

Test center funding debated

By TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Legislature

State investment in an electronics testing center at the University of Nebraska Technology Park would open the door to long-term economic development, businessmen and administrators said during the Appropriations Committee hearing Thursday.

Five speakers testified in favor of LB1173, a bill sponsored by Lincoln Sen. Ron Raikes, which would give \$5 million to Southeast Community College to build the center and buy high-tech equipment.

Jack Huck, president of Southeast Community College, said the center would be a catalyst for growth in

Nebraska.

"This is an opportunity for a strong economic development model that may have spinoffs in other industries," he said.

In addition, he said, overseeing the construction and maintenance of the site would fit within the role and mission of SCC by providing hands-on experience for students and employees in electronics field.

The community college would own the center, which would be located in northwest Lincoln's Tech Park.

Joel Young, vice president of engineering and marketing for Transcrypt International, located in Tech Park,

said his company would save more than \$100,000 a year in testing expenses by using the facility.

The center would not only attract revenue from electronics businesses in other states, he said, but workers from other states would have more incentive to relocate to Nebraska.

He said private businesses had discussed the possibility of funding a center on their own, but the project would be more productive with the involvement of public and private sectors.

"The educational aspects and the cooperation of our community college, the university and private industry working together are a critical catalyst for helping to attract qualified workers to the state," he said.

The committee took no action on the bill.

Sex offenders' post-prison fates argued

By BRIAN CARLSON
Senior Reporter

Legislature

When probable repeat sex offenders finish their prison sentences, they should serve time in mental institutions rather than threaten the public, supporters of LB1096 argued Thursday.

The bill, presented in a hearing of the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee, would require sex offenders to be examined by mental health professionals before being released.

If the offender was found to be mentally ill or to have a mental abnormality making repeated offenses likely, the offender could face civil commitment and mental health treatment in a mental health facility.

Mental health professionals, however, said their industry is not equipped to protect the public from sex offenders when the criminal justice system fails to do so.

Nebraska Attorney General Don Stenberg said the proposal was in response to a Supreme Court ruling last year upholding a similar statute in Kansas.

"With respect to sexually violent offenders, Nebraska citizens deserve

much more protection," he said. "Only when these extremely dangerous predators are confined where they do not have access to potential victims will Nebraska citizens enjoy the measure of safety that the law can and should provide."

Stenberg said LB1096 would complement related pieces of legislation being considered in 1998.

LB323 would increase punishments for repeat sexual offenders; LB204, known as "Megan's Law," would provide for public notification when sex offenders are released.

But opponents objected to LB1096, saying it was an attempt to dump the failures of the criminal justice system into the lap of the state's mental health system.

J. Rock Johnson of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill said the bill recklessly equated mental abnormalities with true mental illness.

The bill could also divert mental health facilities' funding from needy patients, she said.

Invoking William Jennings Bryan, Johnson said, "We will not be crucified on a cross of punishment and incarceration."

Terry Davis, a psychiatrist representing the Nebraska Psychiatric Association, said the mingling of mental health patients and sex offenders would pose a threat to patients' safety.

Davis also questioned the effectiveness of mental health treatment for sex offenders, saying results had been mixed.

Davis said he thought the bill's true purpose is not to rehabilitate sex offenders but to quarantine them from the public — a task better suited for the criminal justice system.

Eric Evans, deputy director of Nebraska Advocacy Services, said the bill stigmatized mental health patients by wrongly equating mental illness with violent behavior.

"This does extreme injustice to people who are mentally ill and their families by codifying this stigma in state statute," he said.

But Sen. Kate Witek, Health and Human Services Committee member and bill co-sponsor, said the proposal arose out of public dissatisfaction with the handling of released sex offenders.

After a failure to secure increased sentences for sex offenders, Witek said, bill drafters resorted to the civil commitment option.

"It's more of a frustration than anything else causing people to turn to that area."

Student fees may rise to pay for union

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dent, said, "If you want to stop cigarette sales, you have a right to do it, but don't ask students to pay for it."

But Swanson said it was contradictory for university entities, such as the University Health Center and Campus Recreation Center to promote wellness, but sell tobacco at the union.

If tobacco sales continued, a 7.4 percent increase would be requested.

If \$35,500 from a National Bank of Commerce lease was given to the union instead of the university's general fund, the 7.4 percent could be reduced to 5.6 percent, Swanson said.

When NBC's lease ended in 1996, they bid again, which gave the union an additional \$35,500 to occupy the space again and, more importantly, provide the ATM machines, which are the two

most used ATM machines in the state.

At that time a university policy was started requiring revenues like this to be returned to the UNL general fund.

But Chancellor James Moeser allowed the union to keep this money because of the decline in revenue the union would experience during its current construction, which is scheduled to end in September.

With the completion of the new union, the NBC lease money will go back into the general fund.

If the budget passes, student fees would increase by \$24 per semester, which would be added to the \$207 per semester now paid. The Association of Students for the University of Nebraska and Moeser will have to approve the amount CFA passes Thursday.

