



### Winter lover

NU women's golfer Hanne Nyquist is a big fan of snow and golf. For Nyquist, the two have been a perfect fit this season. **PAGE 10**



### Get happy

Bobby McFerrin, the one-man vocal band who sang "Don't Worry, Be Happy," performs tonight at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. **PAGE 12**

April 17, 1997

### A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Sunny, breezy, high 65. Clear tonight, low 43.

# Daily Nebraskan

VOL. 96

COVERING THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN SINCE 1901

NO. 140



## Tobacco companies may snuff icons

NEW YORK (AP) — Abandoning their all-out defense of cigarettes, the nation's two biggest tobacco companies now seem willing to cut their legal losses for up to \$300 billion and retire Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man if the government backs off its threat to regulate nicotine.

RJR Nabisco and Philip Morris are in early talks with the attorneys general of eight states in hopes of winning blanket protection from lawsuits over smoking-related health problems.

In return, the cigarette companies would pay hundreds of billions of dollars and agree to cut back on ads, especially ones like Joe Camel that appeal to children and those that depict people, such as the Marlboro Man.

The cigarette companies' willingness to even consider such concessions marks a startling turnaround. For decades, the tobacco industry has fought a no-retreat battle on all fronts.

In the past few years, however, the industry has been barraged with lawsuits filed by 22 states

### Decision could seal fate of Marlboro Man, Joe Camel

and countless individuals, and the litigation is hurting stock prices and taking management's attention away from the business of selling cigarettes.

"I think the tobacco industry is in big trouble and they know it, so they are finally beginning to come to the table," Minnesota Attorney General Hubert H. Humphrey III said. "I think their proposals still fall short of what we'd be interested in."

A sticking point is whether the Food and Drug Administration would get the right to regulate the nicotine levels in cigarettes to make them less addictive.

The tobacco companies adamantly oppose such regulation for fear that once the FDA gets the power to regulate tobacco, it will try to ban it.

News of the talks, first reported Wednesday by The Wall Street Journal, sent cigarette company stocks up 10 percent, reflecting investor hopes that an industrywide settlement of tobacco lawsuits would lift a cloud hanging over companies.

Industry analysts have said that tobacco companies, which had revenue of about \$45 billion last year, could finance a big settlement simply by raising cigarette prices.

"A resolution of this issue is important to our shareholders, our customers and our country," RJR Nabisco Chairman Steven Goldstone said at a stockholder meeting Wednesday in Winston-Salem, N.C. "But it has to be fair and it has to be reasonable."

The amount of a settlement also is among the sticking points.

"The industry is in the low twos and the plaintiffs are in the upper threes. There is no consensus on the money," said an anonymous source close to the negotiations.

Also under discussion is the establishment of a fund from which smokers could seek payments. They would be banned from suing the cigarette companies.

Protection from lawsuits would require an act of Congress, and that's another one of the unresolved issues that is said could still sink the

Please see **TOBACCO** on 2

### Break from the law



LOBBYIST BILL WYLIE, left, talks with attorney Ted Frazier outside the legislative chamber Wednesday afternoon. Wylie was a state senator from 1965-1969. **MATT MILLER/DN**

## Senators to receive online presentation on education finance

BY BRIAN CARLSON  
Staff Reporter

Supporters of increased federal funding for higher education will seek to gain the attention of U.S. senators in an online presentation Thursday at the Capitol.

An Internet petition signed by thousands of financial aid supporters demanding increased federal funding will be presented to senators by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Rock the Vote, and the U.S. Students Association.

Several Democratic senators, including Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, Sen. Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts and Sen. Barbara Boxer of California will attend.

The petition effort, sponsored by the Democratic Technology & Communications Committee (DTTC), promotes Democratic plans for easing financial burdens for college students. Current initiatives call for increased Pell Grants, tax deductions for low- and middle-income families and lower fees and interest rates for student loans.

Jim Papa, DTTC press secretary, said the Internet petition plays to students' political strengths.

"Students are known for not having as much influence as the numbers indicate they should," he said. "But one of the advantages students have is web savvy."

Currently, students are often prevented from attending the colleges of their choice or face years of debt because of rising college costs, Papa said.

He said greater access to higher education would be essential for maintaining the United States' status as an economic world power.

Although federal budget constraints are a concern, higher education deserves special consideration by Congress this year, Papa said.

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"It's a matter of whether or not we're going to make higher education a priority."

JIM PAPA  
DTTC press secretary

we're going to make higher education a priority," he said.

Press officials for Daschle said they were hopeful that Democratic proposals for easing college students' financial burden would be passed into law. However, they also said Republicans had shown little inclination toward supporting their proposals.

Deb Fiddelke, press secretary for Nebraska's Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel, said Hagel's office had not been contacted with regard to the petition drive.

She said Hagel would support Republican efforts to make college more affordable. Those efforts include the Safe and Affordable School Act, which would provide \$7 billion in tax relief over the next seven years for parents faced with college expenses.

An Internet home page for the petition drive was recently constructed and can be accessed at <[www.pirg.org/student/aid/petition](http://www.pirg.org/student/aid/petition)>. The site includes the petition, which can be sent via e-mail.

Organizers said everyone affected by college costs is welcome to sign the petition, which concludes, "A college education is the best investment in America's future. Support student aid and stop the doors of college from closing on America's future."

## Nelson: Spring floods no reason for panic

BY ERIN SCHULTE  
Senior Reporter

While the drip, drip of melting snow may be music to frostbitten ears, it might sound like money gurgling down the drain for Nebraska farmers.

Gov. Ben Nelson said Wednesday that parts of Nebraska should brace for spring flooding, but not panic.

"There is a fine line between being prepared and the state crying wolf and scaring people unnecessarily," he said.

Snow melting from western mountains and the plains is flooding low-lying areas around Rulo, where some farmers have decided not to plant their crops, Nelson

said. Near Rulo, the Missouri River is already a few feet above flood level.

Another problem, Nelson said, is that reservoirs are already full. During the 1993 floods, Nebraska escaped potential flood damage because the rains came after years of drought. Now, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has to release water from the reservoirs to make room for spring flooding, Nelson said.

Cooler temperatures and more precipitation is predicted for this spring and summer, which also adds to the problem, he said.

Other areas expected to be hit hard are towns around the Niobrara River, he said. Two years ago, roads around the Niobrara had to be raised to avoid

floodwaters, or residents would have had to travel 100 miles for basic services.

"We're going to meet with local officials and tell them what to expect," Nelson said.

One bright spot is Nebraska's excellent flood control, he said, which consists of six dams along the Missouri River. The dams, which cost about \$1.2 billion to build, have saved the state billions in past years, and will save more in the future.

"Through last year's flooding, it prevented \$10.5 billion in damage and untold grief along the way," Nelson said. "Without it, Eppley (Airfield) would be underwater."