

Legislative Notebook

Bill to spend tobacco bucks on research center

A new research center devoted to public health may find a home at UNMC, if a bill proposed by Sen. Nancy Thompson of Papillion passes.

LB623 would create the Nebraska Center for Education and Applied Research in Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Money from a settled lawsuit between several states and tobacco companies would fund the project.

Charged with ensuring excellence in public health, the center would coordinate community health programs, conduct research and provide technical assistance and training to community health officers.

In addition, the bill would funnel the tobacco settlement money to local health departments to promote and improve public health.

Minimum wage may jump

Nebraskans who work for minimum wage will be receiving bigger paychecks, if a bill proposed by Chris Beutler of Lincoln passes.

LB633 would boost the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15 by April 1, 2002.

But Nebraskans wouldn't have to wait until 2002 to see healthier checks.

Beginning on Oct. 1, the

wage would gradually begin inching toward the \$6.15 mark.

DNA testing to be part of state law

Convicted criminals who maintain their innocence may have another opportunity to prove their case, if a bill proposed by Ernie Chambers of Omaha passes.

LB659, known as the DNA Testing Act, would formally acknowledge the importance of DNA testing in court proceedings.

More importantly, the bill would allow convicted criminals to file a petition requesting forensic DNA testing of material related to their crimes.

Bill could put a lid on campaign contributions

If Chris Beutler of Lincoln gets his way, state politicians will have to run leaner campaigns because of new lids on contributions.

LB681, introduced by Beutler, would put a \$2,000 cap on individual contributions to candidates and a \$10,000 lid on contributions from committees, businesses and unions.

The new campaign guidelines would apply to candidates running for state offices including the governor, attorney general and secretary of state.

Compiled by George Green

Legislature

English language focus of change

BY GWEN TIETGEN

A resolution to change the state's violation of the U.S. Constitution swept through the Education Committee on Tuesday.

The committee unanimously decided, with some minor amendments, to advance a resolution that would clarify school English language requirements to the general file.

The Nebraska Constitution's violation has existed since 1923, when the U.S. Supreme Court decided part of the state's constitution violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

This violation in Article I, section 27 of the state constitution says that "public, private, denominational and parochial schools" are to be taught in English.

The amendment was added to the constitution in 1919 because of the anti-German sentiment during World War I.

Twenty-two other states also passed state laws that made teaching any other languages unconstitutional.

If passed, the resolution would remove the "English-only" requirement in schools.

In other words, English would remain the state's official language, but its use wouldn't be mandated in the state's public or private schools.

The legality of the "English-only" requirement has been challenged only once, in 1924, with Myers vs. the State of Nebraska, which made it unconstitutional for the state to interfere with a parent's wishes in private school settings.

And though the constitution was contested, it wasn't changed. The Legislature's first attempt to address the constitutional violation came in 1995 with the formation of a Constitution Revision Commission.

In 1997 the commission submitted a legislative resolution that would have removed the constitution's "English-only" requirement, but it was defeated because legislators ran out of time to iron out the details.

In 1999, Sen. Elaine Stuhr of Bradshaw sponsored a similar resolution to change the constitution, which passed 48-0 in the Legislature.

But when Nebraska voters showed up at the polls in May 2000, every county defeated the resolution that would have removed the "English-only" requirement from the state constitution.

Stuhr attributed the defeat to voters' misunderstanding of the amendment.

"We're actually giving private schools more flexibility by allowing them to teach how they want with this resolution," Stuhr said. Dick Herman, chairman of the Constitution Revision Commission from 1995-97, testified in favor of the resolution.

"Nobody paid any attention to it until the commission did," Herman said. "Then, the people of the state thumbed their noses up at it."

Herman said he was shocked and disappointed when voters defeated the resolution.

"I have no idea why they voted it down," Herman said.

