

Legislative bill thwarts creation of fake IDs

LB574 would bring Nebraska IDs and licenses up to par with other states.
BY GEORGE GREEN AND JILL CONNER

On Monday, the Legislature moved one step closer to thwarting the schemes of fake ID suppliers.

The Transportation and Telecommunications Committee moved a bill to the floor of the Legislature that would change the face of Nebraska driver's licenses.

LB574 would abandon Nebraska's ID in favor of new digital ID, complete with a bar code that could provide an array of information including the individual's age, driving record and more.

"We recognize that there is a large problem with the current license," said Scott Berryman, a legal aid to Sen. Curt Bromm of Wahoo.

He said people who make fake IDs could easily tamper with the Nebraska license, one of only five state licenses that are laminated paper, as opposed to the newer credit card-like IDs of other states.

Because the ID is prone to criminal activity, Berryman said area businesses frequently had to

struggle with deciphering real IDs from fake ones.

More importantly, he said the committee heard complaints from Nebraskans who were refused seats on airplanes and the opportunity to open bank accounts because the Nebraska ID appeared unofficial.

The state also has struggled with underground manufacturers who create fake IDs and sell them to illegal immigrants, Berryman said.

To foil fake ID dealers and to ensure Nebraskans access to airplanes and banks, the new ID would include micro-printing, digital pictures and a magnetic strip that could hold a bastion of personal information.

But, he said, a few people had voiced concerns that "Big Brother" could put too much personal information on the ID.

Joel Schafer, president of Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, said the bill moved the fight against underage drinking in the right direction.

"It's much better than piling on punishments," he said.

The student government opposes LB114, which would increase penalties for minors caught possessing alcohol.

Schafer said the state fre-

quently forced students into environments where entertainment opportunities were few and far between.

Moreover, he said it prints an ID that invited fraudulent use.

"It's a failing of the system that driver's licenses are so easy to fake," he said.

Linda Major, director of NU Directions, an anti-binge drinking group, said her group supported the bill because 12 percent of UNL's students reported using a fake ID in the past 30 days.

If the state can put a lid on these fakes, she said, it also will stop some minors from drinking.

"It's a problematic system that needs to be updated and its time has come," she said.

Fake IDs are used for purchasing alcohol and tobacco products, but Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady said they were also used in cases of forgery and impersonation.

The new lamination process would make fake IDs obvious, said Beverly Neth, director of the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, along with providing better protection of drivers' identities.

Lincoln bars and liquor store owners also say the new IDs are a necessary improvement.

Chris Davey, the alcohol man-

ager for Super Saver at 27th and Cornhusker Highway, said a common way to make a fake ID is to pull back the lamination of a current Nebraska ID and switch the birth date.

Davey said he had caught about three fake IDs a month.

"It's so easy to fake these Nebraska IDs," he said. "It's scary to me."

Bill Jergensen, owner of P O Pears, 322 South 9th St., said Nebraska IDs were easy to fake in a number of different ways.

Jergensen said the digital system would allow businesses to electronically swipe cards and find out information about the patron immediately.

"(The new system) will add to our ability to check (customers) for height, weight, color of hair and so forth," he said.

One other benefit to the new system, Neth said, is that it would put Nebraska in the same league as other states already using the technological driver's license system.

Nebraska is one of five states currently not using digital licenses, the other states being Oklahoma, Alaska, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

"We can kind of leap frog from being the very last to being the very best," Neth said.

California exhausts emergency budget

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO — California has exhausted a \$400 million emergency energy fund, but Gov. Gray Davis on Monday ordered that other state money be used to continue buying power while lawmakers try to resolve the state's energy crisis.

Davis' decision to continue buying power will keep the lights on for the time being in energy-strapped parts of the state, but his administration would not say how much money was available or how long short-term energy buys would remain possible.

The state began buying electricity 12 days ago under emergency legislation that set aside the \$400 million. All that money was spent by late Sunday, Department of Water Resources spokesman Mike Sicilia said.

Davis said last week he would use department money to make emergency power purchases if the \$400 million ran out. Lawmakers, meanwhile, were waiting Monday for an audit ordered by the Public Utilities Commission to assess the finances of Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas & Electric Co., which say they have lost a combined total of at least \$12 bil-

lion to soaring wholesale electricity prices.

The state's 1996 deregulation law prevents them from passing on costs to their customers, and suppliers are refusing to extend credit to the utilities.

Assembly Minority Leader Bill Campbell said lawmakers need to see the audit to know whether the reported losses were inflated.

"What does that audit mean for the legislation we are drafting to solve the rate crisis?" he said. "We can't craft solutions if someone's playing hide the ball."

Davis spokesman Roger Salazar said the audit was not finished.

One proposal under discussion would have the state issue revenue bonds to cover the utilities' debts and make their customers pay the money back over 10 years, at rates of 9 percent for residential customers and 7 percent to 15 percent for businesses.

