

ASUN Watch

And the score is...

The following is a list of goals ASUN has set, and the progress it has made.

1. To create successful programming for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Jan. 19 as well as create a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day coordinating commission for 1998.

—Viet Hoang, speaker of the senate, said this year ASUN was sponsoring events for Monday afternoon in the Nebraska Union that would include student groups such as the Mexican American Student Association, African People's Union and the Women's Studies Association. Hoang said ASUN also will be sponsoring a continual showing of the "I Have Dream" speech by the University Program Council in the Crib. This year, ASUN President Curt Ruwe said, there has been a lot of confusion about who was doing what for the holiday. Ruwe said next year he wanted one commission, possibly consisting of faculty, administrators, student organization leaders and ASUN members to coordinate all events for the holiday.

2. Research and work toward the implementation of midterm and standard academic evaluations in addition to the existing departmental evaluations.

—Ruwe said ASUN started work last semester on new evaluations and several Academic Senate members have been "very receptive" to the idea and are continuing to work for it. Ruwe said, "My goal is to have an accurate comparison across departments on the effectiveness of instruction," he said.

3. Continue to work toward implementation of a parking education class.

—Ruwe said senators would continue to work with Tad McDowell, director of Parking Services, possibly to give students a chance to decrease the financial burden of parking tickets by taking a parking education class. Ruwe said the class will educate students who "just didn't know they couldn't park there."

4. Work toward Internet registration for classes.

—The increased use of the Internet has created a need for registration of classes on online, Ruwe said, which the University of Nebraska at Omaha already has. Registering for classes online is a "potentially cheaper resource," Ruwe said, by avoiding long distance phone charges.

5. Lobby for student support for a jury deferment bill.

—A jury deferment bill that would exempt students from jury duty if called to duty during the semester when they are attending classes did not pass last year in the Nebraska Legislature, Ruwe said. This year ASUN will be pushing for the bill again. The bill would let students defer their jury duty until the summer or a time when they were not taking classes. As it is, Ruwe said, a student called for jury duty during finals week may have to go to jury duty and miss a final.

6. Work toward keeping the Student Impact Team and Government Liaison Committee busy through working toward campus beautification projects.

—The Student Impact Team and Government Liaison Committee have the goal of gaining money to purchase trees on City and East campuses to replace the ones that were destroyed during 1997's winter storm.

7. Reconstruct the Outstanding educator Award.

—Ruwe said the award was set up unfairly so that teachers of smaller classes did not have the same chance at winning the award as teachers in larger, 100-level classes. In the two years that the award has existed, Paul Keller, associate professor of chemistry, has won the award, Ruwe said.

House targets 'marriage' tax

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican lawmakers pressed President Clinton Wednesday to join them in changing income tax rules that they say penalize people for being married.

In a letter signed by 123 House members, including Speaker Newt Gingrich, lawmakers asked Clinton to use his State of the Union address later this month to endorse their proposal to eliminate the so-called marriage tax penalty.

"It's immoral that our tax code punishes our most basic institution," said Rep. Jerry Weller, R-Ill., chief sponsor of the legislation along with Rep. David McIntosh, R-Ind.

Weller and McIntosh said 42 percent of all Americans, 21 million married couples, pay higher taxes than if they were single because filing joint returns pushes them into a higher tax bracket.

For example, a couple jointly making \$60,000 a year, putting them in the 28 percent tax bracket, would have to pay nearly \$1,400 more in taxes than if they were single and each paid taxes on incomes of \$30,000, which is in the 15 percent bracket.

The two lawmakers, who introduced their legislation last September, said they now have 232 co-sponsors, including about a dozen Democrats.

They said their bill, which would give married couples the option of filing separately if that meant a smaller tax burden, would cost the government \$18 billion in revenues a year, and could be paid for with the budget surpluses expected in the coming years.

Similar legislation has also been offered in the Senate, including a proposal by Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., that would allow married couples to split their tax burden.

Clinton last month said he was opposed in principle to the "marriage penalty," but added that there are "a lot of tax cuts that might be desirable, but how would you pay for them?"

Christensen makes tax bill priority

■ The Nebraska representative joins his peers in aiming to remove the penalty.

OMAHA (AP) — Rep. Jon Christensen, R-Neb., is making the elimination of the so-called marriage tax penalty a priority for this session of Congress.

Could that have anything to do with the fact that Christensen plans to marry former Miss America Tara Dawn Holland in late November or early December of this year?

No, according to his administrative assistant, Lori Wall, who said Christensen has been interested in the issue for almost two years.

In a letter signed by 123 Republican House members, including Christensen and Speaker Newt Gingrich, lawmakers on Tuesday asked President Clinton to use his State of the Union address later this month to endorse their proposal to eliminate the penalty.