CFA members also asked if the services their fees would pay for would be

the ones they wanted.

Much of the \$178,092 the union requested would pay for an art gallery and increased space and services of the Student Involvement office.

Kendall Swenson, chairman of CFA, asked if the art gallery would be a way to improve the university and its image, rather than reflect the real wants of students here now.

But Swanson said the union was there to "offer something for everybody." The majority may not want an art gallery, Swanson said, but a lot of services at the union now are designed to benefit the minority.

Swanson said CFA members might not be giving students enough credit.

"Don't underestimate the fact that your fellow students might head for the food court one day and sneak into the gallery."

World Spotlight

China, France oppose strike to end Iraq crisis

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — Diplomatic attempts to solve the Iraq crisis picked up speed Thursday, while China and France registered strong new opposition to an American military strike. Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared that "we shall not allow" an American attack.

Diplomats from Russia, France, Turkey and the Arab League — as well as an envoy of PLO leader Yasser Arafat — pressed Iraq to compromise on U.N. demands to inspect "sensitive sites," including President Saddam Hussein's palaces, to head off a threatened U.S. strike.

Thus far, varying forms of compromise offers reportedly discussed have not provided a way out of the crisis. The United States and Britain, virtually alone among major powers in advocating the use of force, insist on the long-standing U.N. demand of unfettered access to all sites.

"We have stood together ... before in the face of tyranny," Prime Minister Tony Blair said after a Washington meeting with President Clinton.

"Today, in the face of the threat from Saddam Hussein, we must stand together once more. We want a diplomatic solution to the crisis, but the success or failure of diplomacy rests on Saddam. If he fails to respond, then he knows that the threat of force is there, and it is real."

Shortly before Blair's comments, the USS Independence accompanied by a submarine and four other American ships, sailed into the Persian Gulf. Another 2,000 Marines on Navy ships with infantry and combat aircraft aboard were heading toward the gulf to join 24,000 American forces.

Iraq has been sparring for weeks with the United Nations over weapons inspections. It has barred members of the U.N. Special Commission, which oversees the inspections from certain sites including Saddam's palaces, on grounds they would infringe on Iraqi sovereignty.

The Security Council has said punishing economic sanctions, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which led to the Persian Gulf War, will not be lifted until the commission certifies it has destroyed its weapons of mass destruction. Iraq claims it has done so.

Since March 1996, inspectors have visited 63 sites where they believed the Iraqis were hiding contraband. Inspectors were delayed from entering 38 of the sites and flatly denied access to 14 others in the name of national

"We must not allow a strike by force, an American strike. I told Clinton about it."

BORIS YELTSIN
Russian president

security.

Yeltsin, directing unusually critical remarks at Clinton for the second straight day, renewed warnings that U.S. bombing raids against Iraq could spark a world war.

"We must not allow a strike by force, an American strike. I told Clinton about it. No, we shall not allow that," Yeltsin said in Moscow.

It wasn't clear how Russia intends to block an American attack. Yeltsin aides ruled out Russian retaliation, and although Russia has veto power in the U.N. Security Council, the U.S. has said it doesn't require further council approval to attack Iraq.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine made clear that France will not join in any U.S.-led strike on Iraq now, telling Europe 1 radio that diplomatic means to pressure Baghdad remain. An airstrike, he said, "would not resolve the problems."

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, speaking on state-run television, also said he told Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that any military strike could make matters worse.

The Iraqi Parliament, meanwhile, held an emergency session Thursday but refrained from action, with lawmakers saying they will give diplomacy a chance to resolve the crisis.

Saddam discussed the crisis with his ruling Revolutionary Command Council, the official Iraqi News Agency said. It gave no details, other than to say he outlined the mediation efforts.

Iraq reportedly has offered to allow U.N. inspectors access to eight disputed sites for about a month — a plan that U.S. and British officials have said does not go far enough.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, trying to line up support for a strike during visits to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, said "there are some interesting proposals there, although they do not match up to our requirement of full compliance."

Penguin chicks hatched in captivity at Omaha zoo

OMAHA (AP) — King penguins rarely are hatched in captivity, so there was a lot to celebrate after a second chick arrived last weekend at the Henry Doorly Zoo.

Associate zoo director Randy Wisthoff said captive king penguins usually are hatched at specialized Sea World facilities. The Omaha zoo also hatched a king penguin last March.

The wrinkly chick began pecking through its eggshell on Jan. 30 and emerged on Sunday.

The bird, covered by a fine brown down, is small enough to fit into a pair of cupped hands. It weighed 6.8 ounces Thursday, up one half-ounce

from Tuesday.

Wisthoff said eventually, king penguins stand 30 to 36 inches tall and weigh 40 to 50 pounds. The chick will shed its baby down between 4 months and one year, replacing it with black, white and brilliant orange feathers. Its high-pitched whine will evolve into a deep-trumpeting call.

Handlers don't know the chick's gender since birds offer few outward indications. Unless there is a need to know, such as transfer to another zoo, Wisthoff said, zoo keepers let nature take its course.

"You let them figure it out," he said. "They know."

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