

Bonds considered for renovation

Nelson supports building improvements idea

BY BRAD DAVIS
Senior Reporter

Gov. Ben Nelson pledged his "wholehearted" support Friday to a state legislative proposal that would renovate or replace 14 buildings in the NU system.

If passed, the proposal would eliminate the University of Nebraska's maintenance backlog by 2015, including five buildings at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. Dan Lynch of Omaha, would allow the university to issue about \$79.5 million in bonds designated for deferred maintenance. The university and state each would repay half the bonds' cost.

NU will pay off its share of the bonds — about \$5.9 million per year — through a 1.5 percent tuition increase that began in 1997.

The state will match NU's funds, up to \$5.9 million per year, if the bill passes in the Legislature.

NU President Dennis Smith said the time to issue these bonds was now because of the low, 4.8 percent interest rate available to tax-exempt institutions. Therefore, the net cost of the bonds would be close to zero.

Because construction and renovation costs rise approximately 4 to 5

percent per year, issuing bonds one after another would be too costly.

"If we start tomorrow, and take 10 years to finish (on a pay-as-you-go basis) it will be a lot more," Smith said.

Smith presented a chart showing the university also will save money by issuing bonds, because university cash reserves could earn 6 percent interest. Therefore, it is less expensive to issue the bonds charging only 4.8 percent than to pay for each renovation project as it is completed.

Buildings included in the NU maintenance package at UNL include Love Library, Hamilton Hall and Avery Hall on City Campus, and the Snyder building at a university extension in North Platte.

The plan also recommends the replacement of several buildings, including the Biochemistry and Natural Resources building on East Campus along with Lyman and Bancroft halls on City Campus.

Richards Hall is being renovated by state funds from a separate bill, LB386, which the Legislature approved last year.

LB386 provides NU with \$5.9 million for the fiscal years 1998 and 1999.

The newly proposed legislation also provides the state college system with between \$7 million and \$8 million in deferred maintenance funds, to be repaid with \$400,000 per year in

state funds and \$400,000 from the state colleges.

Lynch said the state had been, "at best, irresponsible" for leaving some maintenance without funding for the past 30 years.

Smith said the university has been deferring about \$6.13 million worth of maintenance each year.

He said NU now has about \$108 million in deferred maintenance.

To ensure NU does not accumulate a backlog of deferred maintenance in the future, Smith said the university would increase funding directed to maintenance by \$1 million each year for the next 10 years.

He said maintenance funding ultimately would equal 1.5 percent of each building's worth per year, which is construction experts' general recommendation for annual maintenance on most buildings.

"This is a good business way to deal with this problem," Nelson said. "It's not unique to Nebraska or higher education; it's sometimes the last thing that's funded."

"It's a lot more exciting to build new buildings and expand programs," Lynch agreed.

"Without this kind of project, we're never going to catch up," Lynch said.

"And for generations to come, it would continue to be chaos with maintenance."

New speaker of Legislature takes over helm mid-term

BY BRIAN CARLSON
Senior Reporter

The newly elected speaker of the Nebraska Legislature said he expected a smooth transition for the body this year despite the loss of a half-century of experience among its members heading into the 1998 session.

Sen. Doug Kristensen of Minden, who was elected speaker Wednesday, said he would emphasize faith in the institution and its processes as the Legislature adjusts to changes in its makeup.

Kristensen defeated Sen. Dave Landis of Lincoln by a vote of 26-21. He replaces Sen. Ron Withem, who resigned in November to become a lobbyist for the University of Nebraska.

With the resignation of Withem and the April death of longtime Sen. Jerome Warner, the Legislature has lost 50 years of experience since last year.

But Kristensen said that by ensuring fairness, fostering spirited debate and maintaining independence from lobbying interests, the Legislature can continue to work for the state's best interests.

Kristensen said he would work to keep all senators involved and informed, and spend much of his time meeting with individual senators in their offices. The goal, he said, is not to pass every bill 49-0 but to ensure that debate is thorough and balanced on the most important issues.

"The speaker needs to be able to fashion an agenda so that every bill at least gets a chance to be heard," he said.

Kristensen said it was too early to speculate on which bills would be prioritized during the spring's short session. Taxes and spending, as always, are "bread and butter issues," but other concerns such as petition-drive regulations also will be debated, he said.

Last Wednesday senators began their shortened, 60-day second session of the 95th Nebraska Legislature.

"The speaker's race has come and gone, and we get on with other business."

DAVE LANDIS
senator

They will have until mid-April to discuss the 500 bills left from last session and close to 300 more that are expected to be introduced in the next few days.

By the end of January it probably will be much more clear which bills will receive priority, he said.

