

# Legislators consider LB476 incites fiery debate break from compact

## Residents: 'Save' Boyd from waste site

BY JESSICA FARGEN  
Senior staff writer

Legislature

"Save Boyd County!" was the cry from several testifiers Wednesday supporting a bill that would withdraw Nebraska from the low-level radioactive waste compact the state entered into more than 10 years ago.

Senators on the Natural Resources Committee led those cries and advanced the bill 7-0.

Supporters testifying said recent developments within the compact may give the bill to withdraw from the pact more steam than it has had in the last several years.

In 1989, Boyd County was selected for the waste site as a part of the Central State Low-Level Radioactive Waste compact, which also includes Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas.

Ewing Sen. Cap Dierks, who is sponsoring LB530, said roadblocks preventing similar legislation from passing before have now been bypassed.

Earlier fears of Nebraska's withdrawal causing millions of dollars in litigation have been quelled by a Washington, D.C., law firm hired by the Legislature, he said.

The firm's lawyers said if Nebraska withdrew from the contract, it could be required to pay \$25,000 a year for five years. The state now pays \$25,000 in dues each year to be in the compact.

In addition, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality denied a license for the site last year.

At the hearing, waste site opponents, many of whom were Boyd County residents, said the land chosen for the site was not well-suited for a waste site.

Dierks told senators the proposed land for the site is on wetlands and next to a highway, and the price of the land was \$1,000 an acre.

"This impossible, improbable, illegal site is still being pursued," he said.

But supporters of the site warned senators not to act in haste in passing LB530.

Bill Neal, division manager for environmental and governmental affairs for the Omaha Public Power District, said Nebraska joined the compact to prevent collecting waste from non-compact states. Membership also assured that the state would have a place to dump its own waste.

Right now Nebraska's low-level waste is shipped to a site in South Carolina, he said, which is in jeopardy of closing.

"How would Nebraska intend to fulfill this responsibility?" he said of the South Carolina site closing. "Is there a plan?"

**"This impossible, improbable, illegal site is still being pursued."**

**CAP DIERKS**  
Ewing senator

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a concealed-weapon permit to undergo background checks. Felons and those convicted of other offenses listed in the bill would be denied a permit.

To receive a permit, Nebraskans would have to take a gun-safety training course including classroom instruction and range training.

Although Gov. Mike Johanns has said if the bill came across his desk he would sign it into law, senator support has dwindled this year. Fewer than 10 senators have signed onto the bill, compared to more than 30 last year.

But that did not stop the half-dozen supporters of the bill from testifying.

Terry Veazey, who is in a wheelchair, said he would feel a lot safer if he had the choice to carry a gun.

Veazey pointed to two incidents at grocery stores in his Omaha neighborhood where people in wheelchairs have been robbed and were unable to defend themselves.

Russ Tooker, who is on the board of directors for the Grand Island Rifle Club and is a firearms instructor, recalled a situation where carrying a gun to defend himself could have helped stop a fatal incident.

One night in 1977 at a local restaurant where Tooker was eating, a man burst through the door and started firing a 12-gauge shotgun. The gunman, who was a psychiatric patient, fired six bullets — two of which struck Tooker in the leg. A sheriff's deputy at the restaurant was killed, he said.

That violence may have been cut short if someone in that restaurant legally had the ability to fire back, he said.

"The only chance we had that night was a concealed handgun used by someone," he said.

The misconception that carrying a handgun will lead to mass violence is unfounded, he said.

"Sometimes trouble comes looking for you, and it won't walk away," he said.

Statistics on both sides of the issue are at odds with each other.

Proponents point to a University of Chicago study conducted from 1977 to 1992 of states with concealed-weapon laws. Those states saw an 8.5 percent reduction in the murder rate and a 7 percent reduction in severe assault.

Opponents favor a study done in Texas last year, revealing that more than 1,600 of the 185,000 Texans licensed to carry concealed weapons were arrested

in the first year of that state's concealed-gun law. Of those arrested, 402 were for felony offenses.

Steve Grabowski, who spoke on behalf of the Nebraska Fraternal Order of Police, opposed the bill.

Officers approach armed and unarmed suspects differently, he said. This legislation would make that distinction hard because, conceivably, anyone could be armed.

Although he said he imagined most gun-toting citizens would be law-abiding, even a small number of law-breakers could be dangerous.

"Even if 1 percent more guns are out there on the street, that's 1 percent more guns I have to worry about," he said.

Janet Bonet, Omaha coordinator for Nebraskans for Peace, opposed the bill because of the fear it could create.

"Fear is fodder for violence," she said. "Concealed guns will feed the violence, not stop it."

Omaha Sen. John Hilgert asked Bonet if she would support any part of the bill, or if she was unilaterally against concealed weapons.

