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inside **T**
Tuesday
Sports

Trev Alberts returns to
Lincoln, page 7

Arts & Entertainment

Cable show stops in Lincoln
for breakfast, page 9



April 11, 1995

Welfare reform dominates Legislature's day

By J. Christopher Hain and
Matthew Waite
Senior Reporters

The Nebraska Legislature took all of Monday to debate the Welfare Reform bill, but made only slight progress toward a first round vote.

The committee amendments, the one part of LB455 passed by lawmakers, survived the day with senators adding only three amendments. The entire floor needed to approve the amendments that the Health and Human Services committee forwarded.

Amendments from Sen. Tim Hall

of Omaha, from Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln, and from Sen. Jerome Warner of Waverly and Curt Bromm of Wahoo were the only three to survive debate.

The welfare bill, introduced by Sen. Ardyce Bohlke of Hastings at the request of the governor, provides aid to parents for day care and health care in exchange for a two-year cap on benefits.

Beutler's amendment allowed a welfare recipient to be considered under extreme hardship if he or she could not provide clothing. The committee amendments originally included only shelter and food.

Hall's amendment, however, had a much larger scope and sparked sharper debate.

The amendment, called "the polygon amendment" by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, said that if welfare recipients were declared ineligible by the state, the county could not give them assistance.

Hall said he proposed his amendment to show that the intent of welfare reform was not to shift the responsibility of the program to the counties.

Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln said the county welfare office was the last line of help for those in need. He

quoted Nebraska law that said the counties were responsible for caring for the poor.

The Hall amendment represented a fundamental change in the way the welfare system was run, said Wesely, who opposed the amendment. He said county assistance was short-term help that would leave with the amendment.

Chambers, who sarcastically supported the amendment, said the amendment sent a message.

"The idea is to say shape up or ship out," he said.

Chambers said real welfare reform was not meant to have the

recipient make a short walk to the county welfare office after the state cuts off aid.

With no county or state assistance, Chambers said, elderly people and children who are welfare "sponges" would die off.

"Let them die," he said with sarcasm. "And if they die, we cut the excess population."

Chambers voted in favor of the amendment, only to change his vote to oppose the amendment. It passed 30-12.

State senators began the day of

See LEGISLATURE on 6

Jammin'



Travis Heying/DN

A group of elementary students cheer the introduction of Nebraska Quarterback Tommie Frazier Monday at the "School is Cool Jam" Monday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. More than 10,000 elementary and middle school students from around the state gathered to hear UNL sports celebrities.

Rally tells students secret: School is cool

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Standing only 3 feet tall, 6-year-old Michael Norris tugged on his mother's sleeve.

"That's him!" he said, timidly pointing to former Nebraska football player Trev Alberts, who towered over the boy.

"Well, ask him for his autograph," she said.

The boy summoned up his nerve and tapped on Alberts' sleeve. He got his autograph.

His mother proudly displayed a notepad with another scribbled name.

"We've got Tommie Frazier's, too," she said, smiling.

Alberts and other Nebraska role models awed the almost 12,000 elementary school children who filled the Bob Devaney Sports Center Monday for the 1995 "School is Cool" Jam.

The motivational pep rally was designed to encourage students to discover their talents, make good decisions and realize the benefits of education while having fun.

Members of the UNL marching band, yell squad and the mascot Lil' Red were no match for the screaming children.

Sherri Svoboda, a fifth-grade teacher from Pershing Elementary School in Lincoln, was surrounded by a group of students shouting, "Tommie! Tommie! Tommie!"

"This is a great way to get kids to like school and stay in school," Svoboda said. "Just listen to the kids; they're so psyched up."

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor Graham Spanier, University of Nebraska President Dennis Smith, Gov. Ben Nelson and other community leaders introduced the almost 130 schools from more than 80 communities.

"School is a lot like athletics," Smith said. "The more you use your mind, the

stronger it gets."

The students also watched athletic demonstrations by NU gymnasts and volleyball players and watched members of the NU basketball team in a slam-dunk contest.

But no celebration in Nebraska — especially a motivational celebration — would be complete without a tribute to the national-champion Nebraska football team.

Jodi Bursovsky and Katherine Mezger came from Table Rock Elementary School to see their favorite Nebraska role model.

"We're waiting for Todd Osborne," Mezger said.

Bursovsky corrected her.

"It's Tom Osborne."

"Oh, whatever his name is," Mezger said, as she turned her attention to figuring out how Lil' Red could see out of his costume.

Sixth-graders Andrew Tomes and Mike

See SCHOOL on 6

Disturbances by vagrants up in union

By Chad Lorenz
Staff Reporter

An increase in objectionable behavior from vagrants in the City Union has caused union officials and campus police to explore options for banning repeat offenders.

Daryl Swanson, director of Nebraska unions, said he was working with campus police to prosecute vagrants for panhandling, consuming alcohol on campus and public disturbances.

UNL Police Sgt. Bill Manning said officers received three to four calls a day for vagrant disturbances. Recently, calls about panhandling have become serious, he said, with some comparable to strong-arm robbery.

"If it's intimidation that makes people give up their money, we have a problem," Manning said.

Last Tuesday, a student reported he was threatened with a knife by one of the union's inhabitants, Manning said.

Swanson said he noticed vagrants visited the union more often and stayed longer. Some are becoming bolder with their behavior, he said.

See HOMELESS on 6

State to pay legal costs for Williams

From Staff Reports

The state will pay for death-row inmate Robert Williams' legal counsel, a judge ruled Monday.

Lancaster County District Court Judge Paul Merritt ordered that Williams' legal fees be taxed to the state. On Friday, Merritt appointed lawyers John Vanderslice and Paula Hutchinson to represent Williams.

Williams, convicted of the 1977 murders of two Lincoln women, came within three hours of execution on March 22. A question of possible juror misconduct prompted the State Supreme Court to issue a stay and send the case back to district court. Williams remains on death row.

Hutchinson was involved with the case leading up to March 22 after receiving a federal appointment. When the case was sent back, however, Hutchinson withdrew, stating that she no longer believed her appointment was valid.

No court date has been set for an evidentiary hearing regarding the possibility of juror misconduct. Officials in Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey's office said Lacey had yet to ask for the hearing.