

Amendment may impact fathers' rights

By Jeff Randall
Staff Reporter

State legislators spent most of the day Tuesday discussing the fate of an amendment that would establish a registry for biological parents.

The amendment, sponsored by Sen. Gerald Matzke of Sidney, also modified an earlier amendment from Sen. Elaine Stuhr of Bradshaw.

Stuhr's amendment, co-sponsored by Matzke and Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln, would provide for notification of the biological father when a child born out of wedlock is put up for adoption.

Stuhr supported Matzke's amendment, which replaced hers after passing on a 26-0 vote. Debate over the revised amendment's fate continued after that, with a number of other senators entering into the discussion.

Matzke answered a variety of questions from other senators and explained the basic aspects of the legislation.

He said that, under the proposed bill, the biological father would receive notice either through the mail or, if his address was unknown by the mother, through the publication of the proposed adoption in local newspapers.

Following the notification, the father would have five days to reply with an intention to pursue custody of the child. If a reply is not received

within that five-day period, the father will have relinquished his parental rights.

Matzke said the time limit on parental notification was designed to protect children from fathers who sought to remove them from adoptive homes.

"We want the father to take responsibility and make his mind up before that child becomes a part of another family," Matzke said. "We want him to have his rights, but we want him to decide upon those rights before it will disrupt the life of the child."

Discussion continued over a provision that would allow the biological mother to take her child back if the father were to attempt to obtain custody.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha rose in opposition to that provision, saying it worked against the rights of the biological father.

Keeping the father as far away from the child as possible was the primary intention of such laws, Chambers said. He said such methods forced children in and out of temporary homes, serving only to make sure the child was adopted rather than given to the natural parents.

"I see this as a stratagem to help those agencies and to keep this ball bouncing," he said.

Referring to both private and religious adoption agencies as "baby

peddlers," Chambers attacked both the financial aspects of adoption and the attitudes of his fellow legislators.

"In their campaigns, everyone talks about family values and the strength of the family unit," he said, "But I don't see concern for the child in any of these discussions."

Chambers also introduced an amendment that would give a biological mother who has signed an agreement to relinquish her child 90 days to change her mind.

Under Nebraska law, relinquishment agreements are irrevocable, unless the biological mother proves she made her decision under duress.

Chambers said 90 days would give the mother opportunity to reflect on her decision.

Senators who opposed Chambers' amendment said a woman had nine months to decide on adoption. Lengthening the decision-making period would only add to the mother's anxiety and would not affect her decision, they said.

Sen. David Bernard-Stevens of North Platte tried to compromise by offering an amendment to change the time period allowed from 90 days to 14, but the amendment failed.

No action was taken on Chambers' amendment.

Staff Reporter John Fulwider contributed to this report.

NU provost withdraws from presidency race

From The Associated Press

The University of Nebraska executive vice president and provost withdrew Tuesday from consideration for the presidency of Bowling Green State University, a university spokesman said.

Joe Rowson, NU spokesman, said provost Lee B. Jones, one of two finalists, did not give a reason for his decision to withdraw.

The other finalist for the post was Sidney Ribeau, vice president for academic affairs at California State Polytechnic University.

Current Bowling Green President Paul Olscamp will step down at the end of June.

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