



The Sick State

Art by Bruce Hanson

Yes, Nebraska is sick. Or maybe we should say it hibernates during the winter and naps during the summer.

Finally, someone has decided to stand up and say some of the things that too many people have refused to recognize. A Lincoln lawyer, and we might point out a conservative Republican, Roger V. Dickson, in a "political" sermon delivered April 15, took his congregation on a trip into what he termed the "Twilight Zone."

We have received his permission to take you, our readers, through that same fantastic world of facts, documented, about Nebraska. This journey points out clearly that Nebraska is really sick. That it is suffering from World Hereditis; that it is ranked 35th of 36 in the number of qualified teachers with four-year educations; that teacher salaries in Nebraska rank 43rd on the scale of 50; and that 45% of our elementary teachers leave Nebraska each year.

One of the most surprising facts was that Nebraska, a conservative state which supposedly does not want federal aid, is 23rd in reliance on such aid for education while it ranks 49th in state educational support.

Is the Unicameral an effective tool for state government? Roger Dickson points to its non-partisan structure as one of the major faults in effective government. This unique structure which has gained much publicity for Nebraska is run by 43 one-man legislatures, each largely responsible only to himself.

We feel that Nebraska will not move forward until state legislators are elected on a political party basis and can be held responsible for that party's platform.

Today many state senatorial contests are nothing more than popularity contests.

As Dickson observes, even the best and strongest of governors can accomplish little when the power resides with the legislature.

The pay scale is also a bit ridiculous. As Mr. Dickson points out in his speech, Nebraska's football coach is paid more than the Governor. And the state senator's pay is nothing but a token. Young, aggressive, progressive men can not afford to enter into government for a meager salary of \$2400. During the last Unicameral legislature, there were over 14 of the 43 senators over 60 years of age.

Education, which everyone should agree is the most vital ingredient of our society, is another area of this "Twilight Zone." Ted Sorensen started a row last year when he labeled Nebraska's education as sick. He pointed out in his speech:

"Here in (George) Norris' own state — where the pioneers once vowed that every child should go to common school, where the proportion of high school graduates has long ranked high and illiteracy low among all the states of the Union — education is no longer a prime concern. Budgets are cut federal aid is opposed. Teachers and faculties are harassed and underpaid . . . And one result is a steady exodus of young people seeking . . . a better life (until Nebraska) is left behind, old, outmoded, a place to come from or a place to die."

Students do leave Nebraska. Dr. Clifford Hardin told Nebraska graduates last February that they had a "moral obligation" to Nebraska. Moral? Yes. But Nebraska also has a moral obligation to its people. It has a moral obligation to become a strong state in the upper ranks of statistical charts, other than the large number of people over 65. A moral obligation to provide a strong educational system so that we do not fall behind.

A part of the Nebraska graduates' moral responsibility to Nebraska is to fight to change the complexion of Nebraska and Nebraska politics. We should talk to our parents, question the candidates for state offices, urge a partisan legislature so we can place responsibility and power into the same ring. We should urge the unlimited support of education, the backbone of a strong nation, a strong state and a strong community.

Last, but not least, the state press. When any state or city has only one paper, there is a strong possibility of veto by that paper. The same holds true or could hold true for other media. But the press has a responsibility to give ALL sides of the issues. The press has the responsibility to guard the right of the people in the state it serves. It has the responsibility not to cloud the issues or slant stories or headlines so as to mislead the public. The press should also encourage progress and state development — State, not an individual community, or a particular interest group, but the people.

But the Twilight Zone is here and now. It is Nebraska. It is more mystic than Ivy Day and more shocking than many Friday night TV shows. We are a "sick" state, a state that refuses to treat its illness.

Now is the time to wake up. Now is the time to THINK. Now is the TIME to do something about this State that is "too timid to live." The problem is a bi-partisan one.

(The following is a speech delivered by Roger V. Dickson. During the past few weeks there has been considerable comment from political circles and newspapers in reference to the speech. It was delivered from the pulpit of the Unitarian Church of Lincoln on April 15, 1962, and is a "political sermon." We feel it's a message of vital interest and concern to University of Nebraska students, the future leadership of, maybe, Nebraska.)

Last July, at McCook, in connection with the Norris Centennial, Ted Sorensen made some uncompromising remarks about the state of the State of Nebraska. He said Nebraska was falling behind in the field of public education.

The editor of the Lincoln Star daily newspaper had this to say on March 8, 1962:

" . . . Nebraska finds that where it was once a leader in watershed development, it is now a trailer; it finds its state institutions still using buildings that have long ago been condemned as fire hazards; it finds it cannot even satisfy public demands for tourist literature about the state; it cannot build nearly the roads it needs into recreation areas; it cannot pay its full welfare bills; it cannot afford an adequate railway commission to protect the public's interest; it cannot adequately patrol its highways, cannot adequately enforce its driver's license suspension cases, cannot meet competitive salary levels in many areas of government and education, is among the tail-end states in interstate highway construction and in general operates on a near-starvation financial diet.

