

Tax on Internet sales meets skepticism

TOPEKA (AP)—Gov. Kathleen Sebelius wants legislators to take steps toward collecting taxes on Internet sales, but some don't believe the state would see any money from such efforts for years — if at all.

Sebelius mentioned a "streamlined" sales tax bill as one of her legislative goals during her State of the State address. The Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee plans to hear testimony on the issue from Department of Revenue officials at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Such legislation is designed to

make the state's retail sales tax law mirror the laws in other states. Supporters believe that if enough states have uniform laws — apart from their different rates — collecting taxes on Internet sales will be much easier.

But getting the idea past the federal government may be difficult or, as some supporters fear, impossible. Supporters must persuade Congress to pass a law to allow states to tax Internet sales, then President Bush, who has opposed the idea, must sign it into law.

"I wouldn't go to get any loans

against the income," said House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka. "It's a four- or five-year project."

In her address, Sebelius suggested collecting the state's 5.3 percent sales tax on goods are sold over the Internet would help local businesses and promote fairness.

"It makes no sense that Kansas businesses must collect sales tax, while online retailers are given a free pass," she said.

The state already imposes a 5.3 percent compensating use tax, paid on catalogue sales or items Kansans purchase out of state. Officials ex-

pect it to raise about \$230 million during the current fiscal year, which ends June 30.

House Taxation Committee Chairman John Edmonds, R-Great Bend, said much of the potential tax probably goes uncollected because most Kansans don't remit it to the state on one-item purchases. The Department of Revenue collects the use tax by auditing companies with large sales, he said.

Supporters of taxing Internet sales believe the state may be losing tens of millions of dollars to business conducted on the Web.

"It's a project worth doing," Edmonds said. "We're leaking a lot of sales tax revenue at this point."

Some business groups oppose the idea, believing it will stifle economic activity. But legislators haven't turned to such philosophical issues yet.

Edmonds said many of the issues involved in collecting Internet taxes are technical, such as making sure that all of the states attempting it have the same legal definitions for what's taxed and what's not, so that they can collect revenues for each other.

"It has to be a while before it's worked out," said Sen. Nick Jordan, R-Shawnee.

Then there's Congress, which under the Constitution regulates interstate commerce. In 2001, it rejected a proposal to allow states to tax Internet sales once 20 agreed to do so, in favor of a two-year ban on such taxation, due to expire in November.

President Bush had wanted a five-year extension of the ban, arguing that new taxation would discourage Internet use and decrease access to the Web.

Demand up for bilingual

HUTCHINSON (AP) — The state's growing immigrant population is creating big need for educators who speak Spanish.

As of May 2002, there were about 28,000 students in Kansas' public schools who had limited English proficiency and needed assistance, said Melanie Stuart, a consultant with the Kansas Department of Education.

Students arrested for guns

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hicle, sophomore Blake Saint as having marijuana, and junior Blayne Bahe with the shotgun shells and hunting knife. Sophomore Jordan Anderson had a shotgun and pellet pistol.

Under federal law, it is illegal to have weapons on school property, and students who break this law have to be turned over to police. The offense can be a felony or a misdemeanor and the student must be expelled from school for one calendar year.

"These are federal laws," Selby said. "If you get state aid, you have to follow them."

Bahe was sent home for the day on Wednesday while officials, with the state Department of Education, were making a determination as to whether the knife was a violation or not. Selby said the knife was not a violation of the law since it was in his vehicle. It would have been a different situation if the knife had been inside the school.

"People need to realize it is illegal to have weapons on school grounds," said Sherman County Sheriff Doug Whitson said.

Whitson said because of the federal laws concerning school violence, when weapons are found on the school property, the case must be turned over to law enforcement without exception.

The three students who were arrested, Cloyd, Anderson and Saint, were all taken to the Goodland Police Department and released to their parents.

Police Chief Ray Smee said two were charged with possession of firearms on school property and the other with possession of a controlled substance. He said all reports have been sent to County Attorney Bonnie Selby for the filing of formal charges.

A school hearing committee will be meeting on Tuesday to discuss the drug and two gun violations and what will happen to each student. Selby is the only person who can make an exception to the 12-month expulsion for the two found with guns. He said if they are expelled, they would be able to attend classes at the Northwest Kansas Service Center in Oakley to stay on track with their high school credits.

Saint, who was found with marijuana, will also appear before the hearing committee on Tuesday to discuss punishment. The school's drug policy on a first offense would suggest a 30-day suspension plus a suspension from all student activities for no less than four school months.

Selby said he was meeting today with high school principal Harvey Swagger to discuss the students and their character and to gather more information.

While that's only 4 percent of the state's student population, Stuart said there are "many more" students for whom English is not their native language, but whose English skills were sufficient enough that they didn't need help.

Parents as Teachers, a program in many schools across the nation, offers one-on-one guidance for parents of infants and toddlers.

In Kansas, it is providing many non-English-speaking families a bridge between home and school.

Through the program, educators visit parents in their homes and offer insight about developmental childhood.

Other services include parenting classes, play groups and screenings.

The program became an issue last week, when the State Board of Education voted 8-2 to approve an ex-

ception to a requirement that Parents as Teachers educator have 60 college credit hours.

The Topeka school district had sought the waiver so it could hire a Spanish-speaking PAT educator.

Board member Connie Morris, a St. Francis Republican, contended that if families were living legally in the United States, the parents would have a working knowledge of English.

"Meeting these parents' needs crosses the line, in my opinion, of educating their children, particularly when it jeopardizes the quality of education for other students and comes at an added price to the taxpayer," Morris said.

Board member Sue Gamble of Shawnee said there were many third- and fourth-generation Kansans who still speak their native lan-

guage at home.

She said Morris should not assume that a lack of English proficiency translates to illegal immigration.

"I just find that offensive and highly inaccurate," Gamble said.

Five of the Garden City school district's eight PAT educators speak Spanish, and one also speaks Guatemalan, program coordinator Dani Hooper said.

Of the 340 families seen by a PAT educator in the school district during the latter half of 2002, Hooper said, English was the second language for parents in 154 families.

"You would be surprised at the number of phone calls I had this year" from other school districts interested in Garden City's Spanish-language materials and programs.

Activists mark date

WASHINGTON (AP) — Anti-abortion activists marking this week's 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision say they have their first chance in years to put a dent in abortion rights now that Republicans control the House, Senate and the White House.

"We will pass the first significant pro-life legislation actually limiting abortions in 30 years," said Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan. and a leading abortion foe. He predicted Congress will move quickly to pass a measure banning a late-term abortion procedure called partial birth abortion by opponents.

Congress passed a measure twice, in 1996 and 1997, banning the procedure, in which the fetus is partially delivered before its

skull is punctured. President Clinton vetoed it each time.

The House passed the measure again last year, but the then-Democratic-controlled Senate never took up the measure.

"We will pass a partial birth abortion ban," Brownback said. "That's going to hearten people. It's been a long fight. We're finally turning some of the battle."

President Bush has said he would sign the bill, one of several abortion-related measures Republicans will push this legislative session.

Their optimism is expected to be apparent Wednesday when thousands of marchers converge on Washington to mark the anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision three decades ago legalizing abortion.

Keep your eye

on Goodland's horizon!

Watch for it

Internet tonight!
899-2338