

Education bill may ease aid requisites

BY SHANE ANTHONY
Staff writer

At a hearing Tuesday, educators asked state senators to take them off the roller coaster.

That roller coaster is the current method for determining state aid for schools. On Dec. 1, schools found that because of a change in the formula, they would have to pay back \$22 million in state aid through cuts in the next year's budget.

"We have to know where we're going. The schools out there have worked very hard to tighten the belt," said Bev Peterson, state Board of Education president.

LB149, a bill introduced by the Education Committee, is intended to prevent such violent swings in the future.

The committee voted 8-0 to advance the bill — including an amendment for a minor language change — to the floor of the Legislature. The bill has an emergency clause that would put it into effect as soon as it was passed and approved.

Peterson said she spoke for the board in supporting the bill. Sixteen people were scheduled to testify at the committee hearing Tuesday. Only eight people other than Hastings Sen. Ardyce Bohlke, the committee chairwoman, actually addressed the committee. None opposed the bill.

"I think we'd be shocked if someone came in in opposition," Bohlke said.

The bill would change the certification date for state funds to April 1 this year and Feb. 1 each year after. The change would allow the state to use actual data instead of estimates to determine aid to schools. It also would set the local effort rate — a major component in determining state aid — at 10 cents below the maximum property tax levy limit.

Without the changes, some officials said, schools

would suffer.

Duane Obermier, Nebraska State Education Association president, listed several examples. Silver Lake would lose 73 percent of its state aid, he said. Sutton would lose 87 percent, Hyannis 94 percent and Davenport 99 percent.

"The numbers tell you something is drastically wrong," Obermier said. "If LB149 does not pass, our students will suffer. Less money means less service, and less service means larger class sizes and fewer programs for students."

Kimberly Ma, an 18-year-old Lincoln Southeast High School senior, said she worried future students would not have a quality education. She urged the committee and the Legislature to move forward with LB149 "so students across the state may benefit from a quality education that will enrich the rest of their lives."

In a phone interview, Tim Kemper, director of finance for Lincoln Public Schools, said that even if LB149 passed, the Lincoln school district still would not know until April 1 how much money it will have next year. Under the current law, he said, LPS faces a drop of \$5 million in state aid for next year.

If LB149 passes, he said, LPS will get a new figure April 1, comprising two parts. The first, a recalculation of the past year, should restore \$3.6 million. The second number, a new certification for the 1999-2000 school year, is still unknown.

The 1998-1999 school year was the first one in

which estimates instead of real figures were used, Kemper said, because the date for certification changed from July 1 to Dec. 1.

"This year, I think, would teach us that that was not the most favorable move," he said.

The move was intended to let schools plan budgets before the April 15 deadline to make staff decisions for the coming year. But Dec. 1 was too early to use real data, Kemper said, so the estimates were used.

Bohlke said the estimates were based on a three-year period. Then, the state looked back to correct the

figures to the amount actually required, hence the \$22 million swing. But forcing schools to pay back that \$22 million would not reflect schools' efforts to cut costs, she said.

Real figures to determine state aid will be available Feb.

1, Bohlke said, a later deadline than Dec. 1, but still in time to meet the April 15 deadline.

Jon Habben, superintendent of Newman Grove Public Schools, said he was pleased to see the committee move away from a three-year average. He encouraged senators to continue looking for a solution to property tax questions while ensuring schools get the funding they need.

Habben recalled his own children, ages 24, 16 and 8.

"You know, when my oldest son graduated from high school, the last thing that I ever thought we'd be talking about was giving my other two kids less education," he said.

"If LB149 does not pass, our students will suffer."

DUANE OBERMIER
State Education Association president

World and Nation DATELINES

■ LONDON

Lawyers: Pinochet cannot escape Torture Convention

(AP) — Gen. Augusto Pinochet of Chile should not be permitted to flout an international law that allows nations to prosecute anyone accused of torture, lawyers for Britain and Spain argued Tuesday.

Under the International Convention against Torture, no one accused of torture is considered immune from prosecution, Alun Jones told the House of Lords, Britain's highest court. Chile signed the convention in 1988.

The former dictator's lawyers contend that his arrest is illegal under British law because the acts he is accused of date to when he was Chile's leader, entitling him to state immunity.

Pinochet was arrested Oct. 16 in London on a Spanish warrant that alleges he ordered murders, kidnappings and torture during his rule from 1973 to 1990.

Pinochet's lawyers will be presenting their arguments later this week.

Muslims welcome end of fasting

BY BERNARD VOGELSANG
Staff writer

UNL senior Saad Alavi is one of several Muslim students who fasted during daylight hours for nearly a month.

The students didn't eat or drink from sunrise to sunset during the Islamic month of Ramadan to mark God's revelation of their holy book, the Koran, to Prophet Mohammed.

Alavi, a finance and management information systems major from Pakistan, said he was excited Ramadan ended Tuesday.

However, the short winter daylight hours didn't make fasting too hard for him.

"I even wish I have lost two or three pounds," he said. "Before the fasting period I have gained weight."

Ramadan starts every year on a different date because the Islamic year

has 355 days. This year, about 850 million Muslims worldwide started fasting Dec. 20.

Some predominantly Muslim countries are Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Malaysia.

Nor Aliza Abdul Rakim, an entomology teaching assistant from Malaysia, said a heavy breakfast of bagels, fruit and water at 5 a.m. helped to relieve the hunger during the days she fasted.

