

Senate debate lacks tension

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private schools. He said the federal government should experiment with school vouchers.

Stenberg said he supported school vouchers.

"We'll get better education if we have more competition for the education dollar and more choices for parents," he said.

Nelson said he opposes a school voucher program, noting that Nebraskans already may choose which public school their children attend.

"My concern about vouchers is that we not dilute the funds going into public education," he said.

DeCamp, a former state senator, said he supports school vouchers. He said the federal government also should implement a nationwide school testing program and support charter schools.

But Grogan, an Omaha businessman, shot back at DeCamp. Grogan said he supported local control of schools.

Grogan said he supports experimentation with vouchers, "but not at the expense of our public schools."

Hergert said the federal government should not have a role in education. He favors eliminating the U.S. Department of Education and sending the leftover funds to school districts "with no strings attached."

But Moore ridiculed that idea, saying federal money would inevitably come with strings attached.

"You're living in la-la-land if you think federal money can solve property taxes and teachers' salaries," he said.

Moore opposes school vouchers, which he said would drain money from the public schools. But he supports charter schools, which he said are important for educational innovation.

The candidates offered different opinions on Internet taxation and the role of the Internet.

Grogan said a tax on Internet sales would stifle the Internet's growth.

"We cannot do anything to inhibit the growth and the leading role the United States has in the growth of the Internet," he said.

Nelson disagreed, saying it would be unfair to exempt electronic-commerce sales from taxation while subjecting stores on Main Street to the sales tax. That would also erode the tax base, he said.

Moore said government policy should encourage the Internet's growth. Because Internet companies can flourish away from urban areas, he said, rural Nebraska could benefit from the growth of electronic commerce.

Rustad and Stenberg agreed that

the Internet holds potential for rural Nebraska.

But Stenberg warned about the Internet's "dark side." He said the federal government has a role in preventing the proliferation of Internet pornography and the Internet's use by sexual predators seeking to lure children.

Rustad said parents should make sure their children use the Internet wisely.

On the issue of spreading methamphetamine traffic in Nebraska, six of the candidates urged various combinations of tougher sentencing, better anti-drug education, community programs and interdiction efforts in countries where the supply originates.

DeCamp, however, called the drug war "not only a failure, but a disaster" that actually encourages drug use.

The candidates agreed that genetically modified food products are safe and should have access to overseas markets. Trade agreements should allow their entry, they agreed.

Nelson's appearance was unusual for a forum held before the primary. Typically, pre-primary forums or debates include candidates from one party only.

Nelson said before the forum that he anticipated the GOP candidates might gang up on him, but that did not happen.

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Regents approve baseball stadium

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Byrne said.

UNL Chancellor James Moeser said the university is getting the stadium for a bargain price because of the joint agreement.

"We have got a \$30 million complex, two parks, for \$10.6 million," Moeser said. "So basically, for a third of the price, we are getting something that the university would never be able to get on its own."

NU will lease the stadium from the city of Lincoln, which owns the land. The lease will be for 35 years, broken down into seven five-year leases.

It will share rights to the baseball stadium with a minor league baseball team owned by Jim Abel, who also owns Nebco.

Concerns were raised as to how tobacco and alcohol advertising, both of which are prohibited on the collegiate level but are common in minor league venues, would be handled in the stadium. Byrne said rotating billboards would allow the ads to be switched for NU games.

In other business:

■ NU President L. Dennis Smith voiced his concerns on Gov. Mike Johanns' veto of nearly 40 percent of funds approved by senators for NU's

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James Moeser
UNL chancellor

health care expenses. Smith lobbied the regents to ask senators to override the veto as soon as today's legislative session.

Smith said the plan will need around \$15 million in order to avoid bankruptcy. If no override is passed, a tuition increase may be an option.

Regent Drew Miller said other alternatives exist, such as cutting administrative costs before looking at tuition increases.

Every 1 percent tuition is increased generates \$900,000 for the university.

Smith said there are other means to get the funds.

"We may need to get some from the Legislature on the next budget request," he said. "We may need to get some from internal savings of some form."

"It is a very large sum of money."

■ The regents approved student fee increases at the university's four cam-

puses. Regent Chairman Chuck Hassebrook voted against the increases, citing his disapproval of the increase of student fees by 5 percent.

Student Regent Joel Schafer said there were no objections to the increase in fees at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

■ The regents got a surprise update and presentation on Class.com, an NU project that offers high school courses over the Internet, by Sen. Bob Kerrey and company President John Blair.

Kerrey and Blair reported on the company in both open and closed sessions.

The company has grown, and Blair said schools in Kansas and Kentucky have used Class.com for online schooling, and more states will follow.

"It has enormous potential in my view to be a national leader," Moeser said. "It has great promise for us."

Behlen observatory draws stargazers

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brightness," Lee said. "It works very well for that."

Nebraska's telescope, which was installed around 1972 in an abandoned World War II bomb-making factory, is one of the few in the region and in the country, Lee said.

With the emergence of bigger telescopes, 30-inch ones like the one housed in the Behlen Observatory, are closing down across the country in favor of larger models, Lee said. But with new instruments and a new computer controlling the telescope, Lee said he is optimistic that the telescope won't be at risk.

With constant reallocations and budget worries, Lee said funding the observatory is always a concern.

But funding for the observatory has become more secure since the physics and astronomy department has included the telescope in its budg-

et.

When the observatory was its own budget item, it was constantly vulnerable to cuts by the university, Lee said.

Today, Lee maintains the observatory himself — painting the steps when necessary and getting rid of rodents that sneak in when the observatory is locked up.

But Lee said he hopes the university will continue to support the observatory and its telescope.

"I think there is more a niche for a telescope like ours," he said.

That's the hope of amateur astronomers, who flock to the observatory for the public nights when it's clear.

For them, the observatory is one of the many places in Nebraska that is considered a prime seat for star-viewing.

Along with bringing their telescopes to the Mead observatory, amateur astronomers trek to Mahoney

Park to look at the sky.

In July, a location near Valentine provides some of the darkest sky in the nation. Amateur astronomers bring their equipment and have an all-out "Star Party" during the last week of the month.

Humlcek said the hobby unites the young and old.

Those who have been engaging in the hobby for years want to pass their skills to the young so they can help watch and keep track of potential asteroids that could hit the Earth.

"We're more interested for the young to pick it up," he said.

Preserving Nebraska's 30-inch telescope is vital for amateur and professional viewers, Humlcek said.

"Using large telescopes, you can't see things you can with the 30-inch." Passing on the hobby of stargazing is even more important, he said.

"There's so much stuff going on up there," he said.

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