

Daily Nebraskan

Thursday

WEATHER:

Thursday, cloudy and colder with highs in upper 20s, E winds 5-15 mph. Thursday night, cloudy, 20 percent chance of snow, lows 15-20. Friday, 50 percent chance of snow, highs 25-30. Saturday through Monday, chance of snow Saturday, colder with high of 20. Monday, high in mid-40s.

INDEX

News Digest 2
Editorial 4
Diversions 7
Sports 15
Classifieds 18

March 2, 1989

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Vol. 88 No. 112

Legislature advances burial remains bill

By Jerry Guenther
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska Legislature Wednesday gave first-round approval to an amended bill requiring the Nebraska State Historical Society to return skeletal remains and burial goods to the Pawnee Indians.

Legislature

LB340, sponsored by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, passed by a vote of 25-7 after the Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee added several amendments to the bill.

Chambers called the bill a "first step" toward rectifying some of the

abuses that have been committed against American Indians, but said the amended version was not completely satisfactory.

"This bill has been diluted and watered down to a point that I personally would not accept were I representing this issue for me and mine," Chambers said.

American Indians have made considerable compromises while negotiating for the bill, Chambers said.

Included in those compromises is a committee amendment that allows for the return of only those burial goods that can be proven to belong to a specific skeletal remain.

Sen. Dennis Baack of Kimball, chairman of the committee, said the tribes originally requested the return of all burial goods.

Baack said the amendment greatly

reduces the number of items that would have to be returned because many of the burial goods are not traceable to specific skeletons.

According to research done for the Native American Rights Fund, Baack said, 1,054 non-bead burial goods would have to be returned with the amendment, although the historical society has quoted higher figures.

Another committee amendment allows the Nebraska Department of Roads to remove unmarked burial sites if the sites are in the way of a street or highway construction project.

Baack said this amendment was added at the request of the roads department.

Other committee amendments narrowed and clarified the scope of the bill. The committee voted 27-0 to

adopt the amendments.

In arguing for passage of LB340, Chambers said it is important to understand that the skeletal remains were not "inadvertently" dug up by road construction crews or those building irrigation systems.

"These burial sites were deliberately sought out, deliberately plundered, deliberately ransacked, deliberately desecrated," he said.

"What we are talking about with this bill is nothing less than human dignity, and what we are asking for is common decency," he said.

Chambers also said American Indians should not be required to prove the validity of their religion in order to retain the burial goods of their family and tribal members.

Just like a blessed rosary holds a special significance when buried

with deceased Catholics, Chambers said, burial goods placed with American Indians should be respected as having a similar "consecrated significance."

Chambers said that many times the remains of humans take on a "spiritual meaning."

"If we were looking at these bones only as material substance," Chambers said, "they in fact would have no more significance than the remains of carcasses that we find in the slaughterhouse."

Before the bill passed, an amendment that would have removed burial goods from the bill was defeated 17-21-4.

Sen. Jerome Warner of Waverly, sponsor of the amendment, said he

See BURIAL on 6

ASUN endorsement of remains bill debated

By Ryan Steeves
Staff Reporter

University of Nebraska-Lincoln student leaders heard mostly false, one-sided testimony when they voted to endorse legislation protecting graves and human burial remains, a UNL professor said Wednesday night.

Doug Bamforth, UNL assistant professor of anthropology, said senators of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska passed a bill endorsing LB340 based on false information presented by the bill's supporters.

ASUN voted last week to endorse LB340, which the Nebraska Legislature gave first-

round approval to Wednesday.

LB340, amended Wednesday, would regulate use of all unmarked graves in Nebraska. It also would create a set time for study of skeletal remains and burial goods found in those graves. After this time, those buried items would be returned to the owners.

At least three opponents to LB340 spoke in open forum at the meeting. Several supporters also spoke, but ASUN took no further action on the issue.

Bamforth objected to statements made by James Botsford, an attorney who runs the Indian Law Office in Walthill. At last week's ASUN meeting, Botsford said many graves are often "ransacked in the name of science."

Bamforth said Botsford's comments implied that archaeologists dig up skeletal remains regularly. But in the last 20 years, only two sites were excavated "professionally," he said.

