Nebraska Proposal Would Require Pledge In Classrooms

BY GRANT SCHULTE Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A majority of the State Board of Education backed a proposal Thursday that would require Nebraska public schools to make time each day for students to recite the Pledge of

Allegiance. Five of the board's eight voting members voiced support for the proposed rule, and are expected to decide Friday whether to set a

public hearing on the issue. The proposal would require the pledge in all classrooms, kindergarten through 12th grade, in the presence of an American flag. Students who object could stand or sit silently while the pledge is recited, but would have to "respect the rights of those pupils electing to participate," according to the proposal.

"I'm not big on mandating

things, but there comes a time and a place when some things are of such high importance that they should be mandated," said board president Jim Scheer, of Norfolk. I believe every student in the state of Nebraska should be able and willing to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

Nebraska lawmakers considered a similar bill this year by Lin-

GOP Senate Candidates Debate In Neb.

NORFOLK, Neb. (AP) — Republican candidates for U.S. Senate turned their focus more to platforms and current events than personal attacks during a debate in Norfolk.

Four Republicans seeking the GOP nomination participated in the debate: state Attorney General Jon Bruning, state Treasurer Don Stenberg, state Sen. Deb Fischer and Schuyler investment adviser Pat Flynn.

The candidates all declared their support for such conservative platforms as federal spending reductions and repeal of the national health care reform law, the Lincoln Journal Star reported. They also all stated support for stand-your-ground self-defense laws, which give people latitude to use deadly force rather than retreat from danger. That type of law has been much discussed following the February fatal shooting of an unarmed teenager by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida.

The tone of the Wednesday night debate was decidedly more civil than one last week in Gering, in which Bruning asked why Stenberg requested to "follow" Bruning's 14-yearold daughter on the social media website Twitter. Bruning characterized the request as "creepy" and "weird." Stenberg responded that he doesn't handle his own Twitter count, and that site has more than 1,700 followers.

In Wednesday night's debate, candidates were asked to identify what they admire about one another.

Bruning said he admired Stenberg as "a family man." Stenberg praised Bruning as "a great political fundraiser." Fischer was lauded for her legislative leadership, while Flynn won approval for his determination.

'Hookah Smell' **Riles Businesses**

RAPID CITY (AP) — A cosmetics shop, a massage business and a weight-loss center are among the businesses that are sharing downtown office space with a couple of tobacco parlors — and their owners don't like it.

"Closed due to stinky hookah smell" proclaimed a handwritten note posted Wednesday in the window of Susan Grubl's cosmetics store, accompanied by a drawing of a frowning face.

"I thought the building was on fire, it smelled so bad," Grubl said. "I don't feel like I should open my business while I can't stand to be there. How can I expect my customers to be there?

The hookah lounges cater to people who like to use water pipes to smoke tobacco. Two have opened within the last month in the historic brick Buell Building in downtown Rapid City, and other tenants say the lounges are filling the building with smoke.

Heather Payden-Williams, owner of the Art of Massage, a business upstairs from the lounges, said the smoke has left her with reddened eyes and a "massive headache."

"I'm selling wellness, so I don't appreciate having to drift through a smoke cloud to get my work done," Payden-Williams told the Rapid City Journal.

Spencer Seljeskog, the owner of one of the hookah lounges, Sahara Nights, said he is working to get a new ventilation system installed inside his business.

His lounge is located in the basement of the two-story building. The second, Classified Hookah, is

on the ground floor. The building's owner, Ron Bazac, said he was working to remedy the problem. Bazac lives in the Miami area.

coln Sen. Tony Fulton, but it failed to advance out of the Legislature's Education Committee. The state education board unanimously supported that measure.

Board members are expected to vote Friday on whether to set a public hearing on the issue, likely in May. They would vote on the proposal later in the year.

Board member Molly O'Holleran of North Platte said she has heard concerns from teachers and school administrators that the rule could lead to lawsuits against individual districts. O'Holleran said the pledge decision should be left to individ-

"I personally don't believe this is the place for a rule," O'Holleran said. "I've been so impressed with the state board that we haven't mandated other things. ... Is it really necessary to mandate this?"

But board member Robert

Evnen of Lincoln said lawyers have vetted the language, and the rule would not force students to recite the pledge. "I think this would pass consti-

tutional muster," he said. "I don't even think this is anywhere close

School officials modeled the proposal after a 2002 New Hamp-

shire law and a bill introduced in the Nebraska Legislature. A threejudge panel of a federal appeals court upheld the New Hampshire law in 2010. The judges ruled that the voluntary, teacher-led recitation did not constitute state-sponsored religion.

The Nebraska board's original proposal would only apply to students in kindergarten through the eighth grade.

Still, the Nebraska chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and a group representing rural school districts expressed skepticism.

Laurel Marsh, executive direc-

tor of ACLU Nebraska, said her group planned to speak against the measure at the hearing, and she questioned whether it would create conflicts for teachers. Marsh noted that the proposal doesn't specify whether teachers would have to lead in the pledge, and doesn't give them a way out if

they object. Schools should do everything they can to inspire patriotism," she said. "But you cannot coerce patriotism."

Many outstate Nebraska schools have already incorporated the pledge into their daily routines, said Jon Habben, executive director of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association.

Habben said he supported the sentiment behind the proposal, but questioned the need for a

state mandate. "I do understand the interest in ensuring that our kids learn the lessons of patriotism," he said. 'We certainly don't disagree with that. But generally, our members are already doing these sorts of things, particularly in the elementary schools."

The bill is LB990.





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