Christensen, 34, divorced his first wife in 1996. Ms. Holland, 24, is the former Miss Kansas and has been regularly with him on the gubernatorial candidate's campaign stops in Nebraska.

Clinton prepares for deposition

WASHINGTON (AP) — Loath to see Paula Jones tread on White House grounds, President Clinton's legal team has moved his weekend deposition even as the president says it is "probably" inevitable that he will stand trial on a sexual harassment accusation.

Clinton is expected to give a sworn deposition in the civil suit on Saturday at the downtown Washington firm of his attorney, Robert Bennett. Mike McCurry, White House press secretary, said Wednesday that Clinton had a mid-morning appointment on Saturday and all but confirmed that he will be at the law offices near the White House.

The president's testimony was originally expected to be taken at the executive mansion.

After the date was disclosed last week — and a spokeswoman announced that Jones would exercise her right to attend — the Clinton camp moved to change the venue to deny news cameras the chance to photograph Jones at the White House, two sources confirmed Tuesday.

Given a court-ordered ban on any discussion of depositions given in the case, sources spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Clinton, meanwhile, made rare comments on the case in an Oval Office interview Tuesday. He was asked by U.S. News & World Report whether it seemed inevitable that the lawsuit would go to trial on May 27, when jury selection is set to begin.

"Probably," Clinton replied with what reporters described as a resigned smile and slow shake of his head. "You know, I let my other people talk for me on that because I just try to put it over in a little box and go on and do my work."

Clinton rarely speaks publicly of the case and has been known to snap at reporters who question him about it. With Jones' settlement demands reaching as high as \$3 million, negotiations for an out-of-court resolution have stalled. The evidence-gathering portion of the case is to end by Jan. 30.

PSAT scores show smaller gender gap

WASHINGTON (AP) — The gap between boys and girls on a qualifying test for national scholarships has narrowed with the addition of a writing segment on which girls did better.

Changes in results on the Preliminary SAT, released Wednesday, mean more girls will have a shot at more than \$25 million in National Merit Scholarships when the girls graduate from high school next year. However, critics say the test is still biased and a reliance on it continues to exclude too many girls who outperform boys in school.

The College Board added the writing skills section to the October 1997 PSAT, taken by 1.2 million high schoolers, mostly juniors. The addition followed a gender bias complaint to the Department of Education by the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, a Cambridge, Mass., group that opposes reliance on standardized tests to determine scholarships and admissions.

"Test scores simply do not measure merit," said Bob Schaeffer, director of the group known as FairTest.

The group says the PSAT, with its reliance on multiple-choice questions, favors a test-taking style in which boys do better because they are more apt to risk a guess after narrowing down the possible answers.

The test, also used for guidance and to prepare for the SAT, still measures math and verbal reasoning. Girls did better than in previous years on the verbal part of the PSAT but dropped slightly in the math portion. They lagged behind boys in both sections, but not as much as in the past. Girls outdid boys in the writing part, which tests grammar, usage, sentence and paragraph structure and the ability to revise.

The College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corp. says the bias lies not in the tests but in external factors such as the pool of test-takers, course selection and disparate treatment of boys and girls in the same classroom. With more girls taking challenging courses, especially in

math and science, the gap is bound to narrow, the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corp. said.

Fifty-six percent of the National Merit Scholars last year were boys, compared with an average of 61 percent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, according to figures in a recent annual report. For four years this decade, the Evanston, Ill.-based organization declined to release numbers on the ground that they were not relevant, said spokeswoman Elaine Detweiler.

"The gap is smaller, and we think that it coincides with the better academic preparation of girls," she said.

Some 15,000 of the October 1997 test takers will become semifinalists, due to their PSAT scores. One-half of those will get scholarships as seniors based on a range of criteria, with scholarship amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$40,000.

Schaeffer, the FairTest director, said the new test and revised weighting formula mean the score gap was narrowed in just one year by 40 percent.

However, it will be later this year before anyone knows how many more girls will become scholarship semifinalists based on test scores. The semifinalists will be chosen from among the top scores in each state.

The scores, on a scale of 20 to 80:

■ The national average score on the PSAT was 48.7 in verbal, 49 in math and 49.4 in writing skills. Verbal was up 0.5 points and math down 0.2.

■ Boys averaged 48.9 in verbal, up 0.3. They scored 50.9 in math, unchanged, and 49 in writing.

■ Girls averaged 48.7 in verbal, up 0.8, but their score of 47.6 in math was down 0.2. Their written score was 49.8.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, boys scored about a point higher in verbal and three to four points higher in math.

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