*"Nobody paid any attention to it until the commission did. Then, the people of the state thumbed their noses up at it."*

Dick Herman  
chairman, Constitution Revision Commission from 1995-97

Law & Order

Vering pleads innocent to December DUI

NU wrestler Brad Vering, 23, pled innocent to a charge of driving under the influence of alcohol in Lancaster County Court on Tuesday.

Vering was picked up for running a red light shortly after 2 a.m. on December 22.

Vering's blood alcohol content was measured at .155, the Lincoln Police Department reported. The legal limit is .10.

Vering was cited but not held for his offense. The Lancaster County Court set Vering's trial date for Feb. 23.

Attacker flees after stealing woman's purse

A purse snatcher got away with the contents of a 59-year-old woman's handbag Monday, Ofc. Katherine Finnell said.

Finnell said the culprit approached the woman from behind and grabbed her purse.

Because the purse handle was still around the woman's arm, Finnell said the attacker had to bring the woman down to one knee before she let go.

The attacker then ran, Finnell said. The victim did not report any injuries.

Compiled by Jill Conner

Kuwaiti court denies suffrage to women

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KUWAIT — Kuwait's highest court rejected a case Tuesday in which activists had pleaded for women to have the right to vote and run for office in this oil-rich state.

"The court has decided to reject the case," said Judge Abdullah al-Issa, president of the Constitutional Court. He offered no explanation.

Frustrated with the 50-seat legislature that voted down an emiri decree and a bill for suffrage in 1999, women activists and their male supporters took their case to the courts.

In July, the highest tribunal refused to hear four of these cases on a technicality.

The case rejected Tuesday was filed by a Kuwaiti man, Adnan al-Issa. He sued the elections department for failing to register the names of women, including his wife, on voter lists.

An Election Challenges court referred his case to the Constitutional Court for a definitive ruling.

"I expected this ruling. The orientation of the whole state is fundamentalist and parliament has rejected suffrage before," al-Issa said.

"I don't know why it was rejected," said Farida al-Dashti, a women's rights activist and lawyer. "I'm shocked. I was optimistic when I woke up this morning."

Though a few other suffrage cases are pending, it was unlikely they would be viewed differently by the courts. But women who want a political say can still press for their rights.

Liberal lawmakers have proposed a new women's political rights bill. No date has been set for debate. The house has a large bloc of Muslim fundamentalists that joined forces with conservative tribal representatives to kill a similar bill in 1999.

Extremists and conservatives believe women are better off staying home than mixing freely with men at election campaigns.

Al-Issa's lawyer, Kawthar al-Joan, had argued that the ruler, Sheik Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah, and the Cabinet support women's political rights. The only power that doesn't is Parliament, which "only represents half of the nation," the lawyer said.

Kuwait's 1962 constitution grants equal rights to men and women. However, an elections law, of the same year, bars women from voting or running for office. It also gives voters the right to contest voters' lists in their own district.

Oklahoma executes third in January

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

McALESTER, Okla. — A man who fatally stabbed, beat and sexually molested a 7-year-old girl in his apartment was executed by fatal injection Tuesday night.

Floyd Allen Medlock, 29, told police "something clicked" in his mind before he killed Katherine Ann Busch in 1990.

Medlock's execution was the third in Oklahoma this month. Five more are scheduled over the next three weeks.

Police said Katherine Busch spent her last evening alive pedaling her tiny bicycle around the apartment complex where she lived with her mother, Gina Ford.

As she rode, police said, she saw Medlock in an apartment where she and her mother used to live, and stopped to talk. He made her macaroni and cheese.

About 6 1/2 hours later, police found Busch's nude body — raped, beaten, stabbed — in a drugstore garbage bin three blocks away.

Medlock turned himself in and later pleaded guilty to first-degree murder.

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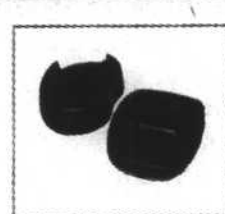
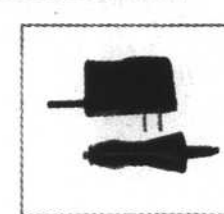
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