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Speaker: Russia is progressing

BY ERIC RINEER
Staff Reporter

Though Russia is in the midst of political and economic turmoil, the country is making remarkable progress since its breakup, a former foreign correspondent said Thursday.

Hedrick Smith, a Pulitzer Prize winner and former reporter for The New York Times, spoke at the E.N. Thompson Forum Thursday about Russia's state of affairs.

Smith, who won the 1974 Pulitzer Prize for his reporting in Moscow, said Russia is on the verge of making a major transformation within only a few generations. That pace is incredibly fast for a country to rebuild its entire political and economic systems.

Smith said it is important for Nebraskans to understand the crisis Russians are experiencing.

Though Russia is no longer a superpower, it still has a tremendous influence on world politics, Smith said. For example, Russia is the only other country in the world with great nuclear capacity.

The greatest failure for Russia to this point is the country's inability to develop political parties, Smith said. He said the absence of political movement is part of the reason for political instability.

Though Russia lacks political movement, Smith said the institutions of democracy are beginning to take place. This, he said, is an important beginning for a political transformation.

Though an empire has collapsed, there have been no real changes in Russian unemployment, he said. It also is remarkable that there have been no civil wars in Russia.

Smith also emphasized that Russia possessed the second-strongest economy in the world before the Soviet Union's breakup.

It's enormously difficult for any country to undergo a major reconstruction of its economy, he said. One of its biggest hurdles is its huge decline in foreign investment.

The turmoil in Russia has caused a separation of generations, particularly between those older and younger than 40. He said it was much harder for the elders to adjust to the radical changes now taking place. The youth had a much easier time adapting.

Though many of the Russian people have lost their economic, political and belief systems, Smith said Russians are far from being politically passive - Russia has had five national elections since 1995.

James King, a UNL associate professor of agricultural leadership and communication, attended the forum and said it's important for UNL students to learn about international affairs.

"The more we know, the better off we will be," King said. "The Russians have a great tradition in arts and literature."

Nebraska's relation to Russia is especially important, he said, because its people are experiencing a major change in their agriculture.

This, King said, includes the possibility of Nebraska exporting agricultural products, technology and expertise to Russia.

"It's important to understand what's happening to people that are hungry," King said.

Dan Inhelder, a forum attendant and senior forestry, fisheries and wildlife major, also said it is important for students to stay informed on Russia's development.

"It's essential to hear about world economies, especially as in Russia where the people are bouncing back from political change."

Union bookstore looking for buyer

BOOKSTORE from page 1

to Starbuck's, the remodeled bookstore will feature an expanded athletic wear department and a branch of the UNL computer shop, Main said.

If the bookstore was not sold, the university would have to finance any renovations itself and that could take 20 years to pay for, Main said.

Instead, whatever firm the committee selects - and administrators approve - to buy the bookstore will provide UNL with a "very handsome" sum of money to "improve things that are going to benefit students."

"They're in it to make money," Main said, "but they're going to want to contribute portions of their profits back to the university."

Main said the bookstore deal would be similar to the Pepsi Cola beverage alliance, with the company contributing to scholarships, campus improvements and programming.

The purchase would be the second new ownership in Lincoln's bookstore business - ownership of the Nebraska Book Company, which owns the Nebraska Bookstore, changed hands three months ago.

Leanna Fitch, junior French major, said if the same firm that owns the Nebraska Bookstore bought UNL's bookstore, she would be worried about prices because of a book monopoly.

Right now, Fitch said, if prices at one bookstore are too expensive, she has the option to go to another.

"That would cause a problem because there wouldn't be competition," she said.

Daryl Swanson, Nebraska Unions

director, said the university could stand only to benefit by the privatization because it didn't need to be financially bailed out.

Unlike other universities' bookstores, Swanson said, UNL's is well-managed and in good shape financially.

"We're turning to privatization primarily to obtain private capital to improve the store," he said.

Some students may wonder what the effect of the improvements will have on their pocketbooks.

Fitch said prices would be the most important part of a new bookstore.

"I don't know that if it's bought by a private company that I would even necessarily go hang out there," Fitch said. "But I do need to get my books there."

Main said everything would be "cheaper, faster and better."

