

# Senators debate merits of seat-belt bill

BY SHANE ANTHONY  
Staff writer

A bill that would allow law enforcement officers to stop motorists for not wearing seat belts strapped senators into intense debate Wednesday.

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers opposed LB356, saying it would lead to racist police harassment. But Beatrice Sen. Dennis Byars stuck by his bill, saying safety was the major concern. Debate ran back and forth between Chambers and Byars with other senators chiming in until the Legislature adjourned at noon.

"I will not be deterred," Chambers said. "I will not be dissuaded, and I certainly will not be intimidated."

He offered, debated and withdrew a motion to indefinitely postpone the bill; offered an amendment — which failed — that would have returned the bill to reflecting current law; and moved to bracket the bill until March 30.

"This is one of those matters where I'm going to have to use the opportunity to educate my colleagues," he said.

During part of the debate, Chambers said he might have to spend more time on issues where he was against the majority of the Legislature and less time on bills such as those introduced by the Agriculture Committee that target meat packers.

"I will have a lot more time if I leave these rural issues alone," he said. "Let them take care of their own."

In addition to making seat belt violations primary offenses, the bill would also count one point against a person's drivers license for being convicted of a seat-belt violation and require convicted persons to pay court costs.

Byars said he wanted to keep people from dying.

"What I'm about, what this bill is about, what my motivation is about is saving lives," he said.

Byars drew support from Wahoo Sen. Curt Bromm and Eddyville Sen. Jim Jones.

Bromm said he did not discount Chambers' arguments about harassment and racism. But an increase in fatal accidents concerned him.

"I'm not content to sit here as a legislator and do nothing," he said.

Chambers spoke at length about police harassing black motorists. He cited the shooting death of Marvin Ammons by an Omaha police officer as an example. Police pulled Ammons over for a minor offense, he said.

"This is how the police operate," he said.

Ord Sen. Jerry Schmitt and Lincoln Sen. LaVon Crosby supported Chambers.

Schmitt, a retired Nebraska State Patrol Officer, said he respects law

## Landis pushes for cigarette tax

BY BRIAN CARLSON  
Staff writer

Sen. David Landis of Lincoln was skeptical when first asked to sponsor a bill to deter youth smoking by raising cigarette taxes from 34 cents to \$1 per pack.

After all, he had received vigorous complaints and pokes in the ribs from constituents angry about previous cigarette tax hikes of just a few cents. Surely a tax hike of 66 cents would be just too controversial.

But as Landis mulled over the idea, he reached a new conclusion.

"The facts were clear," he said.

"First, if tobacco costs more, youth consumption goes down. Second, if youth do not start smoking, they live longer.

"Would it be worth the political downside?" he asked Wednesday in a

hearing before the Legislature's Revenue Committee. "Of course it would."

LB505 would implement that 66-cent-per-pack cigarette tax hike and create the Tobacco Prevention, Control and Enforcement Fund to conduct anti-smoking programs.

At Wednesday's hearing, a group of ninth-graders from Luke County Public Schools in Taylor told the Revenue Committee that a tax hike would deter youth smoking and save lives.

Errin Van Diest said 90 percent of smokers start the habit as teen-agers. At Luke County Public Schools, she said, about one-third of students in grades 7 through 12 are smokers.

Orrin Backlund said he had seen a reduction in smoking among Taylor students since federally negotiated cigarette price hikes went into effect. He said he believed steeper state ciga-

rette hikes would deter even more young smokers.

Andrew Nelson said that by passing LB505, the Legislature could take an important step to protect young people from the dangers of smoking.

"Who could be against anything this important in the fight against teenage smoking?" he said.

Chris Caudill of the Nebraska Medical Association said teen-age smoking has risen 70 percent since 1990.

Studies by the Centers for Disease Control have firmly established a link between higher cigarette prices and lower youth smoking, he said. Thus the state should pass LB505 to protect young smokers from effective marketing that has billed smoking as something that is "cool, macho, the thing to do," he said.

"Simply put, this bill will save kids' lives."

enforcement, but some officers would use the law as an excuse to stop people.

Byars said that was not the bill's intent.

"This isn't a bill to discriminate," he said. "This is not a bill in any way

that will give law enforcement a tool to harass. It is to save lives."

Crosby said seat belt laws already exist and felt Byars was trying to lay a guilt trip on other senators.

"I understand what you are talking about," she said. "But I don't like the

guilt laid on me."

The Legislature adjourned without taking any action on the bill. The issue is scheduled for debate again today.

Senior staff writer Jessica Fargen contributed to this report.

## Death penalty opponents speak

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in prison has led to an unfounded basis for keeping the death penalty, said Carter Van Pelt, state coordinator of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty.

"I think there's a hysteria that life sentences are not served," he said. "That's not true."

LB76 safeguards against early release of a person sentenced to life in prison without parole, he said. The bill states that "a person so sentenced shall not under any circumstances whatsoever be paroled."

The hysteria put aside, Alex Wolf, a member of the Omaha Indian Tribe, said the racial disparities in the death penalty are reason enough to abolish it.

