

Kentucky and the Region

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UK president OKs lesbian health seminar

University assured by state Senate leader that its funding won't be cut

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — A University of Kentucky women's health conference session on lesbian health that has drawn complaints from two state senators has the support of university President Lee Todd.

Todd said Friday that UK's mission was to improve the lives of all Kentuckians through teaching and research.

"That includes providing continuing education to the citizens of the commonwealth

and beyond," he said in a statement from Massachusetts, where he was attending a meeting. "We are an equal opportunity university and pride ourselves on not discriminating against anyone. To do otherwise would be a great disservice to all Kentuckians."

Earlier last week, Sen. Charlie Borders, R-Russell, called the UK Women's Health Center, which puts on the Women's Health in Kentucky conference, and made, in his words, "what you could call a

veiled threat" to UK's funding.

On Thursday, he said he would withhold judgment about whether to investigate that funding until he knew whether Todd was aware of the session.

He was, officials said.

But Senate President David Williams said Friday that UK's funding would not be affected by the dispute.

Borders and Sen. Dick Roeding, R-Lakeside Park, questioned whether the conference should hold a 90-minute session on lesbian health issues.

Roeding, who is president pro tem of the Senate, wrote to Todd to complain that UK would "recognize a lifestyle

that the vast majority of women in Kentucky do not agree with."

Todd said the university has the responsibility to educate.

"Part of that responsibility is to educate health professionals on the issues they face in today's diverse society," he said.

Borders called Todd's comments "interesting" and said he looked forward to discussing the matter personally.

"I believe it's my responsibility to ask questions if I believe taxpayer dollars are being used questionably," he said. "Now it's up to the public to let their voices be heard so that the president can determine if

what they're doing is in the best interests of the state."

The conference is paid for with private fund-raising, UK officials said. However, some of the co-sponsors, such as the Kentucky Commission on Women, receive some state money.

Williams, R-Burkesville, said the Senate would certainly not attempt to curtail UK's funding.

However, he argued that the university should have used more sensitivity in choosing the session's title.

"What I see here are two members of the General Assembly who did not like the

listing of this lesbian health issues," he said. "They felt the way it was presented was a political statement."

"Academic freedom should not be infringed upon, but everybody on either side ought to be sensitive to the way these things are proposed."

UK officials said that a session on lesbian health issues was requested on evaluations at last year's conference. Other sessions this year are devoted to health issues concerning African-American, Hispanic and rural women.

The session will be part of the conference, which will take place Sept. 9 and 10.