

Education report draws criticism

By Gene Gentrup
Senior Reporter

A report issued last month recommending Nebraska's four state colleges be put under the jurisdiction of the NU Board of Regents is being criticized by some of the state's top education leaders.

The report, presented to Gov. Bob Kerrey by the Citizens Commission for the Study of Higher Education, recommends the establishment of a single, statewide governing board that would administer Nebraska's colleges and universities.

The commission recommends that the seven-member Board of Trustees for Nebraska State Colleges be disbanded and that the four state colleges be operated by a restructured NU board of regents. The board would include nine voting members appointed by the governor for six-year terms and three non-voting students members.

Other recommendations by the commission include improving faculty pay, increasing private financial support of higher education and making admission standards tougher.

NU President Ronald Roskens supports the consolidated governing board that the commission recommended. The idea, he said, is a "proposition whose time has come." He said Nebraskans have "an unfortunate mental hangup" about the present two-board system. Placement of the state colleges under the regents "doesn't mean necessarily that the others (colleges) are of lesser consequence," he said.

But other education leaders disagree.

Carroll Thompson, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges, said he opposes the idea of a single governing board.

"We all know that with one large board the opportunity for citizen input is diminished," Thompson said. The legislature may have less influence with one administrative board, he said.

State Sens. Jerome Warner of Waverly and Bernice Labadz of Omaha said they did not think there would be enough votes from the Legislature to place the issue on the voting ballot.

Establishing a single governing board would require an amendment to the State Constitution. To put such an amendment on the ballot would require a vote of 30 of the 49 members of the Legislature.

Tom Vickers, chairman of the Legislature's education committee, said he doubts that unifying the university and the state colleges would eliminate unnecessary duplication and improve cooperation. He and Warner are members of the citizens commission.

At least three Board of Regents members said they oppose the idea of an appointed board.

Regent Margaret Robinson of Norfolk said the board would mean that "taxpayers of this state would be giving up their right to determine their own destiny as far as higher education is concerned."

Regent Don Fricke said "it essentially would be giving the governor control of the university."



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