

Legislature

Bill will share cost of Omaha center

Tax revenue will be used if passed

BY SHANE ANTHONY
Staff writer

The Legislature's Revenue Committee advanced a bill Wednesday that would help pay for an Omaha Convention Center, as well as potential projects in other communities.

LB382, Omaha Sen. Dan Lynch's priority bill, advanced on a 6-2 vote. At least one opponent voiced concern about how the bill would work. But Lynch said the whole state needs the legislation.

"This is a vital and important thing for the state of Nebraska to do," he said.

The bill would return 70 percent of tax revenues generated by the center to pay for its costs. The remaining 30 percent would start a state fund that could be used to match funds for other communities' development projects. No project, including the Omaha one, could receive more than \$75 million under the bill.

Lincoln Sen. Ron Raikes joined Harrison Sen. Bob Wickersham in voting against the bill in committee. He said he opposed the bill because of its tax policy.

"My 'No' vote there doesn't mean that I oppose a convention center or arena for Omaha," he said. "It concerned for me what is and isn't good state tax policy."

Raikes said the bill could create a slippery slope by giving back tax rev-

enues. The state should only gather enough tax revenue to pay for needed services, he said.

Under the bill, the state would only pay if the center generated tax revenues. Omaha officials would have to show the center brought in out-of-state visitors. The amount of money those visitors spent would be multiplied by a factor to determine how much tax revenue the center generated.

Raikes said that could mean the center would receive more "throwback money" when it needed money less and vice versa.

He also said the bill's provisions leave questions about whether any community other than Omaha could meet the criteria to receive support.

Omaha Sen. Pam Redfield disagreed in a statement she released. The bill will go beyond helping revitalize Omaha, she said.

"This legislation will add a very valuable financing tool to any Nebraska city considering construction of a convention center," she said.

Lynch said the money could go to important projects for any community.

He said he appreciated the committee's fairness.

"Right now, I'm about as happy a guy as you can be," he said.

Raikes said he looks forward to making his point during floor debate.

"I'm, in a sense, not disappointed there will be an opportunity to discuss it on the floor," he said.

ASUN

Bill declaring ASUN 'Safe Space' passes

Senators say offices will be an Ally organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students.

BY KIM SWEET
Staff writer

The Association of Students of the University of Nebraska passed a bill Wednesday that declares the ASUN office a "Safe Space" to all students, regardless of sexual orientation or any other "variation from the mainstream."

The bill was written in response to concerns expressed by the Allies Against Homosexuality and Homophobia organization. ASUN President Andy Schuerman submitted the bill after members of the organization came forward declaring the discomfort gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students often feel on campus.

The bill was sent to the Human Rights Committee after the first round of debate two weeks ago yielded a consensus that the wording could be improved.

A new bill stating that ASUN acknowledges its status as an Ally organization was a result of the committee's work.

The bill states that an Ally organization is committed to an environment of personal safety, diversity and mutual respect.

After looking over the new bill, some senators still spoke out against it, saying it would prompt other minority groups to come forward with the desire to create a "safe space."

"It's not our place to align ourselves with a public interest group," said Nate Crocker, Division of General Studies

senator. "We're just endorsing one single group while leaving out a lot of minorities."

Graduate senator Vicki Geiser disagreed.

"An Ally organization is a nationwide viewpoint, it's not a specific institution or group," Geiser said. "We're not supporting a particular group, but instead what concepts this group stands behind."

Schuerman told senators that passing the bill would ensure all its tenets would be applied to all individuals on campus.

The bill states that ASUN recognizes that all people, regardless of any variation from the mainstream, deserve respect and equal human rights.

Charles Cusack, graduate senator, said even though he was not supportive of homosexuality, he was still in favor of the bill.

"I do not condone the homosexual lifestyle," Cusack said. "However, just because a person is gay - that is not their whole person. It is just an aspect of them."

Jason Mashek, arts and sciences senator, said the bill was a step in the right direction in opening ASUN up to all students.

"ASUN is never an open body for a lot of students," Mashek said. "I think that by doing this, it will show we are really trying to go out and tackle tough issues."

"It's a good step we need to be taking."

The bill passed 27-3.

In other business, the senate voted to appoint James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, as the ASUN adviser for the 1999-2000 school year.

Schuerman appointed Paula Allen as the treasurer for the next year.

The senate will meet for the last time in the academic year next week.

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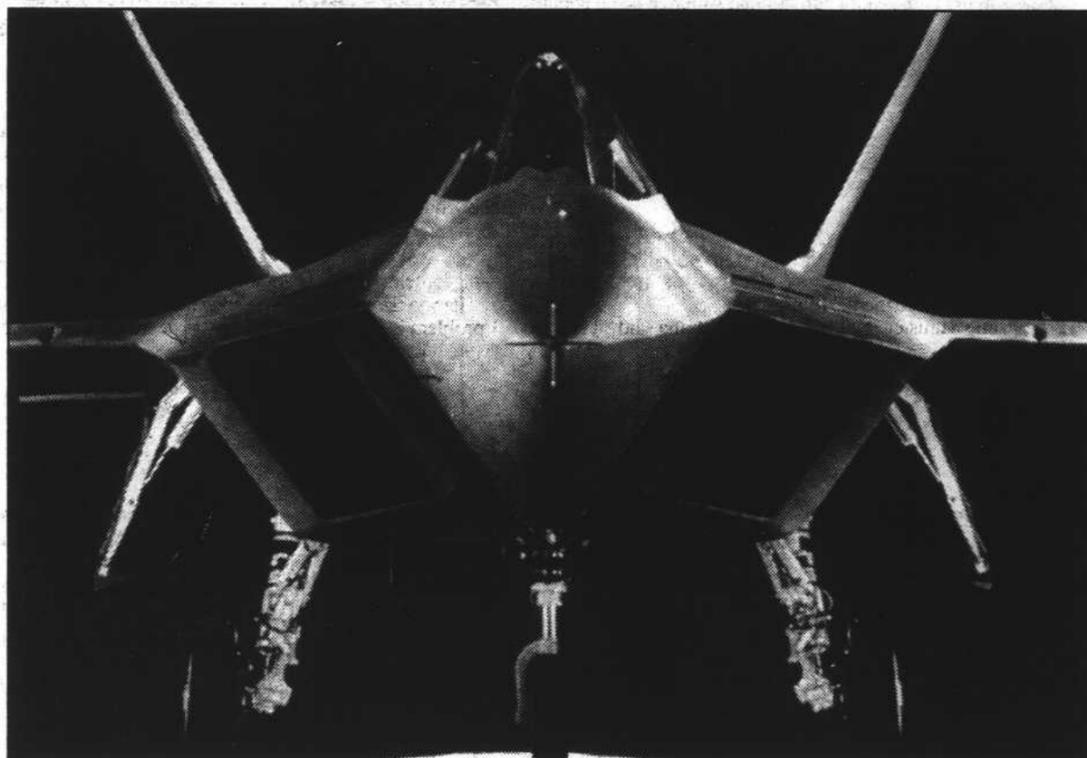
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