Her work at UNL also distracted her from thinking about eating.

Alavi said fasting taught him to appreciate the value of simple things in life, such as food and drink.

Fasting also has given him self-control and discipline, he said.

"During Ramadan, I restrain myself from worldly desires," Alavi said.

Abdul Rakim cooked rice vermicelli noodles for a Ramadan dinner

sponsored by the Malaysian Students Association on Saturday night in the Nebraska Union.

Although authentic Indian food was served, along with pizza minus the pork, Rakim was not hungry at 9 p.m.

"I had a heavy meal with fruit, rice and water at 5 p.m.," she said.

A feast isn't the only thing that marks the end of the monthlong holiday.

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims donate to the poor.

They also ask for forgiveness from relatives and friends after the fasting period, Rakim said.

"That way, they can start the new month with a clean soul," she said.

To celebrate the end of the fasting period, Muslims from many countries will share their Ramadan experiences Friday at 3:45 p.m. in the lounge of UNL's International Affairs building, 1237 R St.

Bill would add colleges to NU

BY JESSICA FARGEN
Senior staff writer

A bill introduced Tuesday would add Chadron and Wayne State colleges to the University of Nebraska system.

The bill, LB631, introduced by Speaker Doug Kristensen of Minden, would turn Peru State College into a community college. The bill was cosigned by Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers.

But Table Rock Sen. Floyd Vrtiska also introduced LB650 Tuesday, which would plug \$7 million into Peru for library and infrastructure renovations, leaving it a state college.

Renovations under Vrtiska's bill, LB650, supported by 25 senators, would not start until next year or later.

"There are only two options left: one is to renovate, one is to close it," Vrtiska said.

The Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education estimated the

price tag of moving the college to Nebraska City at \$96 million. Total renovations for the college would be about \$20 million.

Vrtiska said more funds could be collected for renovation through avenues such as bonds and fees.

"This whole legislation is based on meeting the benchmarks that are set out by the coordinating commission, certain things as far as enrollment, retention, that are being developed right now," Vrtiska said.

Although Vrtiska had not read Kristensen's bill as of Tuesday night, he said he would not support the idea of changing Peru to a community college.

Vrtiska said Peru has an excellent teachers college, and with a shortage of teachers in Nebraska, closing Peru would be a mistake because it would deprive the state of a quality four-year teachers college.

The last addition to the NU system was the University of Nebraska at Kearney in 1991.

CFA approves DN's budget hike request

■ The committee voted tentatively to raise the fee 7 cents more per student.

BY KIM SWEET
Staff writer

In one of its first budget votes of the year, the Committee for Fees Allocation voted to preliminarily approve the Daily Nebraskan's budget request on Tuesday night.

Committee members were reminded by chairman Paul Schreier that while the budget was approved, CFA still had the option to change the allocation after hearing the requests of all the fee users.

CFA voted to allocate 7 extra cents of fees per student to the Daily Nebraskan's budget next year, raising it from \$47,984 to \$50,863.

Vernon Miller, committee representative for the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, said approving the increase was important.

"I feel the Daily Nebraskan should be allowed the increase because of the importance of communication across campus," he said.

ASUN representative Jason Boykin was critical of the increase and said that funds needed to come from other places.

"I'd love to see a bigger paper every day, but I'd like to see more funds that are generated by advertising," he said.

CFA will meet Thursday night to vote on University Programming Council funding for the Lied Center for Performing Arts and for programming.

Clinton talks entitlements

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton, standing before a Congress torn over his fate, proposed Tuesday to protect Social Security with the budget surpluses that Republicans are eyeing for tax cuts. He also announced the government will sue the tobacco industry for smokers' health costs.

On a day of high drama that shifted from his daytime trial in the Senate to his prime-time State of the Union speech, Clinton made no mention of the sex-and-lies case that led to his impeachment and imperils his presidency.

In the ornate House chamber where he was impeached one month ago on a party-line vote, the president was received with respect and interrupted by applause 95 times.

Several Republicans boycotted the 77-minute speech; Chief Justice William Rehnquist, presiding over Clinton's trial, also stayed away. Two of his harshest Republican critics — House Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas and House Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas — sat stonily side by side.

Demanding that Washington reserve \$4 trillion in expected budget surpluses to shore up Social Security and Medicare, Clinton declared, "First things first."

In a new salvo against smoking,

Clinton announced the Justice Department will sue the tobacco industry. He also is seeking a 55-cent-a-pack tax on cigarettes.

Clinton urged spending billions of dollars for new programs in child care, education, crime-fighting, the environment and the Pentagon. And he called for raising the minimum wage by \$1 an hour over two years to \$6.15.

"With our budget surplus growing, our economy expanding, our confidence rising, now is the time for this generation to meet our historic responsibility to the 21st century," Clinton said. "Let's get to work."

He also proposed \$4.2 billion — a 70 percent increase — to dismantle and destroy Russia's nuclear arsenal and redirect the work of Russian scientists from weapons to civilian research.

On Social Security, Clinton's proposal sets up a fight over how to protect the retirement program and deal with GOP tax-cutting ambitions against a background of \$4 trillion in projected surpluses over 15 years.

Clinton proposed transferring about 60 percent of expected budget surpluses over the next 15 years — \$2.7 trillion — to the Social Security account to keep the program alive until 2055.

Never before has a president delivered a State of the Union address under such extraordinary conditions.

Daily Nebraskan

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