

National Guard bill dies in State Senate

By Cadet Harold White

The Wyoming Senate general file served as the final resting place for a National Guard bill, which died there Feb. 24.

The National Guard bill would have provided compensation for members of the National Guard who work for the government or its subdivisions, while serving on annual training.

The bill was co-sponsored by Rep. William Tibbs and Rep. Rory Cross, both R-Converse. "We sponsored the bill after people showed a concern over the vagueness of the attorney general's opinion that has governed this for nearly a decade," Rep. Tibbs said.

In 1977, an employee of the city of Douglas filed a claim with the Wyoming Department of Labor asking for his full city pay while he was at his two weeks' National Guard summer camp.

Before the case was decided, the Wyoming attorney general issued an opinion that forced certain government entities to pay full salaries to employees who serve in the National Guard.

"The attorney general's opinion is a very loose interpretation of the statutes," Rep. Tibbs said. "What our bill does is define exactly who has to pay whom and what they have to pay."

Under the bill, all levels of government would have been required to pay at least the difference between the employee's regular pay and the employee's Guard pay while he is at annual training.

The National Guard's position on the bill was generally one of agreement.

"There is a need for improvement in the system, but we (National Guard) feel that more input is needed to examine the impact of this legislation," said Brig. Gen. Charles Wing, assistant adjutant general, Wyoming Army National Guard.

Rep. Tibbs said his bill would have only affected Guard members who work for government entities.

"This legislation has no effect on

Guardsmen in the private sector," Rep. Tibbs said.

Master Sgt. Bill Green, a local National Guard recruiter, said, "The biggest problem is job conflicts in the private sector—the smaller the business, the bigger the problem."

Sen. John Perry, R-Campbell-Johnson, a member of the Senate Labor Committee, said the major concerns of the Labor Committee were as follows: (1) How would the bill affect state employees? (2) What kind of financial bind would small communities and school districts be put in? (3) Would this bill result in layoffs to support it?

One of the questions asked of this bill concerned the effect this legislation would have on recruiting and retention.

"We hope it does not have a negative effect on recruiting," Wing said. "The trend has been for business and industry to support National Guard personnel. This could be a step in the right direction."

However, Rep. Tibbs said, "Governmental budgets should not be used as an incentive to attract or retain Guardsmen."

Yet Green said this bill could be good for recruiting across the board.

"It would guarantee government employees a benefit they would be eligible for," Green said.

Nevertheless private reactions to the bill were not very vocal. Sen. Perry said no one appeared before the Labor Committee representing the private sector.

"The people who work for the private sector lose their shirts when they attend annual training," Green said.

George Taplin, a local real estate agent and a sergeant in the National Guard, said he had no problem with Guard members receiving the difference between their government pay and their Guard pay, but they should definitely not receive both in full.

"Receiving both pay checks is wrong, definitely wrong," Taplin said. "The only people this bill will hurt are the ones who collect double pay."