"And these sites were excavated only because they would otherwise have been destroyed by construction," Bamforth said.

Some Nebraskans do dig up skeletal remains, he said, but these people are looters who want to make money from remains or add them to their private collections.

"These are not professional archaeologists who dig out of respect for the past humans in hope that those humans can teach us something about their lives," Bamforth said.

Walter Echohawk, an attorney for the Native American Rights Fund in Boulder, Colo., disagreed with Bamforth. Echohawk said every Pawnee burial site in Nebraska has been violated by both looters and professional archaeologists.

"The Pawnee people are extremely upset by this, as you can imagine," he said.

Bamforth said he agrees that remains need protection. The question is whether LB340 is the right legislation, he said.

Bamforth said he especially objects to vague language in section 4.2 of LB340. That part of the bill states, "Human burial site shall

See ASUN on 6

90 UNL students discuss issues with senators

By Larry Peirce
Senior Reporter

Government Liaison Committee Chairman Bryan Hill said "Senators on Campus" day Wednesday was about the "most effective" lobbying activity his group has held this year.

"Any time you can get students with state senators and you can get them talking, I think that's a success," Hill said.

About 90 students talked to 13 senators over lunch in the Nebraska Union about university issues including equipment surcharges for the College of Engineering and Technology, remodeling in the College of Business Administration and the need for research money.

Hill said senators told him they were impressed with the number of students attending and the quality of questions and concerns they had. He said senators told him they were glad they had the opportunity to have direct contact with the students.

Senators want to hear personal problems and experiences the students have had, he said.

Currently, he said, GLC is conducting letter writing campaigns on behalf of the engineering surcharge, the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid and State Student Incentive Grants.

He said that personal contact from the students complimented the letter campaigns.

"Letters are good, but there's nothing better than having a student constituent talking to a state senator in person," he said.

The university's budget comes under consideration of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee March 14, he said, and four members

See SENATORS on 6



David Frens/Daily Nebraskan

Members of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty hold a candlelight vigil Wednesday night on the steps outside the state capital building.

40 protest death penalty at State Capitol

By Brandon Loomis
Senior Reporter

About 40 protesters prayed to God and Gov. Kay Orr Wednesday night at an anti-death penalty candlelight vigil on the steps of the State Capitol.

The group, protesting at the invitation of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, stood on the east steps of the capitol at 8 p.m. and asked God to help state senators understand the plight of death row inmates.

"We pray that you'll have access to the lives of the senators who make the decisions," said Laroy Seaver, director of Lincoln Urban Ministries.

Last week, the Legislature's Judiciary Committee heard testimony about LB596, a bill which would abolish the death penalty in Nebraska. The committee has yet to vote on whether to advance the bill.

From the east steps, the protesters moved to the north steps, where they read a prayer to the governor from an 8-year-old girl.

"I don't like it (the death penalty) one bit," read the letter from Patrice McShane, who attends Randolph Elementary School in Lincoln. "I think it would hurt... Could you change the law for me?"

After the group had stood at each of the four stairways, Kjerstin Bowman, a ninth grader at Lefler

Junior High School, read a Native American prayer adapted from the Lord's Prayer.

"Forgive us and cause us to forgive as well anyone who hurts us," Bowman read.

Bill Roundey, state coordinator of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, said the vigil was an attempt to raise public awareness as the committee prepares to vote on LB596.

Since Feb. 21, when Roundey and members of the group began a week-long fast, Lincoln newspapers have written 10 articles on the group or the bill, he said.

But Roundey said the effort may have had less effect on senators than he hoped for. Earlier Wednesday, the group distributed

invitations to all state senators to attend the vigil.

"It's obvious that we were not too terribly effective at it," Roundey said, surveying the group.

Carl Klarnar, a political science sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said he came to the vigil because he feels states should offer better rehabilitation programs to convicts, not the electric chair.

"It seems to me that the death penalty isn't really a deterrent," Klarnar said. "And I think that would be the only justification."

Roundey said the vigil was part of a nationwide "Abolition Day" sponsored by the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty.