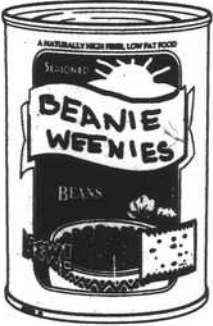


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 World Wide Web: www.dailynebraskan.com  
 The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year, weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.  
 Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.  
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 THE DAILY NEBRASKAN

# Bills target road fatalities; debate focuses on patrols

## Legislators discuss speed limits, drunken driving

BY BRIAN CARLSON  
 Staff writer

The Legislature's Transportation Committee on Monday heard several bills addressing increased traffic fatalities since the 1996 passage of higher speed limits in Nebraska.

Bills presented during the hearing included proposals for lowering the speed limit on Interstate 80 from Lincoln to Omaha, strengthening the seat belt requirement and enacting tougher restrictions on drunk driving.

LB686, sponsored by Sen. Elaine Stuhr of Bradshaw, would lower the speed limit on Interstate 80 from 75 mph to 70 mph on the stretch from York County to the Douglas County line. That proposal is also contained in legislation sponsored by Sen. Curt Bromm of Wahoo, committee chairman.

Since 1996, when Nebraska increased interstate speed limits from 65 mph to 75 mph outside of cities, traffic fatalities have risen each year.

Bromm, who introduced a set of proposals lumped into LB445, said the State Patrol did not have sufficient resources to enforce the 75 mph speed limit.

Ideally, Bromm said, the state

should both lower the speed limit and bolster enforcement. But given the scant budgetary resources available, he said, the only option is to lower the speed limit.

"At least if we lower the limit to 70, maybe it will encourage people to drive closer to 75, which we apparently decided was an acceptable speed limit in the past," he said.

But Gary Scharf, a trucker for Novartis Corp., said the higher limits should be preserved because they shorten trips for truckers.

Another bill - LB356, sponsored by Sen. Dennis Byars of Beatrice - would authorize primary enforcement of the front-seat safety belt requirement, allowing patrol officers to stop motorists who fail to wear seat belts.

Current law authorizes secondary enforcement, which means patrol officers may only cite motorists for failure to wear seat belts after stopping a car for a separate violation.

Byars said the bill would deter people from driving unbuckled, saving lives and taxpayer-supported medical expenses. "This is not a Band-Aid," he said. "This is a full-fledged way to save 100 to 150 lives in the state of Nebraska."

While Nebraska's safety belt usage is 65 percent, states with primary enforcement laws have achieved a 78 percent average usage rate, Elam said.

**"This is not a Band-Aid. This is a full-fledged way to save 100 to 150 lives in the state of Nebraska."**

**DENNIS BYARS**  
 Beatrice senator

### Legislature

Susan Cook, representing the Nebraska Criminal Defense Attorney Association, opposed the bill.

She said it was difficult for patrol officers to see whether motorists were wearing safety belts. The law would be difficult to enforce and could lead to abuse, she said.

If successful in increasing seat belt usage, Byars' bill could qualify the state for additional federal funds.

The Transportation Equity Act for the Twentieth Century, passed by Congress in 1998, provides incentives for states that increase seat belt usage.

The act, commonly known as T21, also would withdraw federal funds from states that fail to enact specific provisions to combat drunken driving. Those mandates, which would be addressed by Bromm's legislation, include the following penalties for repeat DWI and DUI offenders: driver's license suspension of at least one year, vehicle impoundment or the installation of an ignition interlock system, alcohol abuse treatment if necessary and minimum jail or community service sentences.

Bromm's legislation also would prohibit the possession of an open alcoholic beverage container anywhere in the passenger area of a motor vehicle.

If Nebraska meets all the federal mandates contained in T21, it could receive an additional \$600,000 to \$800,000 for highway construction or highway safety programs.

The committee took no action on the proposals.

# UNITE members express concern over new Bessey Hall discoveries

After remains are found again, American Indian students question policies.

BY VERONICA DAEHN  
 Staff writer

Becca Amen, University of Nebraska Intertribal Exchange member, said professors should be role models.

That's why she was upset Friday when more American Indian remains were discovered in 109 Bessey Hall, almost a year after the room was supposed to be cleared of them. It was the second time in a little more than a year that remains had been found in the room.

Anthropology Associate Professor Karl Reinhard allegedly stored and studied American Indian remains there, which is against federal law.

Amen, a Ponca Nation member and a junior anthropology major, said she was disappointed in the university's anthropology department.

"He's (Reinhard) supposed to be a role model," Amen said. "He's saying this is OK, and that's not how things go. As an anthropologist, you have to respect everyone's differences."

Amen said there are certain standards that must be upheld when obtaining and studying artifacts and remains.

Reinhard disregarded those standards, she said.

"This should not be an issue at all," Amen said. "To put up with this kind of stuff is totally disgusting. It's like we're sub-human beings, like we're dogs."

Collette Mast, a senior sociology major and fellow UNITE member, was shocked, but said she was not surprised.

"It seems to be a recurring theme," she said. "Nothing's surprising anymore. I'm becoming immune to the disrespect."

Though Mast, a Northern Cheyenne tribe member, said people removing the remains last spring may not have known the ones left behind were American Indian, the department should have made sure none were left behind.

"That's an incompetency," she said. "It's their fault that they look bad."

UNITE member Amy Bearskin was also not surprised at the find.

"Every time we think things are taken care of, something else comes up," she said.

Bearskin, a Winnebago of Nebraska tribe member and senior finance and anthropology major, said the anthropology department assured her and fellow UNITE members the situation was being rectified.

However, members were not notified of actions taken by the department, Bearskin said.

"I have been trying to give the anthropology department the benefit of the doubt," she said, "but what else can we do? Participate in activities? No one notified us on a regular basis of what was going on."

Both Bearskin and Amen acknowledged, however, that all professors in the department they have worked with have been ethical and conscientious of minorities.

"The professors I worked with are good," Bearskin said. "I don't know where the problem is. This shouldn't have happened. It was bad enough in the first place."

Some action is being taken to combat the anthropology department's mistakes, Amen said.

Plans are under way to build a memorial on East Campus where an anthropology professor in the 1960s scattered the ashes of American Indian remains, she said.

Mast said the only thing the university can do now is return the bones to their respective tribes and secure 109 Bessey Hall.

The room was sealed Friday and will be blessed by an as-yet-unknown American Indian spiritual leader. "It's scary for me," Mast said. "The spirits need to go their track. It's plain respect. You can't just dig somebody up."

Bearskin said the university needed to ensure this type of incident would not happen again.

"It makes things hard for us," she said. "What if this comes up a year later? How can the university say we're friendly to minorities when stuff like this comes up?"

**"Nothing's surprising anymore. I'm becoming immune to the disrespect."**

**COLLETTE MAST**  
 UNITE member