

Legislature proposes bill for convention center aid

CONVENTION from page 1

The state would then return 70 percent of the additional revenue to help defray the costs of building and managing the convention center. The other 30 percent would help fund grants for small-town facilities used for conventions, performing arts or other activities.

Sen. Bob Wickersham of Harrison, chairman of the Revenue Committee, said the state should not pass up a chance to boost its economic development.

"This bill is important because it enriches us in the very best sense of the word: It makes money," he said.

But Chambers said he objected to the bill, saying a convention center alone would not have the economic benefits for which supporters hope.

"I don't think people go to Denver just because they have a convention center," he said.

Chambers also said the bill would not benefit some parts of Omaha — such as the southern and northeastern portions — that he said the city had neglected for generations. To build a convention center and not address conditions in those parts of the city, he said, would be the "death knell" for those areas.

"I'm totally, unalterably opposed to this bill," he said.

Sen. John Hilgert of Omaha, who supports the bill, said the decision to build a convention center would remain a local one. But the state should assist communities that want to build such facilities, he said.

"This bill simply makes the state a willing partner in a project if it is approved," he said.

The Legislature probably will return to the bill on Monday. If the debate lasts a total of eight hours, as expected, supporters would need to persuade 33 of the 49 senators to vote to cease debate and force a vote on LB382.

Legislative Notebook



Gov. Johanns OKs fireworks sales bill for New Year's 2000

From staff reports

Nebraskans will be able to ring in the new millennium with fireworks bought in Nebraska.

Gov. Mike Johanns signed LB621 into law Wednesday morning. The law allows fireworks sales from Dec. 28, 1999, to Jan. 1, 2000. Money generated from sales-tax revenue from fireworks would be put into the state's Fire Insurance Tax Fund. That money is used for fire-prevention activities.

Sen. Adrian Smith of Gering sponsored the bill.

"It's been an interesting process," he said. "This is one of the few bills that will generate more money than it will spend."

Mayoral candidate Wesely values university experiences

WESELY from page 1

friendships he established while being a member of several clubs and organizations such as the Model United Nations group, which met once a year for a two-day conference.

Members of the group would pretend to be representatives of different countries around the world, similar to that of the United Nations.

Usually, the group attracted more than 350 student delegates.

One year, Wesely won the most outstanding delegate to the security council award.

Another popular group — not a student organization — was MECA, a group of student leaders who met once a week at Harry's Wonder Bar at 1621 O St.

The group first met on a Monday night, but eventually met Wednesdays — hence the name Monday Evening Club Amended.

Political discussions all but disappeared during MECA meetings, Wesely said.

"All these student leaders (in MECA) got together once a week and just had a good time.

"We used to have so much fun — we had some great parties."

Joe Nigro, a freshman at the university while Wesely was a senior, said MECA meetings usually involved more talk about Husker football games than anything else.

"We were just silly," said Nigro, who has remained a close friend to Wesely for more than 20 years.

"(MECA) was just a lot of fun."

After Wesely graduated from the university and decided to run for the Legislature, Nigro — then a member of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska — worked with other ASUN members to muster support for Wesely.

Twenty years later, Nigro said, he and Wesely still manage to maintain a close bond.

That bond, he said, usually involves watching Husker football games.

For years, Nigro would play host to New Year's Eve parties, so he and Wesely could see Nebraska play in various bowl games.

The first time Nebraska won the

national championship under former Head Coach Tom Osborne, Nigro said, he and Wesely celebrated for hours.

"When Tom finally won his first national championship — even though it was 4 degrees outside — Don and I and some friends jumped in the car and drove downtown.

"We were leading chants that we were No. 1."

Wesely had a number of opportunities during his time as a college student to take road trips with his friends and watch other memorable Husker victories.

The most memorable games he saw took place in Florida and Louisiana, he said.

Nebraska defeated the University of Notre Dame 40-6 in the 1973 Orange Bowl, and came from behind to beat the University of Florida, 13-10 in the 1974 Sugar Bowl.

"All those games were great," Wesely said. "And to have your friends along with you was special, too."

Even today, Wesely remains an avid Husker football fan.

The former senator had the opportunity on several occasions to meet his favorite player, former NU quarterback Tommy Frazier, while Frazier worked in the governor's mansion for former Gov. Ben Nelson.

"I thought Tommy Frazier was the greatest college football player of all times," Wesely said.

"We got to talk — he was working for Nelson, and I was close to Nelson — so he and I got to talking. He was a great guy, a really nice guy."

Wesely said he was amazed at the amount of punishment Husker players absorbed during a typical game of football.

"Every time I see those guys, I think of when I broke my arm, and some of the hits they take, I don't know how they take it."

The former senator broke his arm while playing in a high school football game at Lincoln Northeast High School.

"I was going down on a kickoff to make a tackle. That was the end of my football career."

Besides his days attending Husker football games and being a

member of various university clubs and organizations, Wesely also wrote briefly for the Daily Nebraskan.