Kristensen acknowledged it was difficult to jump into the role of speaker in the middle of a legislative term, but said he is ready for "the sprint to the finish."

Landis said he was disappointed by the results of Wednesday morning's vote, but by afternoon he said he was ready to move on to other business.

The speaker influences the session by setting the body's schedule for debate, but by himself doesn't make or break a legislative session, said Landis, the Legislature's second-longest-serving senator.

In his remarks on the floor before Wednesday's election, Landis said if members could discern the speaker's ideology by the way he or she carries out the role of speaker, then the speaker is doing the job incorrectly.

An effective speaker, Landis said, upholds the rules and procedures of the Legislature without bowing to the interests of the lobby.

"The sun will rise tomorrow," he said. "The speaker's race has come and gone, and we get on with other business."

"The institution survives and prospers."

ASUN focuses on King holiday, diversity education for semester

BY JESSICA FARGEN
Assignment Reporter

ASUN leaders hope to pick up where they left off last semester with diversity education.

Last semester, ASUN leaders hoped to promote diversity at UNL and interact more with student organizations on campus.

This semester, the Association of Students for the University of Nebraska will be working with minority groups on campus to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Jan. 19, ASUN leaders said.

Viet Hoang, speaker of the senate, said the first order of business for ASUN was to make the King holiday a success by sponsoring events with groups such as the Mexican American Student Association, Afrikan People's Union and the Women's Studies Association.

Throughout the day, speakers, booths in the Nebraska Union and a broadcast on KRNU-FM (90.3) of King's "I Have a Dream" speech will make it hard for students to miss the spirit of the holiday.

Curt Ruwe, ASUN president, said he hoped the holiday would be a day of "union with a lot of activities and coordinating."

Malcolm Kass, 2nd vice president, said, "We don't only want it to occur, but we want it to be a success."

Ruwe said he planned on meeting with Kass and 1st Vice President Amy Rager early this week to assess all their goals and plan changes for this semester.

"As far as the goals list, we'll look at what we've accomplished and what needs to be changed," Ruwe said.

Hoang said he would focus right away on recruiting students to fill the vacant senate seats in the College of Law, the College of Dentistry and the Division of Continuing Studies. Hoang said the sexual orientation subcommittee also had openings.

Senators attending various student organization meetings would announce the vacancies at the meetings to reach as many students as possible.

"Personally, I think increased interaction with the student body has been our bright star."

MALCOLM KASS
ASUN 2nd vice president

Ruwe, Kass and Rager said they all had projects they would at least like to see started during their terms.

Ruwe said he'd like to see additional student evaluations of teachers, such as a separate list of five or six questions that would be the same for all departments, allowing for more accurate comparisons.

"As it is now, you can't compare cross departments because evaluation questions are not the same for English as they are for biology," Ruwe said. "I'd like to see more people see how the classes stacked up against each other."

Another concern that ASUN faces every year is student fee increases, Ruwe said, and with the renovations to the Nebraska Union, student fees could be affected.

"There is always a potential for student fee increases, but I'm not making any predictions yet," Ruwe said.

Ruwe also wanted to change the nomination process for the Outstanding Teacher Award, which students vote for in the ASUN general election.

He wanted a more "realistic" approach to selecting the candidates that would let teachers of smaller classes be recognized.

Kass said he had ideas for using online technology for ASUN election voting online and class registration that he wants to research, but he would not have time to implement during his term.

Kass has been working with the technology committee to come up with an easier and more convenient way for UNL students to register for classes on the World Wide Web — something University of Nebraska at Omaha students have been doing for a

few years. But Kass said his "pet project" has been researching the possibility of UNL students being able to vote in the ASUN elections via e-mail.

The University of Missouri has had increased voter turnout since it began e-mail voting.

Rager said she wanted to see the historically low ASUN voter turnouts increased, but she would focus on talking with visiting student government organizations and making ASUN more visible this semester.

Rager said last semester ASUN was more visible than ever before on campus and made efforts to include more underclassmen and nongreek students and get feedback from other student organizations.

"Our senators have gone out and talked to more organizations than in the past and we want that to continue," Rager said.

Kass attended Residence Hall Association meetings last semester, which he said made a huge difference by opening up communication lines that did not exist before he started attending.

"Personally, I think increased interaction with the student body has been our bright star," Kass said.

Ruwe, Kass and Rager all agreed increased visibility of ASUN was their greatest accomplishment last semester and consistent with the goals that they hope to continue this semester.

Ruwe attributed increased visibility to the strong work ethic of the entire student government.

"I was really glad to see hard-working people and people not taking jobs for granted," Ruwe said.

"We were not just saying words and passing resolutions — the whole group was active."

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