

ASUN draws attention to itself
by tackling explosive issues

Stronger Presence

by Veronica Daehn

For better or worse, Andy Schuerman said his administration made students more aware of student government.

Schuerman, former Association of Students of the University of Nebraska president, urged the senate to pass a bill that would have the Government Liaison Committee lobby against a Legislative bill that would have banned aborted fetal tissue research in state institutions and introduced legislation making the ASUN office an Allies safe space last spring.

While Schuerman had support for these measures, he also had opposition.

Looking back, the former president said he knows his administration's actions had a positive effect, but it's unfortunate some students became disenchanted with ASUN.

"I think about the fetal tissue debate over and over again," Schuerman said. "I regret people felt so turned off by ASUN because of it. I hope now they see we need to stay involved."

A controversy erupted in November when the Omaha World Herald reported that the University of Nebraska Medical Center was using aborted fetal tissue for research on the neurodegenerative diseases including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

In response to a bill in the Legislature that would have banned aborted fetal tissue research in state institutions, Schuerman drafted a bill that said the University of Nebraska-Lincoln student government supported the research.

ASUN senators voted to pass the bill at two separate meetings. About 100 students, faculty and community members showed up at the first meeting to voice their views on the bill.

Those opposed to ASUN lobbying the Legislature in support of the research said the group was not representing their interests.

But the fetal tissue debate was not what Schuerman says is his administration's legacy.

The former president said making the ASUN office an Allies safe space last spring was important.

"It's an important issue," he said. "By no means did we believe that passing this legislation automatically made our office a safe space. But I hope it showed a commitment

throughout the year to underrepresented or oppressed groups."

Schuerman also made strides with domestic partner benefits. This year has seen one of the most comprehensive efforts in bringing equal benefits to gay and lesbian partners of UNL employees, Schuerman said.

Another program Schuerman's administration helped keep going was NU on Wheels, a safe-ride-home program. NU on Wheels was started by two UNL students who attended the 1998 LeaderShape program.

The safe-ride-home program began Oct. 14 and had enough donations to operate the full academic year.

Schuerman said finding a way to make the program permanent was a yearlong effort.

In November, ASUN senators voted unanimously to change bylaws and make NU on Wheels one of the programs they use student fees to fund.

Had senators not voted to adopt the program, it would have run out of money in May.

Rachelle Winkle, former ASUN first vice president, said she hoped her administration was remembered for giving a voice to more students.

"We tried to get underrepresented students to be better represented," she said.

People who lived off campus recognized ASUN, and people who lived on campus were forced to see that student government has an impact, Schuerman said.

Former ASUN Second Vice President Trisha Meuret said she disagreed with about 90 percent of what her administration did. But the issues senators discussed made students more aware, she said.

"Even though I didn't agree with the answers, at least the issues educated a lot of the students," Meuret said.

Meuret disagreed with the fetal tissue legislation and ASUN's stance on domestic partner benefits.

While satisfied with what he did in office, Schuerman said he wishes there could have been more tangible results.

But he knows students felt comfortable in ASUN while he was there. Several underrepresented students told Schuerman they were sad to see him go.

"That made me feel good," he said. "It showed the commitment we had to all people. By no means do I presume we had a lasting impact, but for one year it was better."

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Trisha Meuret

former ASUN second vice president

—ELECTION 2000—

Senate race has kept state on toes

by Brian Carlson

FREMONT — In their final debate before the May 9 primary, the four Republican Senate candidates rehearsed their differences on the budget surplus and school vouchers, while offering contrasting views on the role of the GOP in their decision making.

Only about 45 people showed up on Friday evening to watch Attorney General Don Stenberg, Secretary of State Scott Moore, Scottsbluff agribusinessman Dave Hergert and former state Sen. John DeCamp debate on the campus of Midland Lutheran College.

Despite the apparent lack of interest among Dodge County Republicans, the 2000 Senate race has been anything but dull.

