

US Senator to Visit UNL, Discuss Foreign Policy

By Benjamin A. Schoenkin/Daily Nebraskan | DN file photo on April 7th, 2015



Students and members of the public will have the chance to listen and interact with U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer, R, on the topic of foreign policy during a seminar in the Nebraska Union on Wednesday.

The event, hosted by the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center as part of the Thomas C. Sorensen Public Policy Seminar Series, will be held in the ballroom at 4:30 p.m.

Brianna Puccini, press secretary for Fischer, said the senator “is looking forward to discussing a broad range of our country’s foreign policy challenges with a focus on the Middle East.”

Kevin Smith, chair of the department of political science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, encouraged students to attend. Regardless of students' political opinions, he said, they should take advantage of a rare opportunity to see a sitting U.S. senator engage in a public discussion.

“Rather than having whatever an elected official says filtered through the media or through the Internet or through their friend’s Facebook page, or what have you, or their professor, you can show up and actually hear the person without that filter,” Smith said, “I would strongly encourage all students to take advantage of that opportunity and to get that experience.”

Fischer is the chairwoman of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.

“Sen. Fischer is focused on working with our military to monitor the threats facing our nation and provide the appropriate tools for them to meet those challenges,” Puccini said. “The subcommittee’s jurisdiction includes cyber security policy.”

While explaining why students should stay attuned to foreign policy, Smith said he has several veterans who have been stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan in his POLS 100 class.

“(Students) should turn to the student sitting next to you – it might have directly affected them and your lack of interest and apathy might play more of a role in how it affects others than you know,” he said.

Smith said globalization is another reason why students should learn more about foreign policy.

“We live in a globalized world. Increasingly, the divisions between domestic policy and foreign policy are blurring,” he said.

Tarik Abdel-Monem, research specialist at the Public Policy Center, said foreign policy seemed an appropriate topic given the current geopolitical climate. Recently, 47 sitting senators, including Fischer, sent a letter to Iran expressing dismay with the Obama Administration’s efforts to reach a nuclear deal with the country.

“Obviously it is a very important issue. It is especially visible in the recent months,” he said of foreign policy. “It’s a hot topic, so we thought it would be very appropriate for her here at UNL.”

Erin Cooper, chair of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska’s Government Liaison Committee, said the upcoming speech is a unique opportunity to see firsthand a prominent elected official.

“This is kind of interesting because Sen. Fischer sits on some really interesting committees so to kind of be able to see what is going in the capitol, actually being able talk about it, instead of just read about it in the news, I think that would be really cool for students,” Cooper said.

Cooper said there will be more events such as this one if there is a high turnout Wednesday.

“Having that relationship where they readily take our opinions and are looking to hear from students is kind of where we are trying to push things,” Cooper said.

Abdel-Monem said the event is non-partisan.

“It is certainly not to advocate for a particular position; it’s not a partisan event in any way,” he said. “It is clearly an educational event.”

Students, Abdel-Monem said, will have the opportunity to see one of Nebraska’s sitting senators up close and in-person.

“I would probably challenge them and say, you should probably come and look for opportunities to learn about things that maybe you weren’t expecting to hear from a sitting senator,” he said.

Abdel-Monem said foreign policy includes many issues such as ISIS, but also includes issues such as cyber terrorism, Ebola and climate change and students can converse with Fischer about those topics.

“Wednesday’s discussion will provide students and faculty with an insider look at efforts in Congress to neutralize the growing threats to our homeland,” Puccini said.

ASUN, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UNL, UNL Center for Civic Engagement, UNL College of Law and the UNL Department of Political Science are co-sponsoring the event.