

# Legislature passes bill to lower alcohol limit

BY GWEN TIETGEN

A bill to lower the alcohol concentration limit from .10 to .08 for a charge of Driving While Intoxicated passed through the Legislature on Tuesday.

LB166, introduced by Sen. Carol Hudkins of Malcolm, faced a point-proving discussion by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha during the bill's final reading.

Chambers originally intended to return the bill to select file, one step back in the legislative process.

Upon discussion of the motion, Chambers made an amendment to change the bill's alcohol limit of .08 to .15.

Chambers cited an article that appeared in the Omaha World-Herald on Feb. 21 that charged G.W. "Woody" Egermayer, a member of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and an insurance company executive, with drunken driving.

Chambers said Egermayer, an "elitist," registered a .203 blood alcohol level when he was given a breathalyzer by police.

"Elitists," then, Chambers said, should be given a limit of .20, while the "slobs," or common people, should be subjected to the .08 limit.

To reach a compromise, though, Chambers proposed a .15 alcohol limit — between the "slobs'" current limit of .10 and the "elitists'" apparent level of .20.

After discussing the news article, Chambers withdrew his amendment and the bill passed 43 to 1. Chambers abstained from the vote. Sen. Jennie Robak of Columbus voted against the bill.

The Legislature was under pressure to pass the lower limit by the federal government, which looks more favorably on states that have lower alcohol limits when divvying highway funds.

Millions of dollars were at stake.

"The governor has said he will sign the bill," Gov. Mike Johanns' spokesman Chris Peterson said. "He has expressed concern about the heavy-handedness of the federal government in requiring states to do this or risk financial penalty."

States that fail to adopt the .08 standard by 2004 would lose 2 percent of their highway money. The penalty would grow by an additional .2 percent each year up to 8 percent by 2007. States that adopt the standard by 2007 would be reimbursed for any lost money.

Nebraska adopted the .10 standard in 1971.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

# Bush's address lauds education

BUSH from page 1

mention private school vouchers, a contentious plan many Democrats oppose claiming it will further cripple suffering public schools.

Bush's budget also beefs up spending on Social Security and Medicare.

Medicare would fall into line with 99 percent of private health care plans by covering prescription drugs for poor seniors, Bush said.

The poor would also get more affordable health care through refundable tax credits, he said.

Bush said a new Patients Bill of Rights, another tenant of his plan, would assure that extra dollars go to health professionals of patients' choice.

"My budget puts a priority on access to health care without telling Americans what doctor they have to see or what coverage they must choose," he said.

Rep. Lee Terry of the 2nd Congressional District said Bush "hit a grand slam" with his health care proposals.

He said the bill of rights had "widespread support" among many Nebraskans.

The president shelled out more dollars when he suggested increased spending on military benefits and environmental programs.

Despite the billions Bush proposed to spend, he also maintained his budget could pay down the national debt and give a massive tax break to all Americans.

Breuter said if the U.S. economy remained "not a spectacular economy, but a healthy one" it could balance the tax cut with some increased spending for earmarked programs like education.

More importantly, Terry said, Bush's budget "holds the line on spending" by limiting overall government increases in spending to 4 percent.

Bush said last year's 8 percent increase in spending was too much.

*"My budget puts a priority on access to health care without telling Americans what doctor they have to see or what coverage they must choose."*

President Bush

"The people of America have been overcharged and on their behalf, I am here asking for a refund," he said.

Bush's budget couples the 4 percent increase with a \$2 trillion debt-reduction plan and a \$1.6 trillion tax cut.

The debt reduction would be the largest debt payoff in history, Bush said.

Democrats say his tax cut would be monumental but dangerous to the country because it could jeopardize important social programs.

Bush defended his tax cut, though.

"The surplus is not the government's money, it's the people's," he said.

Bush adhered to his campaign promises throughout his talk, trumpeting the importance of tax cuts and educational spending.

He cut a new path, though, when he suggested abolishing racial profiling.

"It is wrong and we must end it," he said.

Ending racial profiling has received broad support from both sides of the political line. But some of his other proposals like the tax cut have rammed into intense partisan opposition.

With these circumstances in mind, Bush ended his hour-long talk with a call for unity.

"Our generation must show courage in a time of blessing as our nation has always shown in times of crisis ... And if we work together, we can prove that public service is noble," he said.



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