When Nebraska rang in the year 2000, the Senate race seemed predictable. Two-term U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey, a Democrat, would run for reelection and make it difficult for the Republican Party to capture the final statewide office that has eluded it.

Meanwhile, Stenberg would mount an uphill challenge to defeat Kerrey, assuming he could defeat his only GOP challenger, Lincoln dermatologist Elliott Rustad, for the party's nomination.

But Kerrey, an unpredictable politician ever since his election as governor in 1982, announced in early January that he was considering leaving the Senate. After a few weeks of public rumination, he decided not to seek reelection.

That opened the floodgates.

On the Republican side, former Nebraska Football Coach Tom Osborne considered a run for the Senate before settling for a bid for the 3rd Congressional District seat in Central and Western Nebraska.

U.S. Rep. Doug Bereuter also considered a Senate run before deciding to seek re-election to his 1st District seat.

Lt. Gov. Dave Maurstad joined the GOP race, only to drop out after less than two weeks. Omaha businessman George Grogan, who had already entered and dropped out of the race once, re-entered. Moore, who had previously pledged his support to Stenberg, also joined the fray.

On the Democratic side, Kerrey's retirement from the Senate opened the door for former Gov. Ben Nelson's return to politics.

Just days before the March 1 filing deadline, Nelson announced he would run. This will be the second Senate race for Nelson, who lost to Chuck Hagel in 1996.

But the political landscape still was not settled.

In April, Grogan dropped out of the race again, saying he wanted to protect his family from media scrutiny and "personal attacks."

An Omaha World-Herald article had detailed Grogan's three previous failed marriages, a bankruptcy and what several former business colleagues described as his unfair treatment of employees and business partners.

A week later, Rustad dropped out, saying he did not want to run a negative race that would divide the Republican Party.

Then Grogan announced he had never officially left the race but had merely suspended his campaign. He still welcomed votes, he said, although he would no longer actively campaign.

Meanwhile, Stenberg was still the GOP front-runner, but his opponents were frustrated because they believed he was unwilling to participate in debates.

Moore, struggling to gain the footing to surge past Stenberg, accused the attorney general of "entering a four-corners offense and stalling."

But Stenberg had a ready explanation. In what could come to be regarded as a landmark abortion case, he was

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preparing to defend Nebraska's ban on "partial-birth" abortions.

On Apr. 25, Stenberg stood before the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., for oral arguments in Stenberg vs. Carhart. The court's ruling on the constitutionality of Nebraska's law is expected by late June.

To those who questioned the appropriateness of a U.S. Senate candidate arguing such a case, Stenberg said it was his job.

With the oral arguments said and done, Stenberg was ready to give the Senate race his primary attention. The four candidates debated farm policy on Thursday night in Lincoln, then went to Fremont for a debate sponsored by the Dodge County Republicans.

The candidates offered differing views on the importance of party loyalty.

Moore said he, like Hagel, would occasionally "buck the party" when he believed it was the right thing to do. He said he was "an American first, a Nebraskan second and Republican third."

"Nebraskans expect someone who will do what's right," he said.

"I will reach across party lines and do what's right for Nebraska. Americans seem fed up with bitter partisanship."

Moore noted that Nelson has been successful in earning Republican votes in the past. In order to win in November, Moore said, Republicans will have to reach out to "Kerrey Republicans, (former U.S. Sen. James) Exon Republicans and Nelson Republicans."

But Stenberg said he would be a loyal Republican. As he explained it, Nebraskans are tired of "big-government" politicians like President Bill Clinton, who favored a large tax hike and nationalized health care while neglecting the national defense. He said Nebraskans support politicians with the philosophy of former President Ronald Reagan.

"The basic test for anyone going to Washington is whether that person will represent Nebraska values," he said. "The people of Nebraska generally are of the Republican view."

Hergert, who has focused his campaign on the need to address the struggling agricultural economy, agreed with Stenberg that party unity was important.

