

Week's events focus on equality

National speakers, rally planned

BY VERONICA DAEHN
Staff writer

What will culminate with a week-end rally at the Nebraska State Capitol began Sunday with a candlelight vigil, an open house and a photography exhibit.

Sunday marked the beginning of Equality Begins at Home week, an event organized by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to draw attention to local gay, bisexual and transgender concerns.

The largest event will be a pride rally on Friday at 2 p.m. at the Nebraska State Capitol.

Organized by the Nebraska Citizens for Equal Protection, the rally is an attempt by gay organizations to work toward nondiscrimination, said Stephen Charest, Citizens for Equal Protection legal counsel.

"We're trying to approach the gay rights issue on a local, grass-roots level," he said.

Charest said the theme of the entire week was for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people to receive equal employment rights.

Under the current system, he said, employers are not barred from discriminating against people because of their sexual orientation.

Charest said his group was working to get that changed by supporting LB69.

If passed, this bill would add sexual orientation to the list of characteristics for which one cannot be discriminated against, which currently include race, gender and religion.

The group is also sponsoring a new statewide organizing effort called the Nebraska Fair Workplace Project.

Charest said this was designed for employers to sign a pledge promising they would not discriminate based on sexual orientation.

"We're trying to emphasize the idea that we are Nebraskans like everyone else," Charest said. "Whether you're gay, bisexual, transgendered or even asexual, you're still a taxpaying, working Nebraskan."

Kerry Lobel, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, will be the rally's keynote speaker.

Deanna Zaffke, a committee member of Citizens for Equal Protection, said Lobel would be a highlight of the rally, as Nebraska was one of only six states Lobel was visiting.

Zaffke said several other large events were scheduled for the week, in addition to Friday's rally.

Little Rock, Ark., Women's Project founder Suzanne Pharr will speak Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in the Nebraska East Union.

Her talk will center on the connections among racism, sexism and homophobia.

Pharr will sign copies of her books "Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism" and "In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation" after her speech.

Zaffke said about 50 people were expected to lobby at the Capitol on Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon in honor of Nebraska Lobby Day.

Several other social activities are also scheduled throughout the week.

Tuesday, a GLBT Youth Visibility Day will recognize gay youth. Students will be given rainbow ribbons to wear, and an under-25 dance will be held at the Culture Center from 7:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.

Zaffke said the social activities were important to help unite community members, but the biggest events will be Thursday's lobby and Friday's rally.

"Grass-roots political action seems to be the way we can actually move state government anymore," she said. "It's a big week."

Senators override veto of school aid bill

BY JESSICA FARGEN
Senior staff writer

After rounds of debate, a jumble of numbers and a deep division between the Legislature and the governor, senators voted Monday to override Gov. Mike Johanns' recent veto of LB149.

Under the bill, Nebraska school districts would receive the \$19.3 million they were overpaid last year, and without LB149, would have to repay this year.

Proponents of the bill hailed LB149's stability and predictability, but in a press conference after the vote, Johanns condemned the 39-7 referendum, saying it was bad public policy and would not stop the issue from arising in the future.

Johanns said he was concerned that taxpayers were given a false impression of LB149 when they were told it would bring stability.

"It just simply doesn't," he said. "Stability won't be there."

Based on an analysis from his budget office, Johanns said out of the 284 school systems, 235 would gain or lose 5 percent or more of state aid in 1999 and 2000.

Johanns said 176 out of 284 systems would receive less state aid next year.

During debate, the bill's sponsor, Hastings Sen. Ardyce Bohlke, said the Legislature's stance had been apparent from senators' approval of the bill through all three rounds of debate.

"I think we've had sufficient debate," she said. "It's the same bill, the same policy, there are no changes."

Freshman Sen. Tom Baker of Trenton voted for LB149 in earlier debate, but changed his vote Monday after visiting with constituents this weekend.

"I believe that the local schools still have to be accountable to the taxpayers," he said. "The sky isn't falling just because we have some unspent money we have to give back."

Despite the division between Johanns and the majority of the Legislature, Johanns said it was time for the two branches of government to move on.

"The Legislature and I are going to put it behind us and will work together on important issues."

Associate news editor Sarah Baker contributed to this report.

Lincoln police arrest three suspects in Allen stabbing

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Barry has been charged with 19 crimes since 1993, including several assaults.

Welch had 17 crimes on his record since 1993.

Irwin-Barry had only one criminal charge on her record: attempting a class two misdemeanor.

The three suspects are expected to be charged in court today.

Casady would not comment on possible motives for the murder, but one of Allen's neighbors said he heard a disturbance in the apartment

Saturday night.

Michael Barrett said he heard a scared, frantic woman in Allen's apartment when he walked by sometime between 10 p.m. and 12 a.m.

"It sounded like she was getting raped," Barrett said Sunday.

Police were able to identify, locate and arrest the three suspects quickly after the body was found.

"The nature of the crime and how it was committed led to quick arrests," Casady said.

The investigation will continue this week, but Casady said he did not expect to make additional arrests.

Speeding fines would increase

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Originally the initiative proposed lowering the speed limit to 70 mph on I-80 east of York, but Bromm said fellow senators and constituents seemed to favor approaching the issue from the law-enforcement side.

"If we are going to have that higher speed limit we really want to encourage people to go that speed," he said.

Bromm said he hoped the higher fines would eliminate the "fudge factor" of motorists thinking they can drive about 10 mph over the limit without being caught.

Eddyville Sen. Jim Jones also favored hiking the fines instead of slowing motorists down.

"I'd rather do this than change the speed limit," Jones said.

Also under the bill, courts would be given the option to impound the vehicles of repeat drunken-driving offenders. Currently, those caught driving under the influence of alcohol lose their licenses for a period of time.

Bromm said the vehicle impoundment was another way, along with license revocation, to ensure that drunken drivers were not on the roads.

Another portion of the bill would make it illegal for anyone to possess an open container of alcohol in the passenger compartment of a vehicle. The passenger compartment would include the front of a vehicle where the driver and passenger sit.

The bill is Bromm's priority bill, which gives it precedence over other bills on the full Legislature's agenda.

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Fax number: (402) 472-1761
 World Wide Web: www.dailyneb.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.
 Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.
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