

# Student abortion activists remain involved in debate

BY JAKE BLEED  
Staff writer

The debate over abortion rights has raged for decades in America and no end appears in sight.

Activists on both sides of the contentious debate show little sign of compromise, leaving little hope for a conclusion.

But the issues at hand — and defining those issues is also up for debate — are important enough to some UNL students to maintain the struggle over abortion rights.

What keeps these students involved in the fight for or against abortion rights reveals much about how activists work today and the pressures they face.

Nicole Beran has worked on the local and national level against abortion rights since she was in high school.

Although she said her family was anti-abortion, Beran said she became seriously involved after researching the biological facts of the issue.

"When you're looking at something like (partial birth abortions)," Beran said, "you're just wondering, 'How did we get this far?'"

Beran, the vice president of National College Students for Life, said she gained inspiration from those around her working against abortion.

"What continues to motivate me about the pro-life movement is all the grassroots people, the local chapters who never quit working and never give up their beliefs," Beran said. "It's inspiring to me to see so many people care so strongly about the rights of unborn children."

Another source of inspiration for Beran is the need she sees for anti-abortion rights work on campus. Beran said about half of all the abortions in the U.S. annually were among college-age women.

"It is for that reason that I'm so heavily involved," Beran said "I want other women to know they aren't alone,

that there is help out there for them."

But Beran said little attention is paid by the media to the help National College Students for Life tries to provide women. The media focuses instead, Beran said, on the darker issues of the anti-abortion rights movement: the shooting of abortion doctors or the bombing of abortion clinics.

"You don't know how frustrating it is," Beran said. "A lot of time, the coverage that we see is the abortion clinic bombings or, from the other side, the tough, tough issues like the rape and abuse cases. The thing is, our organization is opposed to violence whatsoever. We value all human life."

Erin Hansbrough helped found Students for Choice in 1996 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and spent two years as president of the now-defunct organization.

"The most inspiring thing to me about pro-choice activism in Lincoln are the senior citizens who are incredibly active," Hansbrough said. "They're really inspirational."

Hansbrough said she was hesitant to represent the pro-abortion rights movement because of the movement's diversity.

"I want to make it really clear that I don't feel that I can represent a movement or a philosophy that includes a really diverse population of women," Hansbrough said.

The diversity of the pro-abortion rights movement has not been accurately represented by the media, Hansbrough said, leaving out what she saw as important issues of race, class and sexual orientation.

"I think that once you bring race and class bias and homophobia into the discussion about reproductive rights, your focus automatically has to change," Hansbrough said.

Much of the debate surrounding abortion rights has not focused on those directly affected by abortion rights issues, Hansbrough said.

"My interest now is getting other

reproductive issues into the mix," she said.

But Hansbrough said working locally, while very important, was also very hard.

"I think that for any activist, there's going to be exhaustion and the danger of burnout," Hansbrough said. "I feel like there's a lot of hope lost when we see people like (Gov.) Mike Johanns (who is anti-abortion), for one, who can make it into office and keep climbing politically."

But Hansbrough said the issues at stake in the abortion rights debate were important enough to keep her involved despite the obstacles.

"Energy and hope" are the things she said had kept her committed.

"Activism is an underlying philosophy of life. And I think that's where the majority of day-to-day change comes from," Hansbrough said.

But both Beran and Hansbrough face similar problems as activists. Both women said the perception cast concerning the abortion rights debate was skewed.

While Beran said the media focused too strongly on the extreme sides of the anti-abortion movement, Hansbrough said the pro-abortion rights movement is often portrayed as a view that abortion is the only option.

"One thing that gets downplayed is that abortion is not a best-case scenario," Hansbrough said. "I don't think there's a woman out there who's happy about having an abortion. It's not a fun experience but the alternatives may be worse."

Beran said popular views of the anti-abortion rights movements led to many expecting her to be aggressive and confrontational.

Both agreed the life of an activist is not an easy one, but that the rewards, no matter how far off, are worth it.

"I have as much at stake in this as anyone, as a woman," Hansbrough said. "I think the basics of activism are the same no matter which side you're on."

# Meat-pricing bill advances through second-round debate

MEAT from page 1

amendment suggesting the date change.

Brashear said the possibility of federal legislation to require price reporting could create an unnecessary dual system of reporting. Moving too quickly on LB835, he said, could also leave Nebraska standing alone.

"In trying to be so quick, so out front, so first in the nation, I'm worrying that we're going to be out front and all alone," he said.

The Legislatures of South Dakota and Iowa have passed similar legislation already. But Iowa's law will not take effect until 2000. South Dakota's takes effect in July.

Dierks said action is needed now to pressure the U.S. Congress to pass federal legislation dealing with the same problems.

"If we don't put their feet to the fire, they aren't going to do anything," he said.

Hebron Sen. George Coordsen agreed.

"Someone must take the lead," he said. "Today, in my part of the country, you cannot sell a hog."

The Agriculture Committee sponsored the bill in response to drastic price drops in cattle and hog prices that have forced small producers out of business. The bill's supporters say meat packers have taken control of supply by purchasing meat through contracts. Requiring price reporting, they say, would give farmers a more competitive market.

Opponents have said the problem

is one of supply and demand, and the bill can't solve small producers' problems.

Much of the debate Thursday focused on whether or not Congress will take action, and whether or not state law would work with federal law.

Brashear originally asked for the price-reporting measure to be delayed until May. Plattsmouth Sen. Roger Wehrbein offered the compromise amendment, moving the date to Feb. 15.

Some of Nebraska's Congressmen indicated federal action is on the way.

"Price transparency must be done at the federal level to be effective and to ensure Nebraska is not at a disadvantage relative to other states," said Sen. Chuck Hagel. He said he is working on legislation to give farmers more access to market information.

Sen. Bob Kerrey, in cooperation with Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), Sen. Craig Thomas (R-Wyo.) and Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), introduced legislation in March to require price reporting for cattle, hogs, sheep and boxed beef.

"We are losing our rural way of life," Kerrey said in a statement praising the Clinton administration for saying it would offer price-reporting legislation also. "Mandatory price-reporting legislation will begin to remedy some of the inadequacies in our livestock markets and begin to restore some economic fairness."

Rep. Bill Barrett announced that House Agriculture subcommittee hearings on meat labeling and manda-

tory price reporting will take place next week.

Nebraska's LB835 was originally a series of four bills — including one that would have required meat labeling. That provision is not included in the current bill. But the bill would, Dierks said, add more teeth to a constitutional provision prohibiting packer feeding of animals.

The bill includes fines for packers who try raising animals for slaughter in Nebraska. Fines would also punish packers who pay different prices for animals unless the prices are based on quality or acquisition costs such as transportation.

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers criticized state senators for basing the waiting time on the possibility of federal action.

"The Legislature should do all that it can do," he said, comparing Congress to a small-town sheriff who needed pressure to bring hooligans in line.

But Chambers, without withdrawing support for the bill, cautioned farmers that they must look beyond their fields if they want the family farm to survive. Otherwise, he said, big corporations will run them out of business.

"What people in agriculture are going to have to do is form a coalition with city people," he said. "Sentiment is not going to cut the mustard."

Dierks agreed that LB835 may not be a final solution.

"If (the laws) aren't enforced, then we've got problems," he said.

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