Although Bonet did not directly answer the question, she said she supported the training required under the bill.

# Convention centers bill considered

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but also for the state," he said.

Although convention centers themselves are not profitable, they generate considerable economic activity for businesses, he said.

Charles Cuypers, city attorney and interim city administrator for Grand Island, said the bill could help cities of Grand Island's size build convention centers. Such centers enhance the quality of life by generating economic development and accommodating activities such as the performing arts.

Debra Hanson, development director for Superior, said the bill could help the city transform its old city auditorium into a community center that could accommodate performing arts.

Members of the Revenue Committee pressed proponents for proof of the bill's economic viability and fairness.

Sen. David Landis of Lincoln asked how the state could measure the amount of new revenue generated by convention centers. He also asked how the state could ensure the measure did not promote self-defeating, cutthroat competition between Nebraska cities.

Kuipers said the marketplace would help determine where convention centers would be viable, and communities would have to analyze the prospects for success before building a center.

Ron Barton, an accountant for KPMG Peat Marwick LLP, said the state could use economic modeling to estimate revenue generated by convention centers.

Committee Chairman Sen. Bob Wickersham of Harrison asked how the state could benefit if it had to send a large portion of new revenues back to convention centers.

Barton said the state's commitment to return those funds would lessen as convention centers paid off their debts. Besides, he said, if convention centers were unsuccessful in generating extra tax revenue, the state would not be hurt because it wouldn't have to return as much revenue.

# ASUN voices opposition to smoking, alcohol bills

Senators said a bill that would ban smoking in state buildings would also keep some students from smoking in their on-campus homes.

BY KIM SWEET  
Staff writer

ASUN voted Wednesday to oppose two bills pending in the Nebraska Legislature dealing with cigarettes and stricter penalties for underage drinking.

The Association of Students of the University of Nebraska passed three bills to direct the Government Liaison Committee to organize lobbying efforts against Legislative Bills 211 and 126.

LB211 proposes to prohibit smoking in all state-owned buildings, said Angie Klein, Government Liaison Committee chairwoman.

Because residence halls and four greek houses on campus are state-owned facilities, the bill would prohibit students who reside in these

ASUN

buildings from smoking in their rooms.

Klein said she disagreed with the bill because nonsmoking floors are available and residence halls contain sections that are not necessarily public.

"So long as there are other options available and because you are paying, you should have the right to smoke in (your room)," Klein said.

Fine and Performing Arts Senator Erin Reitz expressed her discontent for LB211. Reitz said many students have come to her opposing the bill.

"They feel they should be able to retain the right to smoke where they live," Reitz said.

Nursing Senator Heather Swanson, one of the few people who spoke against ASUN's bill, said smoking in the halls affects nonsmokers, no matter how far away they live.

"Even if you live down the hall, down the stairs, you still smell the smoke," Swanson said. The senate voted to oppose the bill.

Klein said if the Legislature decides to

**"The issue that the Legislature needs to address is enforcement first and sanctions later."**

**KARA SLAUGHTER**  
arts and sciences senator

exclude residence halls and greek houses from the legislation, the committee will not lobby.

Last week, ASUN tabled a bill that opposed legislation creating stricter penalties for minors found in possession of alcohol.

The Communications Subcommittee revised the bill and brought forth another one that would direct the Government Liaison Committee to lobby against LB126.

ASUN's bills, which state that better enforcement, not stricter penalties, are necessary to address the problems related to possession of alcohol by minors, were passed overwhelmingly by the senate.

"The issue that the Legislature needs to

address is enforcement first and sanctions later," Arts and Sciences Senator Kara Slaughter said. "That's why this bill was written."

Along with passing three bills directing the Government Liaison Committee, ASUN also passed a bill dealing with American Indian remains found at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The bill directs the Racial Affairs Subcommittee to make sure recommendations made last spring by ASUN in dealing with American Indian remains were acted upon.

The bill comes about two weeks after more American Indian remains were found in Bessey Hall, home of the anthropology department.

# Bush warms to candidacy

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Offering his strongest statement to date on whether he is going to run for president in 2000, Gov. George W. Bush said Wednesday: "I'm warming to the task."

The Republican, a leader in several recent polls on the 2000 race, repeated that he still hasn't made up his mind.

Bush spoke after a meeting with legislative leaders from New Jersey and South Carolina. It was his latest discussion with politicians from outside Texas who are urging him to seek

the White House. "A couple of the people here said, 'If you'll run, we'll support you.' For that, I'm most grateful," Bush said.

The lunch meeting took place at the Governor's Mansion.

"I've come from New Jersey specifically to encourage this governor to run for the presidency because I believe the integrity of the presidency is something that is lacking," said Alex DeCrose, deputy speaker of the New Jersey Assembly.

"I think George W. Bush can bring that back to Washington."

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