"This is when I discovered I wasn't cut out to be a journalist," he said.

"The reason is, it was hard work, and it required quick writing. And I'm a slow writer. ... Even a column once a week was tough work."

Luckily for Wesely, he realized he wasn't destined for a career in journalism and instead became a justice on the Student Court and chairman of the Committee for Fees Allocation.

Eventually, he became one of the youngest senators in history to serve in the Nebraska Legislature.

Wesely said his advice for UNL students was to learn as much as possible outside the classroom by participating in athletics or student clubs and organizations.

"That experience is invaluable," he said.

He said he hoped his alma mater would pull through for him in Tuesday's election.

"One of the things in looking at the election that concerns me is that the university campus has poor voter turnout.

"Maybe it's because there's a feeling it doesn't make a difference, or that it isn't a direct concern of some of the students," he said.

Wesely helped to pass LB1100 during the 1998 Legislative session.

The bill gives \$5.5 million a year for 10 years to pay for deferred maintenance to NU campus buildings. NU matches that amount.

Wesely also worked to pass an initiative in the late 1980s to put more state money into UNL for research projects.

He said he fought against the addition of the University of Nebraska at Kearney because he was afraid it would weaken the Lincoln campus.

Wesely said his support of the university made him a strong candidate.

"I plan to cooperate closely with the university.

"I see it as a very important part of the city that is underutilized as a resource for a building economy of the city and for addressing problems in the community."

Law & Order

Six men arrested on drug charges

Narcotics officers arrested six men Tuesday night as part of an ongoing conspiracy investigation.

One of the men arrested on state charges is alleged to have brought 1,000 pounds of marijuana into Lincoln, Lincoln Police Officer Katherine Finnell said.

The other five men were arrested on federal warrants, and few details about their arrests were available Wednesday.

The investigation, which started as a result of an undercover buy earlier this year, involved local, county, state and federal drug task forces, Lincoln Narcotics Capt. Duaine Bullock said.

The 38-year-old man was arrested during a traffic stop near 30th and S streets on the charge of conspiracy to distribute marijuana. He gave police a Denver address.

The man did not have any drugs on him when arrested, but earlier in the investigation drugs had been seized, Bullock said.

The investigation also involved methamphetamine and cocaine. The other five men were Lincoln residents.

Bullock said he expected another man to turn himself in on federal warrants Friday.

All of the suspects are expected to be charged in federal court where penalties for drug offenses are stiffer.

Propane tank leaks block campus traffic

Two leaky propane tanks kept students from their cars and firefighters busy on campus for more than two hours Wednesday afternoon.

Around 3 p.m., firefighters were called to Avery Drive between Memorial Stadium and a commuter parking lot where two 100-pound propane tanks had fallen out of a truck, Fire Inspector James Ellis said.

One of the tanks was damaged and began leaking gas after it fell out of the Ferrellgas pickup truck as it turned the corner on Avery. The other tank was empty.

The area around the tanks, including the parking lot, was blocked off while firefighters checked toxicity levels in nearby buildings and developed a plan of action.

After firefighters determined it was safe, they stood the leaky tank on end and bled it dry. Other firefighters stood with hoses at the ready in case of difficulty.

Students parked in the commuter lot could not reach their cars until the tank had been safely emptied around 5 p.m.

Then Ferrellgas took possession of the empty tanks, and firefighters cleared the street.

Compiled by senior staff writer Josh Funk

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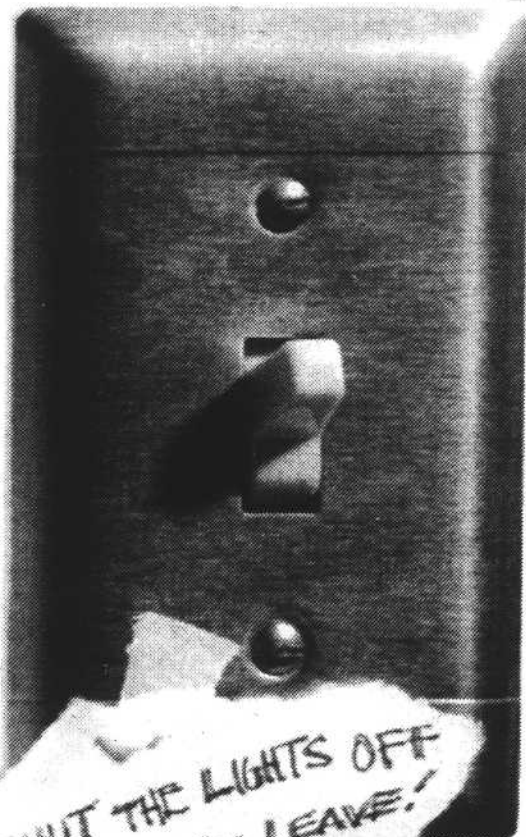
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