

Protesters upset with P Street traffic

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Staff writers

The sound of passing motorists honking in protest of two-way traffic on P Street on Friday interfered with the Embassy Suites Hotel groundbreaking inside Crane River Brewpub and Cafe.

Protesters gathered near 11th and P streets with petitions and signs asking motorists to "Honk 4 One-Way." They collected about 300 signatures that morning demanding the return to one-way traffic on P Street.

Inside the cafe, 211 P St., Mayor Mike Johanns and hotel developer John Q. Hammons dug their silver shovels into a small box of dirt marking the start of hotel construction as City Council members and other officials watched.

"This is a great opportunity to enhance and cultivate the downtown community," Brad Korell, president of National Bank of Commerce, said. "It's only fitting that this block is replaced with this prominent hotel."

But that progress has not been welcomed by everyone.

Signs of protesters outside argued that "2 way + 2 slow = No Go."

And about 50 to 80 people showed up in support of that equation and a return to one-way traffic.

"We're here to give them hell," protest organizer Jim Wrenholt, a Lincoln small business owner, said.

The site of the new hotel, Block 35, located between 10th, 11th, P and Q streets, has been central in Lincoln's history and the protester's arguments.

It was the city's founding block in 1860 and has been the site of many prominent hotels and businesses over the years, Korell said.

"Traffic on P Street was two-way and accommodated business quite well," he said.

Protesters believe the incoming hotel influenced the traffic redirection.

"Money talks, and we're seeing it voiced right here," said Duane Mischsek, a city campus utility plant employee.

The change to two-way traffic has angered many residents who argue lane reduction causes traffic congestion.

"This change is a waste of taxpayer money," Mischsek said. "This is just a continuing disaster."

Johanns said he is working to balance the interests of the people with preserving Lincoln's downtown area. The long-term effects of the hotel will bring economic activity to a thriving downtown, he said.

The City Council decided to change P Street to two-way traffic in an effort to connect downtown with the Haymarket area and make the street more pedestrian-friendly. Council members also argue that two-way traffic and more pedestrians will generate more businesses on P Street.

Protesters said they organized their demonstration Friday morning to coincide with the hotel groundbreaking to attract attention.

"I'm here in support of one-way traffic," said Lyn Leach, owner of Ace Rent-To-Own, 2429 O St. "I believe the hotel is a major reason for the street change."

Hammons, who is planning to build and own the hotel, disagreed.

"We are in the hotel business, not the street business," Hammons said. "Lincoln needed this hotel. We are studying to make it successful."

According to campaign finance reports, Hammons contributed \$1,000 to Johanns' gubernatorial campaign in August.

But Johanns denied any connection between the contribution, the hotel construction and the street change.

Wrenholt plans to present the petition to the City Council on Monday to demand a return to one-way traffic.

Wrenholt said he received a mixed response at the last council meeting, though there was interest in his petition.

"We need people to keep the pressure up," Wrenholt said.

Though a few Bill Hoppner supporters were present with the P Street protesters, Wrenholt emphasized that

the protest was nonpartisan.

Johanns noted the Hoppner supporters on the corner and decried the politics in the protest.

"If there was a Johanns sign out there, I would tell them to move on," Johanns said.

Mike Morosin, vice chairman of the Mayor's Neighborhood Roundtable, said he supported Embassy Suites coming to Lincoln but is against a two-way P Street because of the danger and congestion he said it creates.

"It's a dumb way to flow traffic," Morosin said. "Angle parking is extremely dangerous. Not only can you

not see who is coming, you back your car up ... and stop traffic for blocks."

Bicyclists are concerned the change to two-way will be more dangerous.

"I commute daily by bike, and since the changes, 13th Street has become extremely dangerous," Mischsek said.

But Johanns blamed the ongoing construction to convert P Street, which is scheduled to be completed in mid- to late November.

He told citizens not to be discouraged by the P Street conversion.

"Nobody's feet are stuck in cement," he said. "We want to invest in people's future."

