, any recommended improvements, proposed changes in the use of the institution and any proposed closure or merger.

Newell said the commission should not have to increase the size of its present staff.

Thursday

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