

## Rocky Mountain News

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### Lawmaker questions bus trip

Cloer assails cost to transport CU class to testify on Flats bill

**By Lynn Bartels, Rocky Mountain News**

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A Republican lawmaker has questioned why taxpayers footed the bill for busing a University of Colorado class to the Capitol to testify on behalf of a Democratic bill on Rocky Flats.

The group of about 20 students and their professor attended a committee hearing Monday on a measure to require the posting of warning signs at the former nuclear facility.

Rep. Mark Cloer, of Colorado Springs, privately raised concerns about the transportation, which cost an estimated \$450, with CU's lobbyist.

Cloer said his intent was never to stifle free speech.

"I encourage every student to come to the Capitol and testify, but at their own expense," Cloer said.

But the sponsor of the Rocky Flats bill, Rep. Wes McKinley, D-Walsh, was furious when he learned of Cloer's intervention.

"I think a group of students should be allowed to come down and testify," McKinley said afterward.

"My God, what kind of democracy are we?"

McKinley said he invited the professor, Harvey Nichols, an expert on hazardous waste and Rocky Flats, to testify on his bill. The professor brought his critical-thinking class, which is studying Rocky Flats.

The lawmaker said he registered the students as volunteer lobbyists, and invited them to testify.

The registering turned out to be unnecessary, but it prompted CU's lobbyist, Tanya Kelly-Bowry, to seek legal guidance on whether the school could pay for the bus.

Todd Gleason, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, issued a statement later Wednesday saying the school would pick up the tab.

"Professor Nichols' intentions were solely to give his students, on a voluntary basis, a splendid educational experience - that of watching government in action," Gleason said.

He said although the students wore badges reading "volunteer lobbyist," they were not there to lobby.

"In no case do I feel that Professor Nichols violated a policy that says university resources must not be used by our faculty and staff for political purposes," Gleason said.

"This was purely an educational experience, not a political venture."

House Bill 1389 requires warning signs about health risks to be posted at Rocky Flats, where nuclear components were manufactured.

Before becoming a lawmaker, McKinley served as foreman of the grand jury that investigated Rocky Flats.

The grounds have been converted into a national wildlife refuge with public access to most of the property.

Nichols said he was surprised by Cloer's complaint to CU.

He also said he didn't realize the measure was so controversial.

"Since this is a matter of attempting to protect public health, I would have thought this was a bipartisan cause," the professor said.

Cloer voted against the bill.

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