

Funding

Appropriation for Nichols meets with optimism in Kansas Legislature

By LISA HOOKER

Government Editor
The bill which includes an appropriation for reconstruction of Nichols Gym is scheduled to be heard by the Kansas House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee "probably sometime next week," according to Rep. Bill Buntun, Topeka, chairman of the committee.

The bill is first subject to review by the Joint State Building Committee, and if passed in the Ways and Means Committee, will go to the full House. If passed there, the bill will go to the Senate, where it will be subject to the same review, according to Buntun.

"We will pay a great deal of attention to recommendations for K-State," Buntun said. "There are some other projects at K-State that people are interested in, too."

Optimism was also expressed by other legislators.

"I think the chances are probably pretty good," Sen. Gus Bogina, R-Lenexa and chairman of the building committee, said about recommendations for funding of Nichols. Bogina said the committee was scheduled to make an overview of the requests Tuesday night.

"I think we'll finally approve it," said Sen. Ross Doyen, R-Concordia and president of the Senate. "It should have been done 10 years ago. I intend to fund it one way or another."

DOYEN HAS BEEN an advocate of reconstruction of Nichols in the past when the issue has come before the Legislature. "Nichols has been standing as a shell of a building for the past 10 years," Doyen was quoted as saying in the October 1978 issue of Dimensions. "Frankly, I'm tired of seeing a part of K-State history being ignored. The building is there — all we need to do is put it to practical use."

Local representatives in the Legislature

are fairly optimistic about the University receiving an appropriation for Nichols.

Rep. Joe Knopp, R-Manhattan, said he anticipates the Ways and Means Committee to support and "move the bill on through and get the project going." Knopp said the only thing he believes could change the distribution of appropriations would be a change in the University's priority system, but added he doesn't know of any plans for such a change.

SEN. MERRILL WERTS, R-Junction City, said if the committee does not recommend funding for Nichols, it won't be because it was left out of the budget.

Nichols' fate was very much up in the air until 1979, when a task force appointed by the Legislature determined that the gutted building should be reconstructed.

The task force was appointed as a result of the controversy and unrest surrounding President Duane Acker's decision to ask the Legislature for funds to raze Nichols.

"Finally the Legislature — at about this time of year — gave the president three choices, none of which was particularly good," Vince Cool, associate director of University Facilities, said.

THE CHOICES INCLUDED tearing down the structure and clearing the site, reconstructing the building, and an "interim alternative," which included cleaning up the site, stabilizing the structure and making a "seating, lounging-type area," according to Gene Cross, vice president of University Facilities.

Cross said Acker held "extensive meetings on campus" with large groups and talked with administration and alumni to "get a feeling" about the situation before making his decision.

Students and some others came forward and said "We want to save it" after the University's recommendation to raze

Nichols was made and funds were requested.

"The students went to Topeka and protested on the steps of the state capitol," Cool said.

Werts was a member of the task force that made a recommendation about the fate of Nichols. Members also included Rep. Bob Arbutnot, R-Haddam; Bob Dahl, head of the Department of Architectural Engineering; Cross; and Greg Musil, student body president.

"WE MET DURING the summer of 1979 several times," Werts said. He said the committee recommended that the Legislature appropriate sufficient funds for reconstruction but no specific uses for the building were recommended.

"The initial funds we did not receive until fiscal year 1981," Cool said. These funds were for preliminary planning. The Legislature appropriated final planning funds for fiscal year 1983. The planning is complete, according to Cool.

"At this point we're waiting for construction funds," he said.

If the appropriation is made, Cool said, the University will be authorized to proceed, but the funds will not be available until July 1 of this year.

GOV. JOHN CARLIN recommended \$1.5 million for fiscal year 1984 and \$4.2 million for fiscal 1985. Cool said the University's original request was for \$3,739,760 for fiscal year 1984 and \$2 million for 1985. He said in any case the funds would come through a multi-year appropriation.

"This will probably be the only capital improvement item approved at K-State and maybe in the state from what we've heard," Cool said.

Plans for Nichols have come a long way since the building burned Dec. 13, 1968.

"It seemed very appropriate at the time

that the building be razed immediately," Cool said. "We had just had the experience of the old auditorium burning down two to three years before."

THE AUDITORIUM, which burned in 1965, was razed and Cool said "the initial reaction was to do the same thing (to Nichols) to protect the life and safety of those around the building."

Cool said students had just voted for a new natatorium, and preliminary plans were being made at the time of the fire. The administration was looking at the prospect of being without swimming facilities for two to two and a half years.

However, the old basketball floor was reinforced concrete-framed and analyses were made to make sure the concrete was not badly damaged. It was then decided to put a temporary roof over the swimming pool, clean up around the pool and add insulation, Cool said.

University officials went to the Legislature, Cool said, and outlined the loss of space for radio stations KSAC and KSDB-FM, women's physical education and the Department of Music. The Legislature agreed to appropriate funds to replace the space, Cool said.

At that point, the music department was moved to trailers borrowed from Washburn University at Topeka and placed south of Calvin Hall and west of Nichols Auditorium. A new program combined with the natatorium plans provided an addition for women's physical education, which called for a facility adjacent to the field house and gymnasium.

Cool said there was no strong pressure immediately to tear the walls down, and the University had no authorization to take such action.