

**By Carolyn Lee**

***The Imperial Republican***

For the past 17 years, the Nebraska Department of Education has matched federal funding for programs under the Career Education Student Organizations. Those include FFA, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), DECA, HOSA and more.

During those 17 years, funding has not increased. According to the organization Support Student Leaders, financial support for those programs is “stretched beyond capacity. Without the necessary resources, the Nebraska Department of Education can no longer adequately fund Nebraska Career Student Organizations.”

It states that current funding sources won't allow the Nebraska Department of Education to continue supporting student organizations beyond July 1, 2010.

If the state can't meet the requirements of the Perkins IV federal legislation to get federal money, that funding source will cease.

Support Student Leaders supports LB 476, introduced by Sen. Arnie Stuthman of Platte Center and heard in the Education Committee March 10.

LB 476 would require the state to fund \$450,000 per year for Nebraska Career Student Organizations. The money would fund the student organizations' state and district contests, awards, educational activities outside the normal classroom, administrative support for the state leadership and administration of Nebraska Career Education Student Organizations, and partner with state and local organizations to provide practices that can be disseminated to schools and community colleges.

“No one is cutting funding,” a spokesperson for Sen. Stuthman's office said Monday. The state has to match the Perkins grant, he said, so LB 476 is asking for money to do that.

During the hearing March 10, supporters testified for one and one-half hours, including the Nebraska State Education Association, the Nebraska State Board of Education, business and industry, the Nebraska Farm Bureau and the Nebraska Cattlemen.

The bill is still in committee.

When contacted, District 44 State Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial said “I assume they're trying to cover up the government loss of funds to keep going.” He said he'd been contacted by several concerned students, and said he would research the bill.

Chase County Schools Superintendent Matt Fisher said CCS receives between \$3,000-\$4,000 from the Perkins federal funding for local projects in FFA, FBLA and FCCLA.

“That doesn't mean we won't benefit” if LB 476 is funded, he said. “It would be money that we don't see directly that would benefit our kids,” such as state contests and awards.

FFA Advisor Jason Speck said the bill “makes it sound like if it doesn't pass FFA is gone.” He said that's not the case.

The funding LB 476 would generate, he said, would primarily benefit positions such as the state FFA Director and some other administrative things. It would also pool the various career organizations in one area at the Department of Education.

There are some things that benefit the local FFA chapter that are state funded, such as visits to district contests by state officers. As an example, Speck said a state FFA officer was to visit Imperial Tuesday.

The local chapter pays \$25 for her trip, but the rest of her expenses are paid by the state.

In the future, if LB 476 doesn't pass, Speck said the local chapter could have to come up with travel expenses for such a visit.

Other possible impacts upon the local chapter, if additional state funding isn't approved, Speck said, could be increased admission costs to the state convention, now at \$8 per person, or increased state dues, now at \$5 per person.

Cathy Hanna, FCCLA sponsor, said those members pay \$13 for state and national dues combined.

She said she's not sure how an increase in state funding would impact the local chapter. However, state and federal funding do play a part in the district and state competitions.

The State FCCLA convention will be in Lincoln April 6-7 this year.