

Speed limit bills discussed

Committee focuses on issue of safety

By Ted Taylor
Senior Reporter

Citizens of Nebraska, fasten your seat belts—the speed limit debate has officially begun.

Legislature '96



For more than two hours Tuesday afternoon, the Legislature's Transportation Committee heard testimony on two bills that would increase Nebraska's speed limits on rural interstates and highways.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha was first off the line when he told the committee that he believed Nebraska motorists already had made their opinions known — on the roads.

"The real poll is on the interstate," he said, "and it's applied with the foot they put on the pedal."

Chambers' proposal, LB901, would raise the speed limit on rural interstates from 65 mph to 75 mph — a speed he said was not unsafe.

"I'm not a race car driver on the highway," he said. "Speed alone does not constitute careless driving. There should be a hazard or danger associated with it."

The committee held a dual hearing Tuesday — combining testimony on Chambers' proposal with a hearing on a bill that would raise the speed limit on the state's rural two- and four-lane highways.

Beatrice Sen. Dave Maurstad's bill, LB920, would raise the two-lane speed limits to 60 mph and the limit on four-

"The real poll is on the interstate, and it's applied with the foot they put on the pedal."

SEN. ERNIE CHAMBERS

Omaha

lane highways to 65.

"I feel it's important during discussion of whether or not Nebraska ought to change the speed limit," he said, "we look at rural highways."

Maurstad said there was no question that all of the senators were concerned with safety, and after the 16th birthday of his son, Derek — no one was more concerned than himself.

"You realize what it means to be a parent," he said, "when someone you love is going to be out on those highways."

But Maurstad said because of great strides in the state's drunken driving laws, "we have safer highways today."

Opponents of the bill said safety would be jeopardized if the speed limit were increased.

Laurie Klosterboer, executive director of the Nebraska Safety Council, said convenience shouldn't outweigh safety.

"Just because people want to go faster isn't enough of a reason to sacrifice safety," she said.

Klosterboer said the safety council was urging the Legislature to hold off and wait for more information on the

matter.

"We want the Legislature to do some additional studies — and do what's best for Nebraskans so we don't have the fatalities and injuries."

Bud Cuca of the Nebraska Motor Carriers Association testified against both bills Tuesday and assured senators that his association was taking the issue very seriously.

"I was surprised by the unanimity of their decision," he said.

But Cuca said there needed to be a balance of convenience and safety.

"All I hear is it will get them there a little faster," he said. "Ask yourself, 'Is it worth getting to Omaha four minutes faster? Is it worth getting to Colorado a half hour faster?'"

That was testimony Sen. George Coordson of Hebron found to be a little hypocritical.

"It's my observation that the members of your organization are telling you one thing and doing another," he said.

Coordson said if truckers weren't speeding, they were "at least keeping time with the faster drivers."

Cuca responded by saying he believed most commercial trucks were compliant with the law.

Proponents of both bills said changing the speed limit wouldn't be much of a change at all.

"The speed limit might as well be 75," said Marty Miller, a Lincoln ambulance services director.

"It's time to change the speed limit," he said.

Paul Larsen of Fremont said the current speed limit was frustrating.

"Fifty-five miles per hour just about puts me to sleep."

UNL to prepare itself for accreditation visit

Preparations are in the works for UNL's review by North Central Accreditation next year.

Every 10 years, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln must be reviewed and accredited by NCA, said Al Kilgore, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Gaining accreditation lends validity to degrees given out by a university. The NCA is the largest of six accreditation agencies in the United States.

To prepare for the accreditation, Kilgore said, a steering committee of faculty, staff and students has been created to evaluate UNL's progress since the last review.

"This lets us take a look internally at ourselves to make sure we're doing what we say we are," Kilgore said.

Eight writing teams — also made up of faculty, staff and students —

make evaluations and report to the steering committee.

The committees will do a self-study of UNL this semester, he said, and this preliminary evaluation will be complete by December.

Although the NCA team will not arrive until April 1997, Kilgore said, getting a head start is important.

"The self-study we're doing now is the most important part," he said. "It's sort of a checkpoint for us and part of our responsibility will be to make recommendations on what should happen in the next 10 years."

Kilgore said that after the year of preparation, NCA's visit should go smoothly.

"We're a very strong, well-established university that will continue to be accredited."

— Julie Sobczyk

Custer county keeps number 4

They're dancing in the streets of Custer County.

The Legislature's Transportation Committee killed a bill Tuesday that would have changed the county's license plate number designation from 4 to 59.

"We're scared of Custer County," Sen. Leland Klein of Battle Creek jokingly said after the decision.

Sen. Eric Will of Omaha instigated the controversy earlier this session when he proposed LB953.

And after receiving letters and phone calls, he quickly learned the number 4 was much more than a designation to the small central Nebraska

community.

George Rhodes of Westerville waited patiently through two hours of hearings to testify on behalf of Custer County.

"The number 4 has become a name for us," he said.

Rhodes then displayed a full two-page advertisement from the Custer County Chief that read: "We're Number 4 and Proud of It!"

"I'm sure if the federal government came in and wanted to change around all your name tags, you'd be upset."

— Ted Taylor

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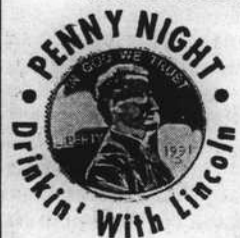
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