#### Daily Nebraskan Thursday, January 18, 2001 Page 7

MARY RILPMA ROSS

# Legislature could give health boost

## Proposed bill would support statewide health services by providing strategies and conducting research.

#### **BY GEORGE GREEN**

Community health centers across the state may get some extra help from the University of Nebraska Medical Center if a bill proposed by Sen. Nancy Thompson of Papillion nasses

LB623, introduced by Thompson on Tuesday, would create the Nebraska Center for Education and Applied Research in Public Health on the University of Nebraska Medical Center campus in Omaha.

The center would provide Nebraska communities with health planning strategies, personnel training and technical assistance.

In addition, the center would be charged with conducting research and measuring, recording and evaluating public health statistics

"This will take Nebraska healthcare to another level," Thompson said.

Tom O'Connor, a spokesman for UNMC, said the university is willing to do whatever it can to improve the health of Nebraskans.

"Public health is an important issue for Nebraska," he said.

But, he said, UNMC had not fully reviewed the project and wants to learn more about it.

## Legislature

eral states and tobacco companies would fuel the project.

Thompson earmarked \$550,000 for the center, which she estimated would employ about six people.

The initial investment will lower health care costs in the long run, she said, because gradually, Nebraskans will be learning how to live healthier lives.

And, she said, the research group will bolster Nebraska's health care system by identifying areas where the state has failed to meet health care needs.

A spokeswoman for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services said she could not comment on the bill because the department had not yet reviewed it.

The new center and the dollars behind it will also make Nebraska eligible for more federal research grants, Thompson said.

Nebraska would receive extra federal money because the center would allow the state to conduct research projects on more complicated and expensive issues.

"Right now, we're not strong enough to manage these initiatives," she said.

Thompson said the center might tackle research topics dealing with new ways to prevent people from smoking or better ways to

keep new mothers informed about the dangers of allowing babies to sleep on their backs, which can cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

The center would put extra emphasis on anti-smoking projects because of its ties to tobacco settlement money, she said.

The benefits of these projects and grants would not just fall upon Omaha, but spill over into the rest of the state, she said.

When the center learns about new ways to improve community health, it will be able to distribute the information to local health care centers, she said.

The process of diffusing information would involve peer training, data trading and seminars about health issues, Thompson said.

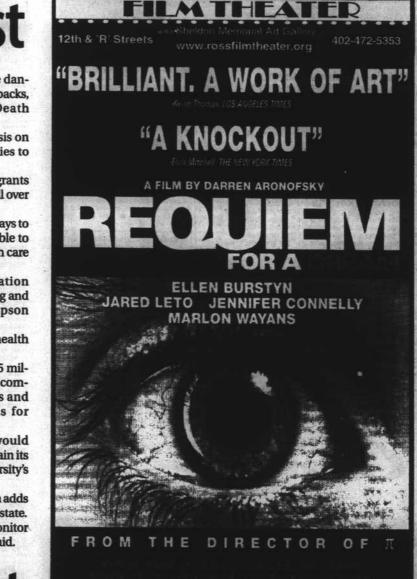
LB623 proposes more than a new health center at UNMC.

The bill also suggests throwing \$26.5 million of tobacco settlement money into community-based mental health services and mental health treatment programs for inmates, parolees and juveniles.

Beyond these programs, LB623 would send another \$200,000 to UNMC to sustain its Public Health Program, one of the university's masters degree programs.

Thompson said the masters program adds valuable healthcare professionals to the state.

"It gives them the skills to assess, monitor and implement health programs," she said.



# Oil tax bill killed, schools won't lose out

## The tax on stripper oil is eliminated allowing funding to go toward education.

#### **BY GWEN TIETGEN**

State senators killed a bill Wednesday that would have lowered oil and gas tax rates and resulted in a half-million dollar loss to public schools

The bill, introduced by Sen. Thomas Baker of Trenton, would have lowered the severance tax on properties producing more than 10 barrels of oil per day to 2 percent.

It also would have eliminated the 2 percent tax on properties producing less than 10 barrels per day. Producers call such oil "stripper oil".

All the oil properties in Nebraska produce stripper oil.

Oil production in Nebraska has continued

# Legislature

said the continuation of the severance tax continues this downward trend.

But revenue from the severance tax goes to funding Nebraska's schools. Because of the continuing decrease in oil production, proponents said schools will suffer revenue loss.

Bill Sydow from the Nebraska Oil and Gas Conversion Commission said eliminating the tax on stripper oil properties sends a friendly message to oil companies.

"This is an industry that nobody likes in general anyway," Sydow said.

"Getting rid of the severance tax would invite people to come into the state through a favorable tax system."

Jim Gohl, a land owner from Culbertson, said getting rid of the tax would be good for the economy

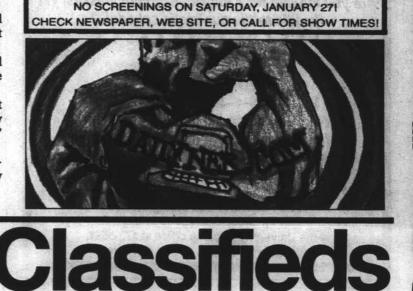
"With the tax, less money is spent by land owners in the community, hurting the community," Gohl said.

The Revenue Committee heard the bill and indefinitely postponed it - effectively killing it for this session.

Sen. Bob Wickersham of Harrison and chairman of the Revenue Committee, said the bill had very few benefits.

"The bill reduces revenue to the permanent school fund and would call for raising property taxes to compensate that revenue," Wickersham said.

"We're unwilling to shift taxes from one taxpayer to another when these taxes are already lower than neighboring states."



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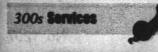
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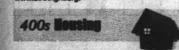
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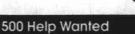
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