The price of textbooks will not increase, and may even be lower, Main said. And the bookstore still will buy used textbooks, he said.

"If we don't have improved service," Main said, "then we're not going to make the change."

Students also will have job opportunities, either as part-time cashiers or as interns interested in bookstore management, Main said.

To ensure a firm is in place by the fall book rush next semester, Main said, he hopes for a firm to be named by the first or second week of May.

"The current operation is run very well," Main said, "so it's going to take a lot to convince us."

Democrats square off in gubernatorial forum

FORUM from page 1

"This campaign is going to be about the values we share as Nebraskans," Hoppner said. "I know I am connected with Nebraskans on the fundamental issues that concern them."

Hoppner, who worked on the gubernatorial and U.S. Senate staffs of both James Exon and Bob Kerrey, said Nebraskans' call for property tax relief has been especially clear.

"Out of all taxes, the property tax is the least-linked to a person's capacity to pay," he said. The value of a farm doesn't indicate its ability to generate income for a farmer, and the value of a house doesn't always reflect the financial well-being of its owner, he said.

McFarland, a former state senator from Lincoln, agreed, calling the property tax the "most onerous tax."

The candidates agreed that education, which relies on property tax revenue, will have to receive more state financial support as property tax cuts are enacted.

Hoppner said that although citizens have called for a leaner government, they also want effective government that represents the entire population.

"I want to provide an assurance that rural Nebraskans have a seat at the table and that their interests aren't just an afterthought," he said.

McFarland said one of his campaign's main themes would be investing in education designed to help meet the state's need for more highly skilled workers.

"Our greatest resource in this state is our citizens," he said. "If we invest in our students and make them highly qualified and skilled, we will prosper."

McFarland said the state should adopt a moratorium on the construction of large hog-confinement facilities to protect the state's environment. Hoppner said a moratorium would hurt small- and medium-sized hog operations and was unnecessary for sensible environmental regulations.

Hoppner said a \$74 million prison approved by the Legislature last year is needed to meet the demands of an overcrowded judicial system.

McFarland countered that the prison's price tag punishes taxpayers more than criminals. He proposed that greater use be made of community corrections programs for nonviolent offenders in order to open prison space for hard-core offenders.

McFarland said he opposes abortion except when needed to save the mother's life. Hoppner said the abortion issue is less important than providing health insurance to poor women.

Both candidates praised the work of Gov. Ben Nelson, who is barred from seeking a third term as governor this year. Hoppner lost to Nelson in the 1990 Democratic gubernatorial primary by 42 votes.

McFarland questioned the loyalty of Hoppner, who did not support Nelson's unsuccessful 1996 U.S. Senate bid and threatened to launch an independent candidacy in that race.

In interviews after the debate, Hoppner criticized McFarland for his comment during the debate that many rural schools are "woefully deficient in quality." Many small schools perform well, he said, and would be neither more efficient nor more effective if consolidated with other districts.

But McFarland reiterated his concern for improved education and a lower cost to run the government. He said he supports a bill in the Legislature calling for unified school districts, which would share some administrative staff.

"I don't want to have second-class schools and first-class prisons," he said.

Both candidates said the Republican candidates' lead in fundraising doesn't ensure a GOP victory in November. They said voters will make their decisions based on who best represents their interests, not on who spends the most.

PIG ROAST!

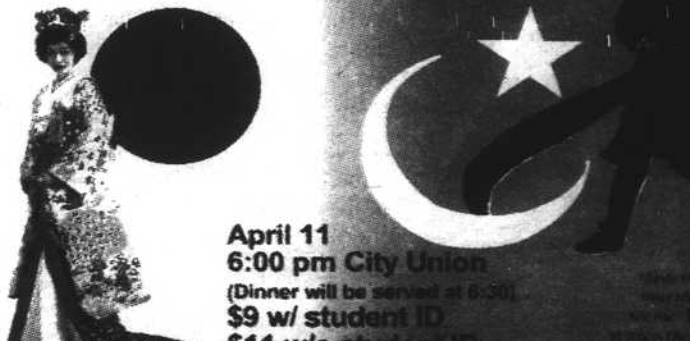
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