

Vermont marriage debate draws 1,000

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — A raging snowstorm couldn't keep more than 1,000 people from streaming into the Statehouse on Tuesday to weigh in on the debate over gay marriage.

Fewer than half that number were able to get into the House chamber where two committees gave people their first opportunity to comment on last month's state Supreme Court ruling that said gay couples must be given the benefits of marriage.

The debate was civil, but emotional.

"Vermont is famous for maple syrup, cheese, scenic beauty and traditional values," said Ruth Goodrich. "Is this (gay marriage) what we want Vermont to be famous for?"

Lee Moffatt of Colchester said

he and his male partner deserve the same rights as opposite sex couples. "I, too, represent the face of Vermont."

People wore their opinions on their lapels, with hundreds of pink circles declaring "I Support The Freedom to Marry" mixing with hundreds of blue ovals stating "Don't Mock Marriage."

Gays and lesbians said they no longer want to be second-class citizens, and those opposed to gay marriages cited scripture and the importance of a traditional family.

Lawmakers heard a variety of suggestions, ranging from granting gays and lesbians the right to marriage, creating a domestic partnership system or adopting a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Union Board votes to ask for increase in student fees

By Cara Pesek

Staff writer

A proposed budget that calls for a 9.8 percent increase in Nebraska Unions student-fee funding for the 2000-01 fiscal year was examined Tuesday night.

The Union Board unanimously decided to request \$2.37 million from the Committee for Fees Allocation.

This is an increase from \$2.16 million for the 1999-00 fiscal year.

The proposed budget would call for a 9.8 percent increase in University Program and Facility Fees, said Gregg Jablonski, Union Board adviser.

However, the general rule is the student fees percent increase should be no greater than the projected increase in tuition for the coming year, said Daryl Swanson, director of Nebraska Unions.

University central administration has projected a 5.5 percent increase for the 2000-01 academic year.

Swanson said there are several reasons for the large increase in next year's

budget.

Health insurance for union employees is one such reason. A 40 percent increase in health insurance costs is expected for next year.

Swanson said this increase is largely because of a surge of the amount of prescription drugs purchased by university employees.

"Health insurance is a big hit that is really affecting this budget," Swanson said.

The proposed budget also allows for several new staff positions. The budget recommends that an assistant cash manager position be created. Swanson said the union has seen an increase in transactions because of the new services the Nebraska Union offers.

The proposed budget also calls for the creation of a permanent night manager position, which would partially replace the student night manager positions.

In addition, new courtesy phones and computer ports for students and new cell phones for union staff have

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caused telephone expenses to increase. "Telephone expenses are hitting us hard," Swanson said.

On Feb. 8, the Union Board will present its budget to the ASUN Committee for Fees Allocation.

The committee can then decide whether to reject, accept or modify the budget. The NU Board of Regents then must approve the budget.

If the committee decides not to allow the Union Board to exceed the 5.5 percent increase, some things will have to be modified.

"It will be painful to cut 4.3 percent from this budget," Swanson said.

CFA grants ASUN wish for fees to cover costs of NU on Wheels

■ Program's taxi driver costs were higher than expected.

By Sara Salkeld

Staff writer

To help pay for NU on Wheels, ASUN President Andy Schuerman requested an increase of \$54,175 in student fees Tuesday from the Committee for Fees Allocation.

Last year's ASUN budget was \$219,209. This year it is asking for \$273,384, \$48,217 of which is for NU on Wheels, a free safe-ride home program.

According to Schuerman, this year's NU on Wheels program was funded primarily by grants. However, these grants were given because the program was still in its pilot phase.

NU on Wheels Student Coordinator Molly Schmitz said part of the tactic used to get some of those grants was that students would want to pay for this program.

NU on Wheels became part of ASUN last semester.

"The student fees will be the pri-

mary funding source," Schuerman said.

A large, unforeseen part of the funding needed for NU on Wheels was driver costs.

During the pilot period, the taxi drivers were paid an hourly rate of \$7.25. The drivers, who usually work on commission, make an average of \$11.50 to \$12 an hour. Because of this wage difference, some drivers were not willing to work for NU on Wheels.

Schmitz said, as a result, students had to wait a long time for their rides.

As the number of cab drivers began to decrease, "approximately one out of five students who called weren't there for the taxi to pick them up," Schmitz said. "This makes the program unsuccessful."

The solution ASUN came up with was to supplement the drivers' hourly wages by paying an additional \$4.25 an hour, putting them at an hourly wage of \$11.50.

Schmitz said that by increasing the wages, they found more drivers were willing to participate in the NU on Wheels program.

The other part of NU on Wheels that requires money is the advertising.

Research done by Schmitz of other universities with similar programs showed that the success of the program was proportional to the amount of advertising done.

The advertising budget of \$13,594 for NU on Wheels includes ads in the Daily Nebraskan, key chains and posters.

In other business, CFA also voted on the University Program Council Budget.

The subcommittee for UPC decided to give UPC a 2.9 percent increase instead of the 7.9 percent increase it requested.

In a subcommittee report, amended twice during the meeting, CFA members said they would like to see an improvement in attendance at UPC events, but also saw the restructuring of its staff as a positive change.

Despite the fact that the group is receiving less than requested, UPC member Adam Kafka still said any increase is good.

"I am pleased to see an increase because it shows that CFA sees the positive direction in which we are heading," Kafka said. "We can still use this extra money for more programming."

Cigarette ruled cause of Lincoln house fire

FIRE from page 1

damage, we had to reconstruct the living room," he said.

About \$30,000 in structural damage and \$10,000 in loss of possessions was reported. The house was a total loss, Schweitzer said.

Lincoln Fire Department Capt. Rick Grell was the first firefighter on the scene and said the entire front of the house was in flames.

"It was tough to get close to because it was so hot," Grell said.

He went into the front door into the living room area to look for residents.

"It was totally involved — flames floor to ceiling," Grell said.

Deputy Chief Rich Furasek of the Lincoln Fire Department said no one was in the house during the preliminary search.

Smithmier said he and a friend, Adam Hassebroek, 16, from Lincoln, approached the house from the front

porch to look for people inside before the firefighters arrived.

"The porch looked like it was going to go down," Smithmier said.

The two, along with another unidentified man, decided to go around the house and kicked in the back door to see if anyone was inside, Smithmier said.

"If somebody was in there, you've got to get them," Smithmier said. "We were looking for the cats, dogs, anything. We would have saved anything."

He didn't hear anyone, and the house was completely filled with black smoke, impairing their vision. Both of them left the house as the firemen came onto the scene, Smithmier said.

The fire was so intense that the house next door, 1436 N. 14th St., suffered heat damage on its northern exterior wall, Furasek said. Part of its siding had melted off the house.

It was amazing how fast the flames engulfed the building, Grell said.

Israelites, Palestinians in stalemate

JERUSALEM (AP) — With only three weeks to go before a crucial deadline in the peace talks, Israel and the Palestinians accused one another Tuesday of not taking the process seriously.

The sides had set Feb. 13 as a deadline for creating the outline of an agreement on thorny issues.

But Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qureia said that after 21 meetings on the final status talks, nothing had been achieved, and it was unlikely the sides would meet the deadline.

Hoping to spur the peace talks, the Palestinians proposed a summit in Davos, Switzerland this weekend. The summit appeared unlikely to take place late Tuesday because Ehud Barak has all but rejected the idea, and President Clinton never expressed any interest in it.

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