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State senators hear testimony on gun bills

By Angle Brunkow
Senior Reporter

Getting tough on crime takes more than passing legislation against guns, according to some testimony before the Nebraska Legislature's Judiciary Committee on Thursday.

"This legislation against an inanimate object will have little or no impact," National Rifle Association Director J.W. Carlson said.

Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha introduced five bills Thursday restricting gun use in Nebraska.

- LB927 would prohibit Nebraskans from transporting or possessing assault firearms.
- LB1012 would require firearms to be

stored safely and out of the reach of children.

- LB1011 would require potential gun owners to undergo safety training before purchasing one.

- LB1013 would prohibit those younger than 21 from possessing a handgun.

- LB1018 would create gun-free zones around elementary and secondary schools.

Sen. Eric Will of Omaha, who also sponsored the bills, said stopping the violence that occurred because of guns was the Legislature's most important task.

"Anything the Legislature can do to address that is vital," he said.

But opponents of the bill said the Legislature should focus its attention on stopping criminals, not restricting the rights of law-abiding

citizens.

Robert Strayer of Lincoln said criminals would get access to guns regardless of laws preventing it.

"Don't punish me; I'm not a convicted felon," he said. "Let's not take things away from the citizens of this state."

Dustin Ruge, a Nebraska State Rifle and Pistol Association representative, said laws in Washington, D.C., restricting citizens' access to guns had not taken care of problems there.

Karine Close of Omaha said such laws concerning guns would vastly reduce the cost to society in the form of human lives and violence.

"Can we afford not to put into law these bills?" she said.

Carlson said there was another way to deal

with gun-related crime and violence.

Starting at a young age, children should be swiftly and harshly punished for violent crime, he said. Current punishments of juveniles, he said, are merely "a slap on the wrist."

Others who testified Thursday questioned the constitutionality of proposed laws such as LB927 that would limit citizens' ability to bear arms.

"This is not fair and this is not just," said Walter Kamp II of Kearney.

Kamp said he was a good citizen who collected guns and often hunted. Although he was brought up to believe it was his "inalienable right" to own weapons, Kamp said LB927 would make him a criminal for owning and transporting his guns.

Remodeled lab helps students help children

By Brian Sharp
Staff Reporter

A small child sits looking at a bin of colored blocks. His big brown eyes dart back and forth, surveying the other children and their creations.

After a while, a tiny hand inches toward the jumbled pile, carefully selects one of the discarded pieces and starts adding to it.

He's going fishing, and he wants to make a fishing pole.

He is one of more than 90 children involved in a class at the newly remodeled Ruth Staples Child Development Lab on East Campus.

University students observe or teach children ranging from 2 to 6 years old. Classes require sophomore or senior standing, depending on the lab, and they involve students in a variety of majors and colleges.

The College of Human Resources and Family Sciences completed remodeling of the lab in December.

The lab has gone from having four activity rooms to two large classrooms and a research area.

Susan Graul, assistant director of the lab, said the project not only gave the children more room to play, it made it easier for UNL students to teach, observe and interact with them.

College students in the preschool child lab try to apply theory in understanding children's behavior, whether they paint, fish with blocks or dress up for an imaginary trip to Valentino's.

The two-phase renovation of the lab cost \$350,000, paid through building safety money and chancellor's office funds.

In other departments of the college, officials said renovations were long overdue.

Since the Family Resource Center occupied its current home five years ago, officials said, little has been done to meet student needs — until now.

A two-phase, \$150,000 remodeling project is halfway done, but fund-raising has slowed its completion.

Graduate students in marriage and family therapy use the building for counseling, research and training for their certification.

Craig Smith, director of the center, said the building originally was used as a living unit. Students learned economics skills firsthand by living in the houses, he said.

While the full kitchen has yet to be converted, the three-bedroom, two-bath home has been remodeled to provide therapy rooms, a graduate student workroom and an electronics/video room for professors to see and hear counseling sessions.

Viewing areas behind one-way mirrors also are in place.

The program admits six university students a year out of 30 to 40 applicants, Smith said. Students work with about 50 clients from both the university and the Lincoln community. Counseling topics range from breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend to child abuse and domestic violence, he said.

"It (family therapy) is a different animal than it used to be," he said. "We're getting more where people are aware what family therapy is and calling for it."

Within the next two weeks, officials will find out whether the program will be accredited.



Kiley Timperley/DN

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, right, talks with Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha during Thursday's session of the Nebraska Legislature. Ashford is a co-sponsor of LB600, and Chambers is a strong opponent to the bill.

Senator proposes use of lethal injection

By Matthew Waite
Senior Reporter

The fate of Harold Lamont "Wili" Otey may not rest in the electric chair of Nebraska's state penitentiary.

LB600, sponsored by Sen. Owen Elmer of Indianola, would change the means of execution in Nebraska from electrocution to lethal injection.

The bill would establish "a continuous, intravenous administration of a lethal quantity of an ultra-short-acting barbiturate in connection with a chemical paralytic agent and an agent to cause cardiac arrest ... until death is pronounced by a licensed physician ..." as the means of execution.

Elmer said he introduced the bill on behalf of the Nebraska Department of Corrections. He said the bill was not supporting or opposing the death penalty but instead a

matter of cruelty and simplicity.

"If we are going to have the death penalty, a system to carry out and implement the sentence should be as humane as possible," he said.

Elmer said the task should be as easy as possible for both the prisoner and the person performing the execution. He said the technology available with lethal injections made

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National guide lists UNL as a good value

By Todd Neeley
Staff Reporter

UNL has been named one of 36 national flagship universities and is considered one of the best values among the nation's colleges and universities, according to one national publication.

"The Guide to 101 of the Best Values in America's Colleges and Universities," published by the Center for Studies in College Enrollment in Bridgewater, Mass., has included the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for the third consecutive year.

David Wilson, co-editor of the book, said being labeled as a national flagship university was the highest praise his publication gave to a school.

"Students get top-flight academics and a

great out-of-class experience," he said. "It is among the most reasonable in cost in the nation."

He said UNL's \$5,300 in-state and \$8,600 out-state tuition costs per year compared favorably with many other schools.

For example, he said, tuition at Duke University in North Carolina is about \$22,700 a year.

But he said students at UNL could get a good education for less money and enjoy the complete college experience.

To be listed as a national flagship university, a school must meet four criteria, Wilson said.

First, it must have a good national reputation. Second, it must have a sense of forward momentum and aggressiveness in academics.

"They must be willing to try new things," he said.

Third, the school must offer the complete college experience, he said, including a wide range of activities from sporting events to anything that displays school spirit.

Fourth, students must be able to get a good education for a reasonable price, he said.

About eight pages in the book are devoted to UNL — more than most schools mentioned in the publication, Wilson said.

Other Big Eight schools named as national flagship universities include Colorado, Iowa State and Missouri. The guide also includes the University of Kansas and the University of Oklahoma among the 101 best values.

Wilson said he interviewed about 170 students around the nation, and was impressed by UNL and Nebraska.

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A&E

The
American
Indian

Films and poetry
expose Indian
culture this
weekend.

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Friday

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Today, partly sunny.
Saturday will be
mostly cloudy with
flurries.