

Nebraska

Lawmakers Take Up Bill That Would Tighten Abortion Standards

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Supporters and opponents of abortion rights clashed Wednesday over the intent of a bill that would impose tougher regulations on certain Nebraska abortion providers.

Planned Parenthood Voters of Nebraska and Nebraska Right to Life each rallied dozens of people to pack a legislative hearing on a measure by Sen. Beau McCoy of Omaha that would reclassify facilities that perform five or more abortions a month as ambulatory surgical centers. Nebraska law requires an ambulatory surgical center to be licensed as a health clinic and to have a written agreement with a hospital in which patients could be transferred in case of an emergency beyond the capabilities of clinic staff.

McCoy, an outspoken abortion opponent, said he sponsored the measure from the perspective of husband and father of three daughters to ensure that Nebraska women have proper medical care.

"I think we would agree we would want anyone who would enter the doors of an abortion clinic to hopefully have the same standard of care they would receive in any other clinical environment across Nebraska," he said.

But vocal abortion-rights advocate Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha called the legislation part of a national trend by abortion opponents to limit women's access to abortion. There are three abortion centers in the state that perform five or more procedures a month: Planned Parenthood clinics in Omaha and Lincoln and the Bellevue Health Center.

Rob Moore, regional organizer at Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, said similar legislation has been used in other states to limit access to clinics, most notably as part of package of strict abortion laws passed in Texas in 2013. The Texas laws are pending in a federal appeals court. Opponents say they would close more than half the state's abortion clinics if enforced.

"They're trying to put in as many restrictions as they can

to make them so cost-burdened some they can't be open," Moore said.

Advocates, including representatives from Nebraska Right to Life, Nebraska Family Alliance and Nebraska Catholic Conference called the measure a safe and reasonable request.

The eight-member judiciary committee questioned how much a new license would cost facilities in equipment and renovations, but neither supporters nor opponents could provide specific numbers.

Lincoln attorney Jeff Downing said an emergency transfer agreement would have avoided a lawsuit he filed for a client who was hemorrhaging internally after an abortion. Downing said cost should take second place to safety.

"Wouldn't we want that equipment to be in place if it's doing invasive procedure that can cause the type of hemorrhaging that has almost cost some Nebraska women their lives?" Downing said.

A second measure by Sen. Bill Kintner of Papillion would require abortion clinics to

post signs reiterating the importance of informed consent, as well as require the Department of Health and Human Services to update its website with links to ultrasound images and counseling centers.

Kintner compared the signs to notices in bars warning pregnant women about fetal alcohol syndrome or in tanning beds educating teens on skin cancer.

Kintner carried similar legislation last year, but the bill did not advance out of committee.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska has said that such signage raises free-speech concerns because the government would be dictating a message on a private clinic's wall.

Falkstrom of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland said if politicians mandate signage, the bill should also require crisis pregnancy centers to post signs saying no one can force a woman to continue her pregnancy to full term, either.

Neither bill has a priority designation, limiting the chances that either will pass this year.

Beanbag Rounds Used To Subdue Man

RAPID CITY (AP) — The suspect in a weekend shooting in western South Dakota is now in custody after police fired beanbag rounds to subdue him.

The Rapid City Police Department says the 69-year-old male suspect was arrested Wednesday after an altercation with police. Authorities suspect the Sturgis man fired the shot that seriously injured a 29-year-old man near a bar Saturday in Rapid City.

Authorities say law enforcement had been in contact with the suspect throughout the investigation and believe the shooting is the result of an accidental discharge of a firearm.

Police say the suspect agreed to meet with officers on Wednesday in a parking lot, but after a discussion, he exited the vehicle and threatened to take his own life with a knife. He reportedly also threatened officers.

Officers then fired several non-lethal beanbag rounds and arrested the suspect. Charges against him are pending.

Neb. Bill Would End Fathers' Rights

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The biological fathers of children conceived through a sexual assault would lose their parental rights under a proposal reviewed by Nebraska lawmakers.

Sen. Tommy Garrett of Bellevue presented the proposal to the Judiciary Committee on Wednesday. Garrett says women who are sexually assaulted often feel pressure to terminate their pregnancy or put the child up for adoption to keep their assailant out of their lives.

Garrett says 29 other states have passed laws to end fathers' parental rights in rape cases. Supporters of the bill say 25,000 to 32,000 pregnancies occur because of rapes each year.

Garrett says the bill (LB358) allows fathers to reclaim parental rights if their convictions are overturned. He says the bill still needs some work, but creates important protections for women.