In exchange, California would be granted long-term options allowing the state to buy low-priced stock in the utilities. If the price goes up, the state could sell the stock and use the profits to help pay off the bonds.

Utility officials have declined to comment on the proposals.

Hour-long chats help students learn

A UNL program allows for international students to practice English with a peer.
BY MARGARET BEHM

Students who are looking for someone to talk to could get lucky this week.

The English Conversation Program pairs an American student with an international student to chat.

Juan Xu, one of the coordinators, said the program is a great experience for international students.

"It helps the students adjust to life here academically and non-academically," she said.

The partners will meet for the first time Thursday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Ballroom.

After that, the students will get together on their own to talk for an hour. When and where they meet is up to the students, Xu said.

Haifeng Jig, who participated in the program in the fall, said that finding an hour a week to spend with his partner was easy.

"When we met, we usually had dinner together," said Jig, a graduate student in computer science. "So it wasn't any extra cost of time."

The program gives international students an opportunity to practice their English speaking skills with one of their peers, Xu said.

This is important because many international students struggle with the language, she said.

"When we met, we usually had dinner together. So it wasn't any extra cost of time."

Haifeng Jig graduate student

"Many international students have problems with communicating with other people," she said.

During the hour, the international student has the opportunity to ask the American student questions about American culture.

For example, Xu said that in her homeland of China, it is inappropriate to ask a question while the professor is teaching. But in America that is acceptable, she said.

"If they could have an American friend, they can help them know what is acceptable," Xu said.

Seventy-six international students have signed up for the program, Xu said. So far, 66 American students have signed up, she said.

Although the deadline to apply is today, applications can still be picked up from the International Affairs Office, 420 University Terrace.

Jig said one of the best outcomes of the program is friendship.

"Both international students and American students can make friends, so that's a good opportunity,"

Work allows exploration of Czech roots

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"We are trying to preserve oral histories as well as other documents and memorabilia," Saskova-Pierce said.

The Czech Heritage Materials Preservation Project seeks to create a digital archive of Nebraska Czech histories, photographs and letters.

The group is working with the UNL Nebraska Consortium for Regional Humanities office to get the materials available to the public via the Internet.

With such an ambitious project in the works, Saskova-Pierce said the Undergraduate Creative Activities and Research Experiences grant had been wonderful.

For Kimbrough, the UCARE funding has given her a chance to earn money while doing something she loves.

"Last semester I had another job, but this spring my only job will be the translation project," she said.

After hearing about the undergraduate research opportunity, Saskova-Pierce approached Kimbrough, offering to be her faculty sponsor for the program.

Saskova-Pierce said she and others had noticed Kimbrough's dedication to the study of the Czech language.

Last year when Kimbrough was crowned Nebraska Czech Queen, she met the Czech ambassador to the United States, Alexandr Vondra.

After conversing with the diplomat in his native language, Vondra extended an invitation for Kimbrough to attend a dinner in New York City sponsored by the American Friends of the Czech Republic.

With financial assistance from the Lincoln Czech Club and the local Czech Language Foundation, Kimbrough attended the black-tie gala wearing the traditional Czech costume that was made especially for the Nebraska

Czech Queen pageant.

While at the event, Kimbrough met the president of the Czech Republic. Standing out from the crowd in her ethnic dress, Kimbrough was approached by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who immediately began conversing with her in Czech, Albright's native language.

The event was a highlight of her year, Kimbrough said. As a Nebraskan of Czech descent, Kimbrough is proud of her heritage and hopes to participate a second year with the UCARE program to continue her research project.

Kimbrough said she was thankful for the opportunity the Czechs of Nebraska gave her and she saw her research project as a way to give back to the Czech community.

"She has spent so many hours listening and translating," Saskova-Pierce said.

"She has the patience and a real gift for the language."

Students gain knowledge through work

UCARE from page 1

uates an extensive research experience.

"It is a win-win situation for everyone involved." UCARE Project Coordinator Laura Damuth said.

"While other institutions may offer (one-year) undergraduate research opportunities, the UCARE project is the only two-year program I know of."

UCARE pairs undergraduates with faculty sponsors. The participating students assist the faculty members during their first year in the program and work on an independent project in the second year.

"The two-year design allows undergraduates to form strong mentor relationships with faculty members," she said.

"It helps students approach

their independent projects with confidence and also to earn some money for their work."

First-year participants are eligible to receive up to \$2,000, while second year students can earn up to \$2,400 to aid in their research.

The funding for the program comes from the Pepsi Endowment, an agreement the university has with Pepsi-Cola, which gives UNL more than \$24 million over 12 years.

In its second year of operation, the program involves nearly 100 students. Damuth said she would like to double the enrollment next year.

"Right now one of our biggest priorities is making sure everyone knows about it," Damuth said. "We want students to know UCARE is not just for science majors."