The recent case of convicted murderer Randy Reeves, who is American Indian, has sparked public outcry that the death penalty is racially discriminatory.

Two days before Reeves was scheduled to die in the electric chair earlier this year, he was granted a stay of execution by the Nebraska Supreme Court.

"Randy Reeves is an example of our ingracious, unequal judicial

system here in the state of Nebraska," said Wolf, who said he was also speaking on Reeves' behalf.

He noted that two of the three people executed in Nebraska in the 1990s have been minorities.

Pat Knapp, a Lincoln attorney, said the death penalty was racist, and that she saw Nebraska politicians using a pro-death penalty stance to gain political clout.

"We are killing people in Nebraska because the issue can be used on a statewide level to further political careers," she said. "No one should die because someone is running for U.S. Senate."

Former Gov. Frank Morrison saw disparity in the way county prosecutors sentence people to die.

Morrison, who is also a former prosecuting attorney, said he has seen an 18-year-old given the death penalty and seen other murderers escape any penalty at all.

"I've always marveled at the stupid things intelligent people do," he said.

Greg Keller, journalism and American history teacher at Lincoln High, disagreed with holding the state to a different standard than

"I think there's a hysteria that life sentences are not served. That's not true."

CARTER VAN PELT  
Nebraskans Against the  
Death Penalty State Coordinator

society.

"Why is it acceptable for the state to commit homicide?" he said. "Why don't we hold the justice system to the same standard?"

In related death penalty bills:  
■ LB391, sponsored by Lincoln Sen. David Landis, aims to commute death sentences to life in prison if racial discrimination was shown in the sentencing.

■ LB52, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Kermit Brashear, would change the method of execution from the electric chair to lethal injection.

## Testimony continues in foster-home murder case

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The two teen-agers who discovered Schmader's body Dec. 22, 1995, when they were digging a fort with a shovel, also testified Wednesday.

Michael Glaser, 19, and Adrian Doan, 17, told the jury how they uncovered Schmader's head when they were digging dirt to fill sandbags for their fort.

Schmader's body was found in the farthest south of three tunnels in the 48<sup>th</sup> Street underpass. A bike trail runs through the north tunnel, Antelope Creek flows through the middle tunnel and the southern tunnel is for overflow.

Lancaster County Coroner Mattias Okoye said Schmader died from a deep stab wound in the middle of his back and a skull fracture that ran from ear to ear across the base of his skull.

Okoye said Schmader also had several cuts on his right hand that showed he had been fighting off his attacker.

In Beggs' testimony, she said that Hopkins and Galligo were very close

when they lived in her house.

"Where you saw Tim you usually saw Tony," Beggs said.

The Beggses have run a foster home at 2155 S. 52<sup>nd</sup> St. for 32 years, where they are licensed to care for nine boys.

Brandon Pickinpaugh, 17, another resident of the Beggs foster home, was found murdered last Thursday in a McDonald's parking lot, 48<sup>th</sup> and Van Dorn streets, a few blocks from where Schmader's body was buried.

At the time of Schmader's murder, seven boys were living in the house.

Hopkins and Galligo roomed together in the Beggs' sun room, which is connected to the room Schmader was staying in.

Several months before Schmader's murder, some other boys in the house accused him and two other boys of sexual assault.

Beggs said that when she heard about the problem from a counselor who was working with the boys, she addressed the problem and it stopped.

Hopkins is scheduled to testify today, and the trial is expected to run into the middle of next week.

## Career fair to begins at UNL today

BY BERNARD VOGELSSANG  
Staff writer

Students looking for summer jobs, internships or permanent employment can connect today with 155 employers from across the nation.

The employers will recruit students and provide them with career information at the Three-in-One Career Fair from 1 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union.

Geri Cotter, acting director of UNL's Career Services, said the fair is the last chance for students to get into contact with employers this semester since there will not be a summer job fair this year.

The fair welcomes private businesses, nonprofit and government employers and summer employers.

Cotter said she is excited that more federal agencies will participate in the fair this year. Both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation agencies will send recruiters.

Cotter said students should prepare well before they attend the fair. She recommended students bring several copies of their résumés and wear business attire.

"Students don't have to wear a suit," she said, "but they should dress the way they think an employer wants to see them."

Cotter said students also should prepare a one-minute introduction of who they are and what they are interested in.

The fair will conclude with a recruiter reception from 6:30 p.m.

until 8:30 p.m. to provide students, particularly minority students, an opportunity to interact with employers in a relaxed atmosphere.

Prior to the fair, the Criminal Justice Students Association will sponsor a discussion about career opportunities in law enforcement and corrections at noon in the union.

Human Resources Assistant Jean Campbell of the L.A.-based William M. Mercer, the world's largest human resource management consulting firm, said his company would recruit students at the fair.

Campbell said Mercer also attended the fair to increase the firm's name recognition among students.

She said she hoped more students would consider starting their careers at Mercer after the fair.

"The fair gives the company a lot of good exposure."

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