

House to examine land laws Wikipedia issue

arouses debate

BY SAMUEL LAU
STAFF WRITER

The fallout from the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Kelo v. City of New London* finally has reached the Tar Heel state.

In response to the June ruling, N.C. House Speaker Jim Black, D-Mecklenburg, announced Wednesday the creation of a new House committee on eminent domain powers.

Eminent domain, found in the Fifth Amendment, traditionally has allowed the government to take private lands for public use, such as new roads or schools, as long as it provides just compensation to the previous landowner.

The Supreme Court ruled that local governments can use economic development as a justification for condemning or seizing land.

The new committee, which will meet in the six months prior to the start of the spring session in May, comes on the heels of the U.S. House passing the Private Property Rights Protection Act of 2005 in November.

The bill would take federal funds away from state and local governments that invoke eminent domain to seize land for private economic development.

"It was an alarming ruling," said Rep. Wilma Sherrill, R-Buncombe, who will lead the committee with Rep. Bruce Goforth, D-Buncombe.

"I don't believe North Carolina needs to take a very serious look at its constitution to ensure that people's private property rights cannot be taken away under the guise of economic development with no

just compensation."

According to a press release from Black's office, the committee specifically will study the effect the Court's ruling has on the implementation of eminent domain within the state and determine when it should be allowed and when it should be restricted.

It also will look at whether property owners are given enough power to defend their land and if they are given just compensation by the government.

The committee's final job is to decide whether there need to be legislative changes made to the state's eminent domain laws.

Spencer Parris, partner at Martin & Jones law firm, which is part of the North Carolina Land Law Center, said state residents don't need to worry about local

governments seizing their land for economic reasons.

"While there is some unclear areas of the law ... it doesn't seem to give the condemning authority those rights," he said.

Sherrill said the study should clarify those issues for the committee, though she said she doesn't know what its eventual recommendations will be.

But she said she does believe that governments in her county already have used economic interests to justify the use of eminent domain despite their denial of such actions.

"If they don't do that, then they shouldn't have any problem with us tightening the verbiage to ensure that they can't do it in the future."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Elicits concern for Internet anonymity

BY KYLE CHORPENING
STAFF WRITER

Following the discovery of a defamatory biography on the popular research site Wikipedia.org, alternative media might face increased scrutiny from policymakers and media watchdogs.

The Wikipedia entry for John Seigenthaler Sr., former editor of *The Tennessean* and once an administrative assistant for Robert Kennedy, stated that Seigenthaler was suspected of involvement in both Kennedy assassinations. The false information was available on the site from May 26 to Oct. 5.

Seigenthaler, who served as a pallbearer for Robert Kennedy, said he was shocked by the charges posted as fact on the Web site, a free, online encyclopedia that can be easily and anonymously edited by any user.

He contacted Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, who removed the misinformation and provided Seigenthaler with the IP address for the computer used to make the entry.

"I'm not interested in suing anybody, especially Wikipedia," Seigenthaler said. "I just want to find this person so I can confront them."

Beyond his own ordeal, Seigenthaler said he is worried about the wider repercussions of the anonymity that Wikipedia offers.

"If things stay like they are, this is just going to happen to other people," he said. "Next year is a campaign year, and political figures are going to be in the spotlight."

If the kind of online defamation experienced by Seigenthaler were to involve policymakers, he said, it could prompt legislation to constrain the anonymity and freedom of all forms of Internet journalism, such as blogs and personal Web sites.

But Wales said he isn't concerned about the possibility of Wikipedia's spurring widespread change in online regulations.

"This is an absolutely absurd argument," he said. "The problem here is that the article was very obscure and small. I'm not sure if it even got reviewed."

Wikipedia has a staff of more than

600 administrators who patrol the millions of Wikipedia entries on a daily basis looking for inaccuracies.

"It just fell through the cracks of our editing processes," he said. "Despite that, we're astonished that it could last so long on the site."

Though he doesn't expect tighter regulations to stem from Seigenthaler's incident, Wales said Wikipedia and many other sites would not survive under more stringent controls.

"It would destroy it," he said. "It would be the end of Wikipedia, the end of your blogs, the end of mailing lists, your home page."

Cathy Packer, a media law professor at UNC, said she doubts policymakers could limit Internet media.

"There certainly are times when Congress wants to tighten control," she said. "Often, it turns out that the control is unconstitutional."

With all the opportunities made available by the Internet, some problems are fated to arise, she said.

"There is a world of anonymity that is wonderful, but with everything that is wonderful, there is a downside," Packer said.

Paul Jones, a journalism professor at UNC, said people should be held accountable for content but can't reasonably be restricted from publishing it.

"What are you going to do? Make people get an Internet driver's license?" he said.

As Wikipedia has grown in popularity and reliability, students often are using it as a source for research, especially for term papers.

"I use it for general ideas, but not for specifics," said freshman Russell Johnson. "It gives me a comfortable understanding of the topic."

Jones said Wikipedia is useful for directing students to good information but should complement other sources.

"Last semester, I returned a paper that was comprised almost solely of Wikipedia entries," he said. "I think by the time you're in college, you should be using primary sources."

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El Centro to town: Mi casa es su casa

BY ERIC MARTIN
STAFF WRITER

Traveling from room to room, community members learned what services were available to the area's growing Latino population Thursday.

The local nonprofit group El Centro Latino co-hosted an open house event to celebrate its recent move to the Inter-Faith Council building on Main Street in Carrboro.

Currently headed by interim executive director Ben Balderas, El Centro Latino originally was formed in 2000 to aid the rising Latino population in Carrboro by providing free programs such as English lessons, job networking and children's day care facilities.

The group's move comes on the heels of what officials said were hard times involving somewhat diminishing program funds and the unexpected resignation of executive director Tina Siragusa this summer.

El Centro now shares space with three other Latino organizations — El Futuro, Pa'lante and the IFC's Hispanic Outreach program.

Organizers from the groups showed optimism at the arrival of El Centro Latino during Thursday's open house.

"This is a great opportunity to collaborate," Balderas said. "(El Centro Latino) is in a more visible location, and we hope to bring in more flow traffic from people visiting the other organizations around us."

This was the first opportunity the groups had to collaborate on a project.

"All coordination that's taken place has been done for tonight's open house," Balderas said jokingly.

As far as further collaboration is concerned, Balderas said that with the recent move he has not found time to plan any future projects with El Futuro or Pa'lante.

But Laura Wenzel, director of the quarterly publication Pa'lante, said she particularly is interested in coordinating.

"Pa'lante is in a time of extreme financial uncertainty," she said.

"We are looking for funds to keep the rent here for the next few months until we can work a possible arrangement with El Centro Latino."

But regardless of the organizations' future plans, Thursday night provided an opportunity for many to come together and learn about what these programs have to offer.

The offices were filled with volunteers and community members



Juana Delgado (left), 6, and Eloisa Sanchez, 5, play at El Centro Latino's open house gathering, which was held to show the organization's services.

who came out of appreciation for the organizations.

Surrounded by children who regularly attend El Centro Latino's after-school program, volunteers Amy Dietzen and Joanna Long spoke of how they like to walk regularly with the children to Carrboro city parks.

Nancy Letteri, director of development for El Centro Latino, said that even though the move came as

a surprise, in the end it has worked out for the best.

"The move wasn't planned and there were some funding problems, but it ended up being a positive thing. The space has been great," she said.

"The new location is working out fabulously."

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