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## legislature

### Student bus trip assailed as lobbying

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The Associated Press  
DenverPost.com

A state lawmaker criticized the University of Colorado today after biology students went to the Capitol in a bus chartered at taxpayer expense to lobby for a bill on the former Rocky Flats weapons plant.

"I encourage any citizen to show up and testify on their own behalf," said Rep. Mark Cloer, R-Colorado Springs. "My concern was using state tax dollars to lobby." The 20 students registered as volunteer lobbyists and went to the statehouse on Monday. They testified before the House Health and Human Services Committee in favor of House Bill 1389, which would require that signs be posted at Rocky Flats warning of health risks.

Rocky Flats manufactured plutonium triggers for nuclear warheads. A cleanup of the site was completed last year and it will eventually be converted to a national wildlife refuge, with much of it open to the public.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Wes McKinley, said the students were studying the effects of plutonium and were exercising their constitutional right to talk to lawmakers. He said it was also an educational experience.

"They were so excited to be a part of the process, a part of a representative form of government," McKinley, D-Walsh, said in a speech on the House floor.

McKinley said it was his idea to have them register as volunteer lobbyists.

Biology professor Harvey Nichols said university officials backed the use of the bus. He said students had offered to pay for the trip after they learned of the complaint, but he refused to let them.

Nichols said academic freedom is at issue because the students wanted to testify in favor of the bill and Cloer, who was on the committee, opposed it.

"Who knows if that's part of the background on this," Nichols said.

Nichols said students learned a valuable lesson when they were told about Cloer's objections.

"They saw the difficulty of getting anything controversial through the Legislature," he said.

A university official did not immediately return a call.

Tanya Kelly-Bowry, a paid lobbyist for the university, said she sent school officials an e-mail saying students should participate in politics "but that it was a whole different thing if they were registering as lobbyists." Kelly-Bowry said she had asked university officials whether Nichols should pay for the bus, but that Nichols told her that if that happened, he would call a faculty council meeting "to let them know that he felt academic freedom was being challenged in some way at the Capitol."