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Political dance



Travis Heying/DN

Karen Skiber of Lincoln joins in protest Tuesday night with members of the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan., in front of the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

Lied show sparks protest from anti-gay group

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

What started as a protest against a dance performance turned into a shouting match between gay rights and anti-gay rights advocates Tuesday night in front of the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

A line of Lincoln Police officers separated about 20 anti-gay rights advocates and 300 gay rights supporters, who shouted insults but remained peaceful during the protests.

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Members from the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan. came to Lincoln to protest the Bill T. Jones dance company.

Jones, who has the HIV virus, uses dance to interpret how people deal with AIDS. His partner Arnie Zane died of AIDS last year. The church group stood on the northeast corner of 12th and Q streets holding up signs with the slogans "God hates fags" and "Get back in the closet."

Gay rights supporters, who were standing on the southwest corner of 12th and Q streets, moved across to face the protestors. Lincoln police officers kept the crowd from joining on the sidewalk.

No protestors went inside the Lied Center, and Director C. Bruce Marquis said the protest did not seem to be scaring people away and may have made more people

aware of the performance.

Complaining about the cold weather, 7-year-old Rebecca Phelps-Roper and her 9-year-old sister, Megan, joined their parents in protesting the performance.

"God hates fags," Rebecca said, "cause the Bible says."

All the "big people" were holding signs, Megan said, so she joined her sister in shouting at the gay rights supporters.

"There's a whole bunch of fags, and it's really weird," she said, pointing across the sidewalk. "It's fun to yell at the fags. These people act like they're 2-year-olds."

Pastor Fred Phelps, who led the congregation from Topeka, said he was pleased with the crowd. Phelps said he was protesting the performance because he wanted to warn people against the dangers of homo-

See PROTEST on 6

Signature amendment not changed

By Jeff Randall
Staff Reporter

Members of the Legislature spent nearly all morning Tuesday trying to push through amendment after amendment to LR6CA, but to no avail.

All proposed amendments to LR6CA, introduced by Sen. Cap Dierks of Ewing, were either dropped or voted down. LR6CA is a proposed constitutional amendment that would lower the number of signatures needed to place initiatives and referendums on the ballot. Nebraskans would vote on the resolution in November 1996.

LEGISLATURE

Debate over LR6CA began Tuesday with a proposed amendment by Dierks to reinforce the idea that the legislation would keep the citizens' rights of initiative and referendum.

Several senators, including Tim Hall and Ernie Chambers of Omaha, spoke out against Dierks' amendment, saying it was nonsensical and of little function.

Dierks said he was convinced by his colleagues' arguments, then dropped the proposed amendment.

Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln followed with an amendment that would have put a six-month time limit on petition drives. Wesely said unlimited time for petitioners created a lack of focus on the issues and signing by uninformed citizens.

"If there is a limited amount of time, you have a better-informed electorate," he said.

Chambers backed Wesely and said he believed the powers of initiative and referendum were dangerous when placed in the hands of uninformed and underinformed citizens. He said making petitioning for initiatives and referendums more difficult was a safety measure that had to be taken.

See LEGISLATURE on 3

Senators see penitentiary from the inside

By John Fulwider
Staff Reporter

Five Nebraska senators were locked into the State Penitentiary Tuesday night.

But unlike most penitentiary dwellers, they were let out three hours later. Sen. Dwite Pedersen of Elkhorn gave a tour of the penitentiary to Sens. Donald Preister of Omaha, Gerald Matzke of Sidney, C.N. "Bud" Robinson of Blair and Jim Jensen of Omaha. More than 15 other friends and staff of the senators also came along.

Pedersen said he gave the tours so senators could see what prisons really were like and make better-educated decisions on crime legislation.

He said people's opinions about prisons changed when they saw one firsthand. For one, he said, they find that inmates are human beings, not animals.

"They discover that not every prisoner is out there with a knife ready to cut their gizzards out," he said.

The group toured most of the facility, including several cell blocks. One person, when passing an 8 foot by 10 foot, double-bunk cell,

See TOUR on 3

Spanier offers advice to new comer

By Matthew Waite
Senior Reporter

More than a week since his announced departure, Chancellor Graham Spanier offered some advice Tuesday for whoever takes his office.

"Keep your chin up at all times," he said, laughing.

Spanier was selected March 16 by Penn State to be the next president. NU President Dennis Smith said he would appoint a committee to search for a new chancellor in the next few weeks.

Though Spanier said he had no specific qualities he felt the committee should look for, he did say that the new chancellor should be prepared.

"Nowadays, to be in a position like this, you need a fair amount of energy and stamina," he said.

Strong academic values and care for the people who work at UNL are also important

traits, Spanier said.

"It would make me feel very good when I leave the university that the custodians and maintenance staff felt as good about my accomplishments as the faculty," he said.

And when he does finally leave UNL, Spanier said it would be on good terms.

"We have much less of a 'we-and-they' attitude than a few years ago," he said.

Faculty morale is high, he said, and the budget situation for the next biennium is looking good.

The re-wiring of the campus is another healthy sign. In addition, several classrooms have gone from deferred maintenance to renovation, and the landscape has improved, Spanier said.

Applications for fall admission are up significantly, and the applications for the honors program have doubled. Spanier said he tried to emphasize undergraduate education, and that he didn't think another chancellor would change his work.

"These were all areas that needed attention," he said. "I think someone coming in would want to build on those, not turn it in

another direction."

But Spanier said he couldn't have completed his projects alone. He needed support of the regents, faculty and administrators, he said.

He had been successful in the last four years, but could have done more if time permitted, he said.

"Other priorities would have evolved had I stayed longer. I'm sure there will be new improvements (with a new chancellor)."

His priorities during his time at UNL were not his own, Spanier said; he did what UNL needed in academics, business and diversity.

"Different chancellors will have different degrees of personal commitment to that," he said. "It's a matter of emphasis on what one cares about."

At Penn State, priorities will be different because of different needs. The agenda there will be set by the Board of Trustees and the faculty, not by him, he said.

"I bring my own value system — that will follow me. It's the value system you bring, not an agenda per se. The agenda here was what UNL needed, not what I wanted to do."