ASUN Watch

And the score is ...

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

1. Continue commitment to diversity through sponsored events and increased communication with the campus community.

— ASUN Human Rights Committee Chairman Andy Schuerman said ASUN will be working with the UNL chapter of Amnesty International to help promote the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Dec. 10. Schuerman said from Oct. 26-30, Amnesty International's goal is to collect 5,000 signatures and send them to Paris to be assembled as part of the world's largest book.

2. Maintain regular campuswide community service projects.

— Ryan Anderson, chairman of the Campus Life Committee, said ASUN will work with UNL's Habitat for Humanity chapter Nov. 7 on the "NU House."

3. Enhance technological services to students.

— Paul Schreier, ASUN Technology Fee Advisory Board member, said student Web services presently are being updated to include online registration, schedules and grade checks.

4. Research the options to make student evaluations more effective.

— ASUN Academic Committee members are meeting with college departments and faculty members to discuss midsemester feedback forms. Kara Slaughter, committee chairwoman, said the committee also is talking with other Big 12 schools and researching their methods of professor evaluations.

5. Address campus parking concerns.

— ASUN senators are continuing to research and discuss parking concerns.

6. Continue efforts to unite City and East campuses.

— Anderson said Campus Life and the ASUN Environmental Issues subcommittees are looking into providing better shuttle and/or bus transportation between City and East campuses.

7. Create a larger representation of students through outreach initiatives.

— ASUN President Sara Russell is contacting student organization presidents asking them to attend Campus Coalition meetings. The next meeting is 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the Nebraska Union.

8. Raise awareness of the proposed spending lid amendment to the Nebraska Constitution and the immediate effects imposed on UNL and its students.

— ASUN is continuing to work with Students Against the Lid to promote awareness of Initiative 413, the proposed tax lid amendment that could cut \$20 million from the NU system's budget. Russell said both groups are promoting "Blue to ML" and are encouraging the UNL community to wear blue, instead of red, to the Nebraska vs. Missouri football game Oct. 24.

9. Lobby for student input and concern regarding the ASUN government party system.

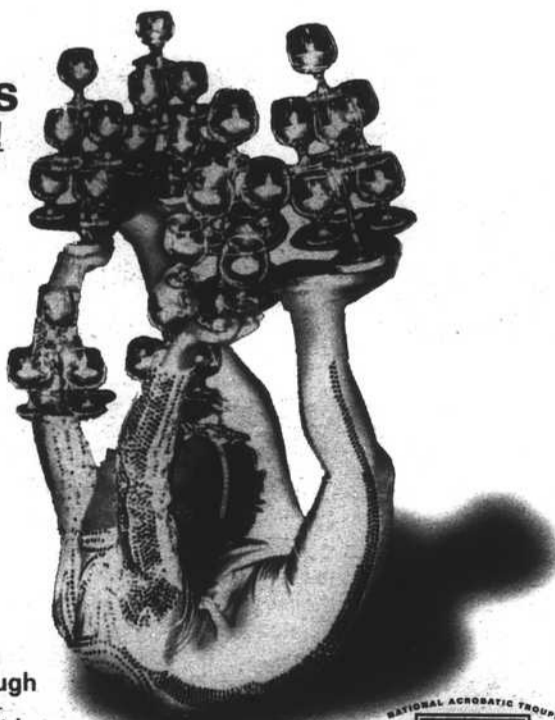
— Russell's proposed measure to keep a partisan government system, but remove the listing of party names on the election ballot, is being discussed by the ASUN Electoral Commission. Ryan Fuchs, Electoral Commission director, said the commission will present an election proposal to the senate in the next couple of weeks.

10. Work to promote alcohol awareness and education campuswide.

— Russell is organizing a steering committee to help with efforts revolving around the Laura Cockson Memorial Scholarship Fund. The committee will include the Cockson family, ASUN, Gamma Phi Beta Sorority, University Foundation, Student Foundation and Project C.A.R.E. representatives.

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