

Finding warmth: Yasmin McEwen reveals a photograph of a girl's journey to find herself
In Opinion/4

A romance for Valentines: UNL Theater produces 'The Philadelphia Story'
In Arts/5



NU gymnastics has an extra bounce to its step and pop to its punch with these three freshmen
In Sports/Thursday/10



Divvying tobacco dough sparks interest

■ The state's \$1.2 million chunk has been earmarked to cover health care, and groups are fighting for their part.

BY GEORGE GREEN

It must be the money. When state senators gathered Wednesday to divvy out an estimated \$1.2 billion, people showed up. A lot of people showed up. Testifiers, aiming to get a piece of the financial pie, overflowed a joint hearing of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services committees. Tobacco companies will hand over

the hefty chunk of change to the state as part of a settlement deal meant to refund the state for the Medicaid bucks it spent on ailing smokers.

Lawmakers have earmarked the tobacco dollars for improvements in health care and health care costs. Since the settlement, health care groups and agencies have been vying for the money.

But dollar signs weren't on everyone's mind Wednesday. Kenny Olson braved icy roads for a different reason.

Olson went to the hearing to tell senators about his wife, Eleanor. Eleanor has Alzheimer's disease.

For a while, Olson said, he could take care of his wife without too many

Legislature

problems.

But, he said, as age began to sneak up on him and Eleanor's disease progressed, it became more difficult to give her the care she needed.

Eventually, Olson said, he was forced to move Eleanor to a nursing home.

But a month away from his wife proved to be too much.

"It was the most miserable month of my life," he said.

With the help of respite services, Olson said, he was able to bring Eleanor

home.

These services help keep disabled and sick people at home under the care of a friend or family member as opposed to moving them to nursing homes.

"In 1941, we exchanged vows, and we promised to always take care of each other," he said.

And Olson said respite services help him fulfill a promise to the woman he loves.

LB692, introduced by Sen. Dennis Byars of Beatrice, would help people like Olson by funneling more state money into respite services.

Byars said this money will not only support caregivers, but it will ultimately save the state money.

The alternative to respite services, he said, is to pack the sick and elderly into nursing homes.

These facilities drain large sums of money from Medicaid accounts, Byars said.

Committee members in the joint session heard testimony on eight bills, including the bill introduced by Byars, geared towards improving Nebraska's health-care system.

And according to all in attendance, the state needs the aid desperately.

Byars said Nebraska is in the bottom tier in terms of state spending on public health.

Please see TOBACCO on 3

Grading system is still unusual

BY LINDSEY BAKER

With the approval of a plus-minus grading system, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is still not following the norm.

Though it has been argued by Academic Senate members as a more standardized grading system, only four of the Big 12 Schools - the University of Missouri-Columbia, the University of Colorado at Boulder, Iowa State University and Texas Tech University - use the plus-minus grading system.

Five use a straight letter grading system with no pluses or minuses; one, Baylor University, has UNL's previous plus-only grading system and the University of Kansas in Lawrence uses a mixture of grading systems throughout its colleges.

The five which use the straight letter grading system are the University of Oklahoma, the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Oklahoma State University and Kansas State University.

The University of Missouri-Columbia instituted an optional plus-minus grading system with a weighted A+ in 1988 and moved to a standard plus-minus system - with a 4.0 A+ - in the fall of 1998, said Christian Basi, a MU news spokesman.

Russ Zguta, chairman of Mizzou's faculty council, said student opinion was the main force behind making the plus-minus mandatory.

"The students became concerned about the fact that it was not being uniformly used," Zguta said. He said he supports the plus-minus grading system because it provides professors with a more accurate grading scale.

Kathy Jones, a registrar at Iowa State University, said the plus-minus grading system has been in place at the institution since 1981. She said the faculty moved to the plus-minus from a straight letter system to grade more precisely - an issue students supported as well.

"I think (the students) would complain if it went away," she said.

Daryl Mehl, an Oklahoma University academic records specialist, said though Oklahoma uses a straight letter grading system now, he wouldn't be surprised if in five years the university switched to the plus-minus scale.

