

ASUN

ASUN parties go back on the campaign trail

Candidates gear up for another week of rallying support

BY IEVA AUGSTUMS AND KIM SWEET
Staff writers

Cheers and moans pervaded two downtown Lincoln bars Wednesday night after UNL students sporting green Voice and red Focus party shirts found out they would have to wear them for one more week.

"I thought I was going to be able to take this thing off," Andy Faltin, Focus campaign manager, said. "I promise I will wash my shirt, but then it's back on for the week."

ASUN election officials determined the Voice party's narrow presidential victory and Focus' second vice presidential victory were not enough to secure the offices.

As a result, University of Nebraska-Lincoln students will go to the voting booth one more time next Wednesday in a runoff election, determining who will fill the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska's executive offices.

"No one had really thought that this would happen," said Dan Slaughter, a sophomore advertising and Focus party supporter. "I am shocked beyond belief."

More than 2,700 students - or 13.2 percent of the student body - turned out for Wednesday's tight race.

Although voter turnout was down 0.3 percent from last year, Voice party presidential candidate Andy Schuerman said, the close results proved students had an interest in the parties.

"I think it says that students took the opportunity to really find out about elections and really find out about candidates," Schuerman said. "I hope they will take the opportunity to do it again next week."

Focus party presidential candidate Paul Schreier agreed.

"It's apparent students are voicing their opinions and focusing on both parties," Schreier said. "I'm glad to see students are concerned about university issues and student government

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DAN SLAUGHTER
Focus party supporter

representation." Unofficial results showed the Voice presidential ticket defeating the Focus presidential ticket 1,320 votes (48.7 percent of the total votes cast) to 1,163 votes (42.9 percent of the total votes cast).

The results also showed that Focus party second vice presidential candidate Trisha Meuret defeated Voice party second vice presidential candidate Vernon Miller by 178 votes.

ASUN election rules state that each party candidate must have at least 50 percent of the total vote for a victory. Because neither party acquired the majority of the votes, a runoff election will take place.

Despite supporters' surprised reactions toward election results, the candidates used the would-be victory parties as their first step toward action in the extended election week.

"We're just going to have to take a deep breath, get some sleep, get up in the morning and go after it harder than we did before," said Rachele Winkle, Voice party candidate for first vice president.

Although there was not enough time to plan an all-out strategy for next week, both parties said they would continue with their previous efforts to try to build additional support.

"It's one more week, not three months," said Joel Wiegert, Focus party supporter. "It's a deadline we all must reach."

Schreier said his party is focusing on getting out and talking to more students.

"We will do everything we can to listen to students and their concerns,"

he said. Although Schuerman had no specific plans in mind, he said the strategy his party used to hear students' voices during the last six weeks worked well.

"I plan to do the same things we did," he said.

Miller and Meuret, along with Jon England, Focus first vice presidential candidate, agreed that mobilizing students to vote a second time would be difficult.

Miller said the only benefit of a second election is that apathetic students can see that their vote really does count.

Neither party was certain whether additional debates would be held.

Besides the concern of voter turnout, both parties said next week's student senate vote on the proposed Committee for Fees Allocation budget would compete with the election.

Schreier, who is also the CFA chairman, said he would look into moving the budget vote date, if possible.

Both parties called for students to educate themselves about party platforms and make an informed decision in the runoff election.

"I want to make a plea to the students of the University of Nebraska to give us one more week to recognize the efforts of the candidates and make an informed decision," Schuerman said.

Schreier agreed.

"It takes a lot more than a voice to lead the way," he said. "It's going to take a group of focused students to make an informed judgment on Wednesday."

Legislative Notebook

Habitual sex offenders

Sen. Deb Suttle of Omaha said sentencing practices should be reformed to prevent dangerous sex offenders from repeating their crimes.

LB467, known as the Habitual Sex Offender Act and sponsored by Suttle, would enact a new sentencing point system to prevent repeated sex offenses. The Legislature's Judiciary Committee heard the bill Wednesday.

Under the bill, a habitual sex offender would be a person who was convicted of a sexual offense and was awaiting sentencing, was previously convicted and imprisoned for a sexual offense and had been assessed at least four sentencing points.

An enhanced point-sentencing system would assess three points for first-degree sexual assault and sexually motivated kidnapping, two points for offenses such as second-degree sexual assault and one point for offenses such as third-degree sexual assault.

The bill also would enact mandatory minimum sentences for convicted sex offenders based on the number of points they had accumulated. Maximum sentences of life imprisonment could be handed down for habitual offenders convicted of offenses such as first-degree sexual assault or first-degree assault of a child.

A defendant's status as a habitual sex offender would be a factor only in the sentencing phase of the trial; jurors

would not be told of this status as they determined whether the defendant was guilty of the underlying offense.

Mentally abnormal sex offenders

The Judiciary Committee also heard a bill Wednesday that would allow sexually violent offenders to be committed to mental health facilities after completing their criminal sentences when they were deemed likely to commit more sexual offenses because of mental abnormalities.

LB435, sponsored by Sen. Carol Hudkins of Malcolm, would require imprisoned sexual offenders to be examined by mental health professionals at least 120 days before their release.

If the offender was deemed to have a mental abnormality that could make further sexual offenses likely, the mental health professionals would inform the county attorney in the county where the offender was imprisoned. The county attorney would then petition to have the offender confined in a mental health facility upon his release.

Opponents have argued the idea would dump the failings of the judicial system into the lap of mental health facilities. Mentally abnormal people convicted of sexual offenses should not be confined with people who are mentally ill but harmless, opponents have said.

Child pornography

Because the state has a compelling interest in preventing child pornography and child abuse, Sen. Kermit Brashear of Omaha said the state should do more to restrict distribution of child nudity.

LB837 would redefine full child nudity. To qualify as full child nudity, material would have to repeatedly and deliberately use fully exposed children and be designed to call attention to the nudity.

The bill would prohibit possession or distribution of such materials when designed specifically to elicit a sexual response from the viewer.

But two nudists testified Wednesday that the bill would unfairly restrict distribution of their organizations' materials, some of which depict children participating in nude recreation. These materials contain no sexual element and aren't designed to titillate, said John Bauer of the American Association of Nude Recreation and Bob Martin of the Naturist Action Committee.

Brashear said his bill would not restrict those materials because they didn't meet all the tests for child nudity.

An interesting spectacle unfolded as Bauer distributed sample copies of his organization's promotional material. Several senators thumbed through the leaflets titled "Nude Recreation."

Compiled by staff writer Brian Carlson

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