Ricketts Signs Carbon Monoxide Bill

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts has signed a law to require carbon monoxide detectors in many new homes, starting in 2017.

The new law approved on Wednesday will require the detectors in any residence sold, rented or issued a building permit on or after Jan. 1, 2017.

Sen. Sara Howard of Omaha has said she introduced the measure in response to past carbon monoxide deaths and close calls.

The city of Wahoo became one of the first in Nebraska to require detectors in 2006, after a father and son died in their home from poisoning.

Carbon monoxide has no color, smell or taste and produces symptoms often mistaken for the flu.

Man In Standoff At Aberdeen Hotel

ABERDEEN (AP) — A man has locked himself in a room at a northeast South Dakota hotel, forcing players and fans of the Class B basketball tournament who had planned to stay there to find other accommodations.

Aberdeen Police Chief Dave McNeil says the man is wanted in connection with local crimes and has a handgun. The *American News* reports that crisis negotiators are at the Western Ramkota in Aberdeen and have talked with the man by phone.

Police responded to the hotel around 7:15 a.m. Wednesday. The newspaper reports officers were visible on the hotel's rooftop and state troopers were stationed outside Wednesday evening.

Patti Woods of Brown County Emergency Management says rooms at other motels in Aberdeen were found for those in town for the tournament.

Aid Increase For Children Moves On

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Low-income families that receive government aid to care for children could see an increase in payments under a bill (LB89) advanced by Nebraska lawmakers.

Senators gave the measure first-round approval on Wednesday with a 26-21 vote.

The bill by Sen. Kathy Campbell of Lincoln would also minimize the so-called cliff effect, which eliminates payments for recipients when their incomes grow beyond a certain point. Advocates say the cliff effect reduces the incentive for recipients to seek a raise at work or a higher-paying job.

Under current law, a family of two gets \$293 a month plus \$71 for each additional person. Formula changes under the bill would increase the average payment by \$112 a month.

The increase would cost \$10.5 million annual in federal money.

Senators Advance Signature-Based Pay

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A bill allowing petition circulators to be paid by the signature rather than an hourly wage has received first-round approval in the Nebraska Legislature.

Senators voted 38-0 Wednesday on a measure by Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte that would lift a 2008 ban placed on signature-based compensation.

An initiative or referendum petition allows registered voters to place an amendment on the ballot. The bill's supporters say the ban limits citizens' access to ballot petitions because most grassroots organizations do not have enough resources to support hourly wages.

Lawmakers have to vote in favor of the bill twice more before it advances to Gov. Pete Ricketts.

The bill is LB367.

Regents OK Confucius Institute At NSU

BY KEVIN BURBACH
Associated Press

PIERRE — Northern State University is on track to create a Chinese language and cultural center that will be the first of its kind in the Dakotas, a move officials hope will give students and the state a direct link to China's growing economy.

The South Dakota Board of Regents voted 7-0 Wednesday to allow for the Aberdeen-based university to establish a Confucius Institute in conjunction with the University of Jinan in China. There are institutes in nearly every state except the Dakotas.

A Confucius Institute will allow the partner universities to exchange instructors, students and academic information in addition to giving them the opportunity to work on joint research and seminars. An agreement finalizing the partnership will be signed in early April on campus.

University President James Smith said the partnership will be especially beneficial to students looking for international business and study abroad experience.



"Being more acquainted with China will allow them to expand their professional portfolio," he said.

The two universities plan to offer Mandarin Chinese courses to NSU students as early as fall 2015. No other University in South Dakota offers the language courses. Northern State stopped offering Mandarin language courses in 1996.

The regents pushed last summer for the Legislature to allocate \$400,000 to fund the institute for the first year, but the memorandum agreed upon Wednesday shows that money will come from an anonymous private donor. The Confucius Institute Headquarters in Hanban, China, will also donate \$150,000 in startup costs and a 3,000 volume library

of Chinese books and teaching materials. All salaries of visiting personnel will be provided by the headquarters.

Plans are also underway to develop a cultural center in the university's Beulah Williams Library, which would house Chinese cultural exhibit.

As of 2011, there were more than 350 Confucius Institutes in 104 countries, according to documents previously provided by the regents. The majority of U.S. states have at least one. If approved, the cultural center at Northern State would be one of the last in the country for now. The institute stopped taking applications to partner with American institutions at the end of 2014.

Northern State isn't the first university in the Dakotas to vie for one.

