

Drunken driving bill advances

By Ted Taylor
Senior Reporter

The Legislature's Transportation Committee advanced a bill Tuesday to keep drunken drivers from slipping through legal loopholes.



Law enforcement officials, activists and state officials were on hand to testify in favor of LB939, which would make it a criminal offense for drivers to refuse to take a breath, urine or blood test.

The bill would also shorten the advisement that law enforcement officers are required to read before drivers are given a blood-alcohol test.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Doug Kristensen of Minden, was prioritized Tuesday by Sen. LaVon Crosby of Lincoln.

Mike Hybl, the Transportation

Committee's legal counsel, said the bill would make law enforcement officials' jobs easier by shortening the advisement they must first read.

"Right now it is very broad and very vague," he said. "We are taking it out of the broad outline of consequences and putting it into specific language."

Kristensen proposed that the advisement be read to individuals when they apply for drivers' licenses, as well as at the time of arrest.

Diane Riibe, the public policy liaison for Nebraska Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, agreed, saying too many cases were lost due to unnecessary complications in the current law.

"By adding the advisement language to the application for an operator's license," she said, "we can bring a simple, yet fair approach to giving that information to anyone who would drink and drive."

Riibe also called LB939 "a sound and needed attempt to clean up the state's drunken driving laws."

The current law requires officials

"These people are intoxicated. They can't even perform a nine-step walk."

SGT. JEFF ELLIOT
Fremont Police

to read a lengthy advisement before a driver undergoes a blood-alcohol test at the time of arrest.

State law enforcement agencies are allowed to use advisement forms they feel are sufficient with the law — some as long as five pages.

Fremont Police Sgt. Jeff Elliot told the committee that even a two-page advisement was too long and difficult to understand.

"These people are intoxicated," he said. "They can't even perform a nine-step walk."

"They wouldn't be able to understand it even if they were sober," he said.

Relief measures

As public hearings on property tax relief measures are set to start in the Nebraska Legislature, three citizen petitions are waiting for Nebraska voters — and driving legislators to act on property tax relief.

Senators began hashing out some of the bigger issues in what many called the key issue of the session Tuesday.

Several initiatives from senators and the governor are expected, but for now, the three petitions are the only finished documents.

They are:

● The Citizens Amendment to Reduce Property Taxes. Organized by the Nebraska State Education

Association and the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, the amendment would limit property tax levies and result in an estimated \$400 million reduction in property tax revenue.

● The Property Tax Relief Amendment. Organized by Stan Dobrovoly, an Atkinson rancher, the amendment would eliminate property taxes altogether and result in a \$1.4 billion reduction in property tax revenue.

● The Nebraskans For Tax Relief Amendment. Organized by Ed Jaksha of Omaha and Paul Nelson of O'Neill, the amendment would cap local spending and tax levies and result in an \$800 million reduction in property tax revenue.

encouraging school mergers.

● Phased in levy caps that would still allow for effective law enforcement, prosecution and defense, corrections and health care, while capping levies at no more than \$2 for every \$100 valuation.

● Left general tax increases as a last resort for covering property tax relief revenue loss.

Sen. Doug Kristensen of Minden said the Legislature had three choices when it came to dealing with the goal of a \$400 million property tax reduction: raise state income and sales taxes, expand both of those tax bases or drastically reduce spending.

Those three options, Kristensen said, would leave the Legislature with raising taxes, cutting government ser-

vices and taking away some local control as its remaining options.

Kristensen said to senators that if property taxes were as big an issue as they thought, they would have to do one or all of the three. If they were not prepared to do that, he said they were not serious about property tax relief.

Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln tried to amend the resolution twice, but he failed on the first try and withdrew the second amendment.

The Beutler amendments would have made the phasing-in of levy caps a 10-year process, set reductions at 5 cents per year and required the revenue and appropriations committees to report yearly progress on property tax relief.

Tax

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intended it to promote general discussion on a complicated issue.

Debate was too broad for some.

Sen. David Bernard-Stevens of North Platte called the debate on the resolution a "love feast" and said if legislators were going to do something about property taxes, they should get started.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, who said he ignored Tuesday's debate for a reason, said the resolution was "one of the worst uses of legislative time" he had seen.

Property taxes are local taxes based on valuations of personal property. They are used to pay for local and county government, such as county courts, school districts and law enforcement.

The property tax issue has been at the forefront of the Legislature for decades, but it has heated up recently with the advent of several citizen petitions that would restrict or repeal property taxes entirely.

Tuesday's resolution said it was the goal of the Legislature to pass legislation this session that did the following:

● Restructured public services and the financing of those services through levy caps, consolidation of services, equalization aid and fiscal responsibility.

● Promoted greater cooperation among political subdivisions, such as

On-line

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sions in a timely manner," she said. "In the past they had to rely on mail to get information."

And, Valenziano said, after waiting for the proper information, constituents could find they were too late to participate in the legislative process.

Although Valenziano has not yet received feedback on the service, she said site users would be able to send e-mail to senators via the web site within the next couple of days.

Sen. Kate Wittek of Omaha said she was thrilled with the web site, and she wanted to see it expanded.

"I would like to see complete access — minute-by-minute so people can see the politics that go on here."

She said the web site would make senators' jobs easier and would do nothing but positive things for both her and her constituents.

"Knowledge is what you need to be informed," she said. "The more access you have to the information, the better decisions you'll make."



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