Brigid Spackman, a University of Texas at Austin

Please see GRADING on 3



Jennifer Lund/DN

SCRAPING ICE: Commuters woke up Wednesday morning to sleet and snow, which caused a sheet of ice to freeze on their cars. Some wielded ice scrapers while others waited while their cars' defrosters melted the ice.

Bill targets discrimination

■ Sen. Ernie Chambers proposed LB19, which would try to stop employers from showing bias towards homosexuals or heterosexuals.

BY GEORGE GREEN AND JILL ZEMAN

They can't get married.

But if a bill proposed by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha passes, gay people might be able resist discrimination in the workplace.

LB19 would stop employers from discriminating against employees based on their sexual orientation.

The bill's protection halo would cover heterosexuals and homosexuals and would apply to all business with more than 15 employees, including State of Nebraska employees.

The University of Nebraska already includes sexual orientation in its nondiscrimination policy.

Angela Clements, a junior political science major, said the bill would firm up Nebraska's Nondiscrimination Act.

And, she said, the bill would put Nebraska on track with the rest of country.

Former President Clinton issued an executive order prohibiting discrimination against people in federal offices, and the governor of Iowa also issued an executive order barring discrimination based on sexual orientation in his state, Clements said.

But, she said, Nebraska's policy would expand beyond the other measures by protecting heterosexuals and homosexuals.

"It's not just targeted to homosexuals," Clements said.

Despite its umbrella coverage, Guylla Mills, lobbyist for the Nebraska Nonpartisan Family Council, said she wasn't impressed with the bill.

Mills said she has consistently been opposed to same-sex marriages and employment protection

Legislature

on the basis of sexual orientation.

She said she didn't think Chambers' bill would pass this session.

"People in the state of Nebraska are not in favor of this," she said.

If the bill is passed, Mills said, it would infringe upon businesses' rights of freedom and would cut into the hard-fought battles her group has participated in year after year.

Mills was the driving force behind last year's passage of Initiative 416, which bans same-sex marriages, domestic partnerships and civil unions.

"Fundamentally, employers have the right to choose the parameters of the character of the people they employ," she said.

Economically, Mills said, gays don't need to be protected.

In her own research, Mills said she found out the average income for subscribers to a gay newspaper to be \$60,000, well above the national average.

"If that's true, it means they don't need economic protection," she said.

Mills said the conditions people of color face shouldn't be compared with that of gays.

She said when TV actress Ellen DeGeneres announced she was a lesbian, she compared herself to Rosa Parks, "coming to the front of the bus."

Mills said she was outraged by DeGeneres' comparison, as were several of her black friends.

Mills said discrimination happens every day, and there's no way laws can be devised to prevent each instance.

Please see EMPLOYERS on 3

Juvenile system comes under fire

■ LB272 establishes a justice institute to address the needs of local and state agencies.

BY GWEN TIETGEN

The juvenile justice system in Nebraska could use some help.

And with the passage of a bill that would establish the Nebraska Juvenile Justice Institute, help could be on its way.

LB272, introduced by Sen. Nancy Thompson of Papillion, would provide coordination between state and local agencies responsible for juvenile justice systems and would use research to identify and address the needs of the system.

The bill was held in the Judiciary Committee on Wednesday.

Currently, coordination between probation services and the Office of Juvenile Services is nonexistent, and no state database exists for juvenile justice statistics, said Denise Herz, assistant professor of the UNO

Legislature

Department of Criminal Justice, in her written supporting testimony.

The institute would be placed within the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The UNO criminal justice department is ranked as one of the best programs in the country and the institute would be advantageous to the department, Herz said.

The bill has two main goals - to address the large number of minorities and women in Nebraska correctional facilities and to provide better training to juvenile justice practitioners.

Though the current training of juvenile justice practitioners is adequate, Herz said, the bill would identify the gaps in training and seek to fill these gaps.

One of those gaps is the increased number of female

Please see JUVENILES on 3