

Regents

Tunnel between honors hall, Selleck considered

Board talks of gender equity, tenured professor

BY LINDSAY YOUNG
Senior editor

Residents of a future honors hall will trek through a tunnel for meals if the regents approve an addition to the hall Saturday.

The tunnel will run from the hall's future location north of the Nebraska Union to Selleck Quadrangle.

At its monthly meeting, the NU Board of Regents will vote on whether to approve the change in the scope and budget of the Esther L. Kauffman Residential Center.

Construction on the new honors hall was scheduled to be finished in 2001.

Regent Chuck Hassebrook of Walthill said the tunnel proposal was not necessarily unexpected.

"I'm inclined to support it," Hassebrook said. Hassebrook voted in November against the \$14.3 million budget for the center.

Hassebrook said he voted against the budget because more space will be built into the center than what is needed.

But, he said, the tunnel may be needed so students will have access to food service in bad weather.

The \$400,000 tunnel will be funded by private donors.

The regents also will decide

Saturday morning if they should terminate the tenure of a University of Nebraska-Lincoln associate English professor.

Regent Don Blank of McCook will report findings of an academic freedom and tenure committee and make a recommendation to the board on whether to terminate Bruce Erlich's tenure.

Erlich could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Erlich, whose salary was \$39,000 per year, has worked at UNL since 1973. He had a joint appointment in the English and modern languages departments. He was tenured in 1980.

Erlich did not teach in the fall semester and will not teach this semester, acting English Department Chairman Stephen Hilliard said.

Because of standard procedure in such cases, Erlich would be paid until a decision is made, he said.

The reasons for the potential firing have not been disclosed because of their confidential nature, Hilliard said.

Erlich taught primarily comparative literature courses in the English department and German literature in the modern languages department, Hilliard said.

If fired Saturday, Erlich would be the second English professor in the last year to lose his job. Assistant

Professor David Hibler was fired last summer.

The regents will also hear a report from the universitywide committee on gender equity.

The report outlines each of the four NU campuses' progress in meeting the regents' gender-equity goals set in 1991.

According to the report, UNL made "marked improvement" in 1998.

However, the committee did offer five recommendations to ensure ongoing attention is given to gender equity:

- Family support policies and benefits need to encompass all families, not just those that are traditionally defined.

- An action plan should be implemented to counter UNL's child-care difficulties.

- The university should continue to advocate salary equity.

- A task force should assess fields of study in which women are under-represented.

- Standards and a system of incentives should be implemented to ensure administrators and departments are working to increase hiring and promotion of women.

The regents meeting will be held at 8:30 a.m. on UNL's East Campus in Varner Hall, 3835 Holdrege St.

Legislature

LB636 proposes tax credits for families, married couples

BY BRIAN CARLSON
Staff writer

State tax relief plans should include an earned-income tax credit for low- to middle-income families and eliminate the so-called "marriage penalty," Sen. Ron Raikes said Thursday.

The Lincoln senator presented four bills designed to achieve those ends to the Legislature's Revenue Committee. LB636 would provide a state earned-income tax credit, and LBs 600, 601 and 710 outlined various plans for ensuring married couples do not pay more income taxes than they would if they were unmarried.

The federal government already provides an earned-income tax credit for working families. A family with two or more children earning less than \$30,095, for example, could receive a tax credit worth up to \$3,756.

LB636 would allow families to claim a state earned-income tax credit worth 5 percent of their federal credit.

Lisa Gibson, a lobbyist for Voices for Children, said federal earned-income tax credits had allowed millions of working families in the United States to escape poverty.

"A state credit can just build on that success at the federal level," she said.

Andrea Scholz, an Omaha mother who holds two jobs to help support her family, said a state credit would make it easier for her to buy clothing and supplies for her children.

Sen. Bob Wickersham, committee chairman, said he was concerned the tax credit could cause wage deflation.

If families received additional support from the state government, they might have less incentive to seek the highest possible wage, and employers could bid wages down, he said.

Raikes said his bill would encourage low- to middle-wage earners to continue working so they would be eligible for the credit.

"The possibility of discouraging economic advancement with this type of tax benefit program is minimal," he said.

Raikes' other three bills would seek to end the "marriage penalty" experienced by some married couples. Under the current tax structure, some married couples pay more in income taxes than they would collectively if they were single and earning identical individual incomes.

LBs 600, 601 and 710 would seek to lessen or end the marriage penalty. Those bills provide three alternatives for restructuring the current system that vary in their degree of change — and cost to the state.

LB601 would double the standard deduction for married couples filing joint returns. The standard deduction is the amount taxpayers in a given bracket can deduct from their taxable income.

The bill would cost the state \$21 million in lost revenue for the fiscal year 1999-2000.

LB600, which has a \$61 million price tag, would also double the standard deduction for married couples. Additionally, it would expand tax brackets so more families would fall under less-taxed brackets.

LB710 raised some eyebrows among Revenue Committee members with its \$150 million cost.

The bill would flatten the state's

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JIM MCFARLAND
lobbyist for the Family Coalition

income tax structure somewhat, cutting the number of brackets from five to two.

It would also increase available deductions and make the available deduction for a married couple equal to the combined deduction the two people could claim if they were single and earning identical individual incomes.

The bills vary in their effect on the marriage penalty, according to an analysis provided by Raikes' office. For a couple making \$50,000 per year, LB601 would lessen the penalty, LB600 would lessen it still more and LB710 would eliminate it.

Jim McFarland, a lobbyist for the NonPartisan Family Coalition, testified in support of the bills. He said strong families played a crucial role in promoting social stability by improving children's lives.

"As many of you are aware, the American family as an institution is under attack in our present culture," he said.

No one testified in opposition to any of Raikes' proposals.



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