The North Dakota Board of Higher Education had given Dickinson State University permission to establish a partnership with a Chinese university and set up a Confucius Institute, but it never happened. A majority of faculty members voted against the idea and state officials also found that the university had given Chinese exchange students hundreds of unearned diplomas.

Weiland Returns With New Political Group

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — Former Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Rick Weiland is borrowing the "Take it Back!" slogan from his anti-big-money-in-politics Senate bid to start a South Dakota-based political organization of the same name dedicated to removing special interest influence in government.

Weiland and Drey Samuelson, former chief of staff to retired Democratic U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson, will formally announce a nonprofit advocacy group and political action committee on Thursday that will use the state's ballot initiative process to push for



Weiland

policy reforms and support similarly minded candidates running for office. Weiland foreshadowed the new efforts, housed under the moniker TakeltBack.Org, during his Election Night concession speech when he declared: "This fight isn't over." In the months since Nov. 4, Weiland's defunct campaign sent out curiously worded fundraising pitches hinting there was more to come.

He and Samuelson decided to dive back in shortly after the election, where Weiland

lost in a four-way contest to Republican Mike Rounds.

They thought, "Do we just want to throw in the towel here and wring our hands and let some other folks figure it out ... or do we want to take a deep breath and re-engage?" Weiland told The Associated Press. "This is how we continue to form a more perfect union. You just can't throw in the towel. That's just not who I am."

Weiland said the nonpartisan organization aims to take on corruption in government and cut through the partisan rancor that grips the political system. Weiland said he and Samuelson are still working on the specifics of ballot ini-

tiatives they'll put forward, but said they will relate to fighting corruption, increasing transparency in campaign contributions and in state contracts. Samuelson said initiatives could also address issues such as instituting a nonpartisan redistricting commission.

Weiland said he wants to focus on TakeltBack.Org and has no plans to run against U.S. Sen. John Thune or U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem, both Republicans, in 2016.

Samuelson and Weiland said they don't yet have any hard fundraising goals. Voter initiatives are likely the place the group can make the biggest impact.

Fees

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But Werner, R-Huron, spoke against Brunner's motion. Werner said April would be "the perfect time" for the registration fee increases to take effect.

April is one of two months — October is the other — that aren't used in the registration renewal cycle because local property taxes are due in those months, according to Werner.

He served on the Beadle County Commission before his election to the House.

"So there is no one in the state who received a renewal notice for April," Werner said.

South Dakota vehicle registrations are renewed alphabetically split across the 10 months.

Werner said he spoke to an official for the state Department of Revenue on Friday. Werner said he was told the department delayed its next round of renewal mailings that were scheduled to go out Monday, March 16.

House Republican leader Brian Gosch of Rapid City said it was time to vote straight up on the bill, SB 1.

A voice vote on Brunner's amendment failed.

"I think we're jumping into this real too quick," Rep. Dan Kaiser, R-Aberdeen, said. He described the legislation as a state solution for a county and township problem.

But another Brown County lawmaker, Rep. Dennis Feickert, D-Aberdeen, described it as "the best opportunity to move forward with the some funding." He is a former Brown County Commission member.

"It really goes back to public safety," Feickert said.

The legislation ultimately passed in the House 55-11. The Senate had approved the final version earlier that afternoon 25-9.

"We need to get this bill passed. We can do more later on," Feickert said.

House Democratic leader Spencer Hawley of Brookings disagreed with the need to rush to passage. He said there isn't time for counties or townships to get ready.

Hawley said the Legislature wouldn't have the courage to pass the increases in the

future if the measure wasn't passed Friday.

Brunner recalled that the Legislature increased registration fees by 30 percent through legislation four years ago. Those took effect in two stages.

"I don't know what the hurry is to raise everything right now," Brunner said. "It's going to be immediate. You go home and feel it right away when you do your license fees and your renewal fees."

Rep. Steve Westra, R-Sioux Falls, said nobody brought to the conference committee the suggestions being heard on the House floor that evening. He said the April 1 implementation means more money for the counties.

The immediate implementation of the higher registration fees for May renewals means local governments will gain seven months of additional revenue for road and bridge work in the current year.

That money wouldn't be available if the increases had been delayed until Jan. 1.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed the legislation into law Tuesday, March 17.

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The Public Is Invited To A Reception Honoring Yankton's 2014 Citizen Of The Year Ben Hanton
1:30 p.m. Saturday, March 28 Yankton Elks Lodge