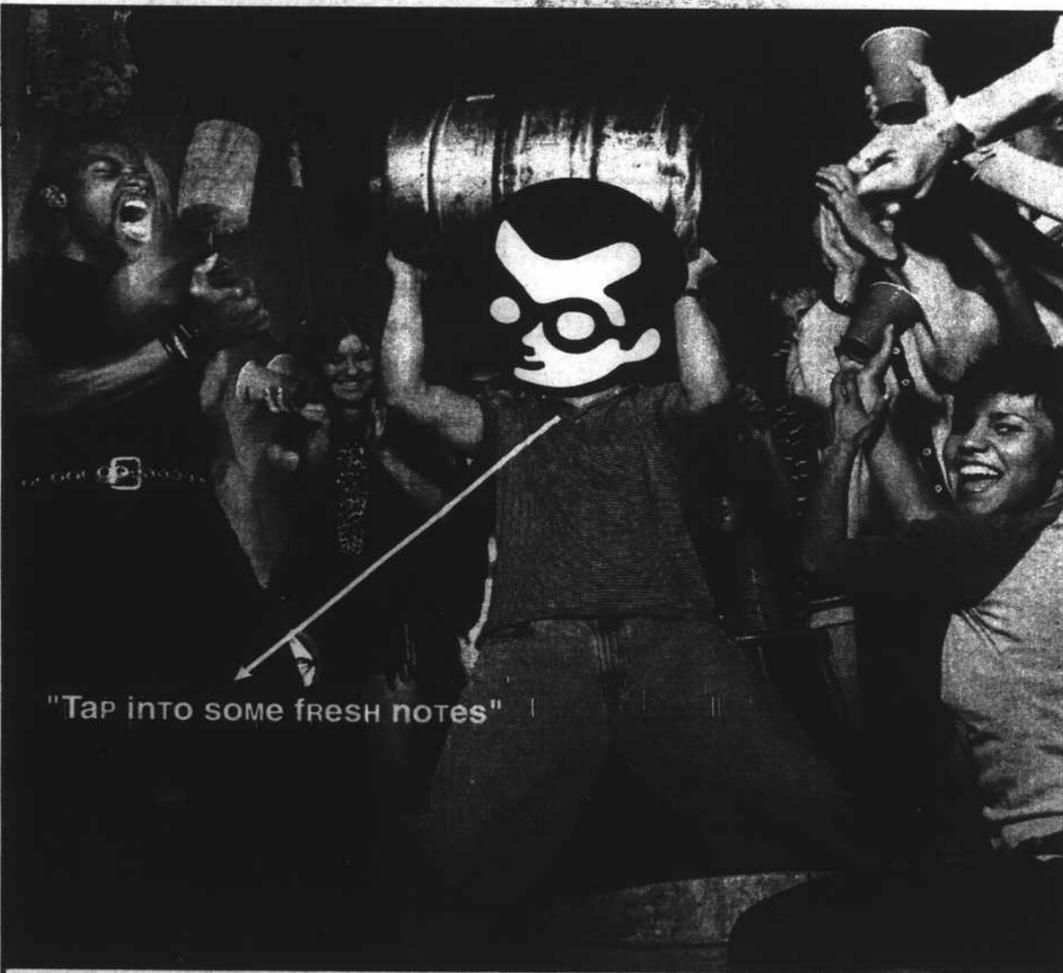
"If you want to get your goals accomplished, you have to abide by the rules of the Republican Party," he said.

DeCamp touted his record as "the great compromiser" during his 16 years in the Legislature.

"In the Congress of the United States, you have to reach compromise," he said. This applies to all members, he said. "Be they a Benny Nelson or a Donny Stenberg."

DeCamp, a controversial political figure, has acknowledged his "one-in-a-trillion" chance of victory. But he could play an important spoiler role in the primary by siphoning votes from one of the other candidates.

He also has provided levity to the campaign trail, whether by referring to the other Senate candidates as "Scotty," "Donny," or "Benny," or by joking that Moore was the best coffee-server during his time as a page at the Legislature.



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