

NEBRASKA: FRONTIER LAND

Daily Nebraskan

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VALUE OF PLATFORM

Issues? What --- Where

Yesterday, Roger Dickeson's and the Nebraskan's views on the state of the State of Nebraska were aired before the student body. Today, we are publishing another article about this "Frontier" of Nebraska.

With the permission of the Christian Science Monitor we are reprinting the article referred to by Dickeson: "... in a very real sense, this still is frontier country."

One point made in this article which brings out the key issue in our discussion of Nebraskaitis, or as Dickeson stated, "World Heralditis", is that of Governor Frank Morrison:

"Thus it is, too, that a Nebraska Governor can say (as Governor Frank Morrison has said to this reporter): 'There is no point in a Governor here speaking out for a legislative program. My voice is no better than that of an individual senator.'"

Nebraska's Governor can, if we draw a proper conclusion from the above, really do very little other than investigate, and perform the ceremonial duties that Dickeson pointed out yesterday.

Candidates always propose programs. Their party's convention promotes a program for their candidate to run on. But what good is a program if it can not be put into effect?

A legislature, with state senators elected on a party ticket and in some way responsible, publicly, to that party for its program, would probably be able to implement these programs. But how is this possible with the present "43" party situation?

Issues are, or appear to be, nil in most electoral contests in the state. Anyway, if the issues are put forth, there probably is a slim chance that they will be enacted

into policy. The governorship in Nebraska, if it is a position of leadership, will probably end up a popularity contest this year — integrity seems the only issue and money, money, who got the money.

Another point to make is this. The primary elections are just ahead and the 21 and over students have a chance to exercise their vote. Look carefully into the candidates that finally get the nomination. We must demand issues. We must hear the platforms of the candidates and how they propose to implement them.

It is easy for a candidate to stand up and tear down a previous administration. It is also easy for one to stand up and say "look at the record." True, the past is somewhat of an indication of what is ahead. But the time is now to say what you, the candidate, advocates for the progress of Nebraska and how to get it. It is time to quit quibbling over questions other than those about the future of Nebraska as a STATE.

It is time for issues, as the Monitor stated, that have already been political battlefields across the country, to cross into the borders of Nebraska. It is time to take a realistic approach toward our problems.

True, as some have said, we are ahead in some areas. But are we ahead in the most vital areas? Education? Industry? Highways? Well-qualified Leadership? These appear, to us, more important to Nebraska than the new "Nebraskit" — and has its place in Nebraska too!

So students of voting age, and those who aren't far off, do something about the state of the State. Question the candidates pointedly, and don't let them skirt around the issues of importance to our future as a State.

Let's develop our "frontierland".

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story is reprinted with permission from the CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, March 3, 1962, and is relevant to the speech made by Mr. Roger Dickeson which we reprinted on Thursday. We present it here for its informational value to the students of the University of Nebraska.

By Godfrey Sperling Jr.
Chief of the Midwestern Bureau of
The Christian Science Monitor,
Lincoln, Neb.

To come to Nebraska is to find that conservatism, is not a thunder, but a way of life.

It is long since the day when this area was incorrectly written off as a part of the great American desert. But in a real sense, this still is frontier country.

The same rugged individualism that once measured up to survival still bases a philosophy that believes that man should take care of himself.

Some of the liberal-conservative battlegrounds of say, Ohio and Indiana, and some other Midwest states have not even been reached here. For example, the right-to-work concept (an anathema to organized labor) is generally conceded to be a basic right of the individual in these parts. Indeed, it is a part of the Constitution.

What little there is of organized labor is centered around Omaha. Its voice is such an ineffective one in this great grain-raising state that not a single significant labor-backed bill got out of committee in the last session of the Legislature.

Local Rights Stressed
What is even more difficult for outsiders to comprehend is that the people of this state, speaking generally, are not just opposed to federal government doing things for them—they also haven't yet reconciled themselves to state government doing very much either.

The 43 legislators who make up the unicameral Nebraska Legislature are deeply conscious of the deep local-rights concept held by their constituents. Thus, in part because the nonpartisan nature of the assembly defies party or gubernatorial discipline, each senator devotes most of his attention to what he feels to be the needs of his own locality.

Thus it is, too, that a Nebraska Governor can say (as Gov. Frank Morrison has said to this reporter): "There is no point in a Governor here speaking out for a legislative program. My voice is no better than that of an individual senator."

Does this approach mean that the people of Nebraska have, necessarily, found the good life? Among those who defend the local concept and, in addition the emphasis on economy, there are critics who say the last Legislature fell short in its appropriations for higher education, welfare and public safety.

The big problem in higher education here is the loss of fine faculty members to other states—where salaries are higher. In the mid-1940's this problem was recognized, and increased faculty salaries have helped to reduce the numbers leaving.

In fact, by 1959 somewhat of a regional parity had been achieved. But the last appropriation for higher education, although an increase over the previous one, was a paring of the recommendation, and is seen by many as a loss to the state in this battle to keep good men.

Broader Tax Base
The local-state conflict now centers on the move for a broader tax base. For general revenue Nebraska still depends entirely upon a property tax. Thus, while neighboring states are debating whether to increase its sales or income taxes (or both), Nebraska still is only slowly moving toward one, or probably a combination of both, of these new taxes.

But here again some understanding is needed. Some of the senators who oppose the new tax base at this time are very conscious that the property tax is reaching a point, in many areas, where it cannot go any higher.

But there is feeling here that more efficiency and savings at the level of local government (also dependent upon the property tax) should be achieved before a move to new taxes is made.

Thus, until a few years ago there were some 6,000

school districts in Nebraska; now there are about 4,000, said to be the most of any state in the United States. The "Little Red Schoolhouse" concept still holds here; a school district can mean a single school, and a single principal, and often a single teacher.

Consolidation would mean more efficiency, less tax dollars spent, less leaning on the property tax. But the spirit of independence is such here that a voluntary approach is being relied on in a contrast to Iowa, which is doing it by legislation. Voluntary action could take years.

Township maintenance of roads also is quite expensive, with much duplication. If this could be done at the county level, less machinery and men would be necessary. But again voluntary action makes such consolidation slow.

Said one observer of this problem: "Think what federal aid to education might do to Nebraska. It could well help support and maintain an archaic and expensive system."

Perhaps, in coming legislative session, a broadened tax provision may be tied to consolidation compliance upon the part of the localities (that is, "no consolidation, no money.") But new taxes pose new problems too in this state.

Strange Alliance
The sales tax, often backed by business interests in other states, is opposed by many businessmen in the powerful Omaha area. Businessmen there get a windfall of business from people in Iowa who shop across the border in Nebraska to avoid the Iowa sales tax. Thus Omaha's business and labor join hands in opposition to the sales tax.

—a strange alliance, indeed. Further, there is the usual resistance to the income tax, coming from businessmen and others.

Nebraskans now are keenly conscious that they are losing population, losing many of their youth to other states. Thus, little by little, the frontier localities are turning to their state government, with acceptance of state spending for better recreation, for better schools, for programs to bring in new industry.

Conservatism in Nebraska does not necessarily mean an absence of progress. For instance, Nebraska now is engaged in an ambitious, state-financed program to find new uses for agricultural products.

A new state-supported program to develop recreation areas and state parks has been enacted. Soil and water conservation projects, with much of the work locally financed, are springing up in all parts of the state.

Nearly every town of any size now has an active industrial development organization and many are starting to promote the tourist attractions of their localities.

Thus, the frontier concept is changing here, but 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.

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