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Laura Damuth said. UCARE Project Coordinator

The program has a wide range with participants with research projects in chemistry and biology as well as architecture, art history, journalism and theater.

Undergraduate students who are interested in the program can get more information at the Web site www.unl.edu/ucare. The deadline for applications in Feb. 16th.

Damuth said the idea for the project came from Senior Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

Richard Edwards and Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs David Brinkerhoff.

Edwards said he was pleased with the program, noting it was designed to help both students and faculty members.

"This is a good way for students to take advantage of the fact we are a research university," Edwards said.

"Teaching and research are often set against each other, but they really go hand in hand."

City works to lighten winter woes

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"The roads are in very poor condition," Schwarten said. "The morning rush is going to be a little tricky for everybody."

Interstate automobile accidents were common, including one where a car slid into a state patrol cruiser while troopers were investigating another accident, Schwarten said.

None of the accidents were life-threatening, he said.

Lincoln Police reported 82 accidents — none life-threatening — from 6 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Monday.

When winter weather hits, Schwarten said, people need to drive slowly and not follow other cars too closely.

Schwarten said the State Patrol, as well as the State Department of Roads, is advising people not to travel today unless absolutely necessary.

Air travel was delayed

Monday at Lincoln Municipal Airport, with nearly every flight canceled for some of the afternoon and others expecting delays through the evening, said Sgt. Rick Horsley of the Lincoln Airport Authority Police Department.

Most flights got out of Omaha's Eppley Airfield without a hitch, said Dale Washburn, airport operations supervisor.

Some passengers experienced delays, but staff members worked through the day and night to keep one of Eppley's runways clear.

Some UNL students may have unknowingly ditched classes Monday, when at least two Omaha television stations, WQOW-TV Channel 6 and KMTV-TV Channel 7, broadcast the University of Nebraska-Lincoln canceled classes for the day.

Dan Cupak, WQOW-TV director of marketing and promotion, said his station erroneously broadcast UNL classes were canceled for about 10 to 15 minutes Monday.

"We weren't reporting it all day," he said.

Some radio stations also announced UNL classes were off.

Sally Buchholz, interim director of UNL Public Relations, said her office was alerted to the erroneous broadcasts early Monday morning.

She attributed the mis-broadcast to possible confusion between UNL, which canceled only evening classes, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, which canceled classes all day.

Buchholz contacted the Office of Academic Affairs about the error in case some students heard the broadcasts and unknowingly skipped what they thought were canceled classes.

"They'll want to catch up on whatever they missed," she said. "I would think that their professors would be very understanding of the fact that on a day with hit-and-miss weather, you can expect that some of your students are going to have to catch up."

Lagging pay becomes priority

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tion association, cited several states that are working to improve salaries.

He said Iowa was close to establishing a minimum salary requirement just shy of \$30,000, and Kansas and Colorado teachers paid their teachers \$4,000 more on average than Nebraska.

For all the suggestions offered, Raikes noted that proponents tactfully dodged the question of how to finance the increases.

Instead, he said they left financing up to senators who would begin wrestling with the dilemma later this week.

With expensive price tags in mind, several senators have proposed bills that fulfill only some of the task force's recommendations.

LB560, introduced by Sen. Chris Beuter of Lincoln, would adopt one of the task force's proposals to extend teacher's contract days.

The bill doesn't specify how the teachers would use an extra five workdays, but its sister bill, LB643, which will come before the committee today, would propose specific guidelines for

teachers to use their in-service days.

Griess, of the state education association, said both bills would help struggling teachers. But he cautioned that extended contract days should not be a substitute for increasing teacher pay.

"This is not a raise," he said.

Sen. Marian Price of Lincoln also departed from task proposals, but stuck with the day's theme of improving teacher salaries when she introduced LB576.

The bill would tweak the state aid formula to reward districts that employ teachers with higher levels of education.

Virgil Home, a spokesman for Lincoln Public Schools, said the bill would help teachers and students.

"The higher the degree, the greater the likelihood that learning will increase," he said.

Ironically, the Legislature has been working for years to retire experienced teachers who get fatter checks in the hopes of trimming district budgets.

Raikes also took a new and complicated approach to teacher pay when he introduced LB744.

The bill, presented to the committee Monday, would fun-

"The higher the degree, the greater the likelihood that learning will increase."

Virgil Home Lincoln Public Schools spokesman

nel state aid to districts that demonstrate need for the money while passing over wealthier districts.

Some districts in Nebraska generate enough revenue without state aid to run their schools, while other districts couldn't survive without state dollars.

Raikes' bill also assures that districts spend their state dollars on teacher pay.

Griess said the bill would bail out sparse districts that don't collect much money from property taxes. These taxes are the backbone of school funding, he said.

Forcing districts to be accountable for their spending is also essential, he said.

"(The bill) has some concepts we like a great deal," he said.

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