"This does not represent a state of efficiency. It represents a state of poverty when we are not an impoverished state . . ."

On March 6, 1962, the Christian Science Monitor carried a feature story on Nebraska. The reporter stated that, "In a real sense, this still is frontier country . . . Some of the liberal-conservative battlegrounds of, say, Ohio and Indiana, and some other Midwest states have not even been reached here . . ."

He stated that although this frontier concept is changing,

" . . . the way of doing things in Nebraska still is a long journey from the eastern seaboard, or for that matter, parts of its own Midwest."

5) What happened to cause only 30% of our high school graduates to go on to college while nationally 35.6% of the high schoolers go on to college? (5) Lyman Glenny in his study of the state of higher education in Nebraska for the Legislature informed us of this.

6) Do you wonder why 45% of the trained elementary school teachers leave Nebraska for careers in other states? (6)

7) Doesn't it intrigue you to ponder the fact that Nebraska ranks 49th among 50 states in state financial support of public education while it stands 23rd in rank among the states in its reliance upon federal aid to education as a source of monies to support education? (7) This is MOST curious. I thought we sound conservatives despised federal money and believed that the state could do it better!

8) Parks and recreation? I hate to mention this. In 1959 Iowans spent \$1,395,000 on state parks, Kansans \$1,105,000. Nebraska? \$381,000. (8) Belatedly, commencing in 1963, Nebraska will begin to spend \$1,000,000 a year on the acquisition and improvement of state parks. (9) Drink this bitter cup: Lewis and Clark reservoir at Gavins Point divides Nebraska and South Dakota. Under a law just passed in 1961 Nebraska has decided it could commit \$120,000 annually to a matching program for paved access roads to recreation areas. (10) The state offered Knox County \$25,000 if it would raise the same amount to be then matched by federal funds of \$50,000 to provide paved access to the Nebraska side of Lewis and Clark reservoir. Knox was unable to come up with \$25,000. Result: no paved access. The increased tourist revenues from resorts, boat facilities and increased assessed values of properties for tax purposes are all over on the South Dakota side where you may count the Nebraska license plates if you wish.

Lack of Patrol

9) For 1960, Nebraska ranked 50th among the states in the amount of state funds appropriated for public health. (11) Per capita, the state appropriation was 34 cents while the national average was \$1.10.

10) Interstate highway? On January 1 of this year, Nebraska had completed and opened to traffic 70 miles or 14% of the total to be built in this state. Iowans had opened 32% of their total; South Dakotans, 26% of their total. (12)

11) Before the Interstate was opened, the National Safety Council recommended a minimum of 290 highway patrolmen for Nebraska. Col. Sanders, head of the patrol, recommended a minimum of 247 at the last legislative session in 1961. Presently we are able to afford only 181 patrolmen for the entire state with a possible increase to 200 in August. (13)

12) We have a State Railway Commission charged with the extremely complex task of fixing rate structures for telephone companies and carriers. These involve millions of dollars being charged Nebraskans monthly. Yet we fail to provide them funds for an adequate staff of statisticians, accountants and economists to analyze the reams of data.



Nebraska, Frontier Country

My purpose . . . is to share a concern with you. Unlike Tombstone, Arizona, the town too tough to die, is Nebraska the state too timid to live? Are we wasting our heritage? Are we, in a very real sense, consuming our capital, living off of principal? If this is true, why is it happening to us here in Nebraska and not in our sister states such as Iowa or Kansas?

This is, frankly, a political sermon. I shall make a controversial remark or two. You are entitled to a note on my biases. I have always been a registered Republican. My training in accountancy and law makes me a traditional, conservative. I have publicly spoken for a broadened tax base before the Nebraska Senate and have assisted in the drafting of language for proposed state sales and income tax statutes.

The Twilight Zone . . .

Now let me take you into the Twilight Zone. This Zone is in the world of numbers — statistics. It is nearly an unbelievable and shocking as the Friday night TV program.

1) Nebraskans are not poor. On a per capita basis for 1960, the personal income of a Nebraskan was \$2113 while an Iowan had \$2003 and a Kansan \$2068. (1)

2) Indeed, Nebraskans are not poor. For every pupil enrolled in school Nebraskans had personal income of \$19,411. (2) It ranked 18th among all the states in this regard.

3) Why, then, of the 36 states reporting teacher qualifications last year did Nebraska rank 35th — next to last — in the percentage of teachers who had finished four years of college? (3)

4) Why was the average teacher's salary in Nebraska \$4,180 last year when the national average was \$5,327? (4) Here Nebraska ranked 43rd among 50 states while Iowa and Kansas respectively ranked 31st and 33rd.



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