

Judge denies Williams' request for stay of execution

From The Associated Press

A federal judge refused Tuesday to delay next week's scheduled execution of death row inmate Robert Williams.

U.S. District Judge Lyle Strom said Williams' request for a delay in his March 22 date with the electric chair should be taken to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals or to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Strom ruled shortly after receiving a brief from Attorney General Don Stenberg who argued that only the U.S. Supreme Court could stay the execution.

Vince Powers, one of Williams' attorneys, said a petition was prepared for filing with the high court.

If all potential court remedies are exhausted, Williams could ask the three-member Board of Pardons for a

clemency hearing. That move could delay his execution. But the board — composed of Gov. Ben Nelson, Attorney General Don Stenberg and Secretary of State Scott Moore — isn't required to grant such a hearing.

Williams, 58, is scheduled to die in the electric chair for the Aug. 11, 1977, murders of Catherine Brooks and Patricia McGarry, both 25 and of Lincoln. A federal appeals court ordered that he be resentenced in

McGarry's murder, but Williams remains under a death sentence for the murder of Brooks.

Stenberg argued that a previous federal appeals court decision that denied Williams' last appeal ended the authority of the lower federal court to act in the case.

"Even if jurisdiction existed in this court to entertain this request for relief, Williams has utterly failed to

demonstrate the necessary substantial grounds for relief exists," Stenberg said.

Stenberg's brief chided public remarks by one of Williams' attorneys, Paula Belford-Hutchinson, who was quoted as saying that Williams' attorneys want a stay of execution in place so that the U.S. Supreme Court would "have adequate time to review it and make a reasoned decision about it."

Pregnant women get aid

By Jeff Randall
Staff Reporter

The Legislature advanced a bill Tuesday that would provide welfare payments for pregnant women in their third trimester.

But Sen. Carol McBride Pirsch of Omaha, the sponsor of LB658, withdrew her support for the bill after it was amended.

The original bill would have withheld all cash payments from pregnant women until after the child was born.

Amendment 986, sponsored by Sen. Dwite Pedersen of Elkhorn and Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln, would withhold cash aid to pregnant women only until the third trimester. The amendment passed by a vote of 31-5.

Pedersen, a staunch Republican, said his political leanings played no part in his decision to sponsor the amendment.

"This is not a liberal issue, this is a moral issue," he said. "This is the least we can do."

The approval of the amendment was preceded by nearly two hours of debate over the merits of the bill. A proposed amendment by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha that would have stripped the bill of nearly all its measures also came before, but was voted down.

Pirsch began the debate by comparing Nebraska's current system for Aid to Dependent Children with that of other states. She said Nebraska was the only state that provided cash payments to women throughout their pregnancies.

Most other states begin such welfare payments either late in pregnancies or upon the child's birth, Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln said.

Pirsch said the current welfare system harmed those it was supposed to help by effectively paying women to have children out of wedlock.

"In our welfare state, we have destroyed people," she said. "We have destroyed their incentives. We have destroyed the importance of the family."

Chambers and Sen. LaVon Crosby of Lincoln led opposition to the bill. Chambers said the bill was another attempt to slash the budget without remorse for real people.

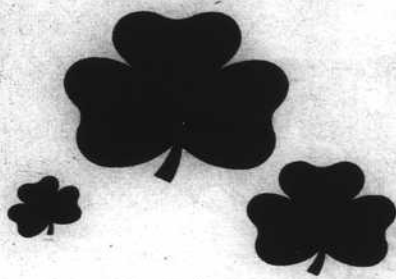
"This is the state version of what's happening at the federal government," he said, "where they take the weakest, the most vulnerable and helpless, to attack. But by doing so, they don't touch the budget."

Chambers said the reforms proposed in LB658 would remove only about \$400,000 from the state budget.

"The amount of harm that could be done by this bill is not balanced by the relatively few dollars that are going to be taken in," he said.

Crosby said she opposed the bill because it went against her idea of government's responsibilities.

"I think that we as a society and a government have an obligation to help those in need," she said. "We have to remember that we are dealing with human beings."

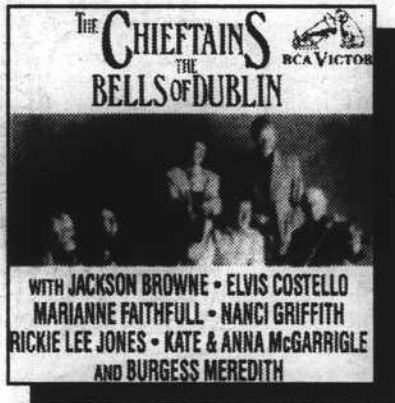


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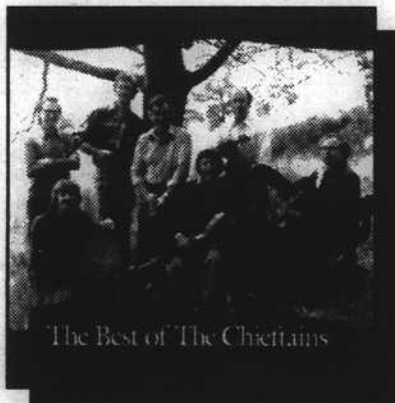
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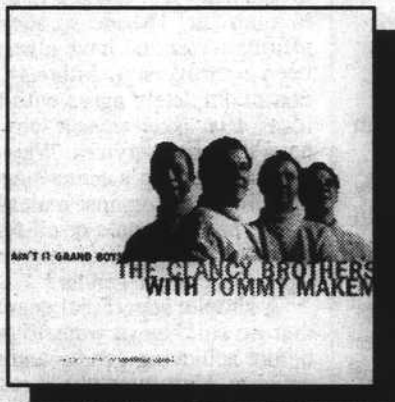
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