

# City Governments Are Like People—Different

(continued from page 1) sits with the council as a council member and presiding officer. In only two cities, Omaha and Grand Island, does the mayor have veto power over council decisions. Omaha with its full-time mayor provision, assigns many of its executive decisions to the mayor. The Rev. Walter Daniels, executive secretary of the Omaha Area Council of Churches, believes that the Omaha council is a group which legislates and also approves some executive decisions which are made by the mayor.

Mayor Frank D. Ryder of Grand Island assigns all decision-making power to the council as a whole. But the mayor of another mayor-council community, North Platte, explains that some decisions belong to the mayor and some belong to the whole council. The North Platte official said that the councilman's authority is limited to action around the council table, unless some special assignment is delegated by the mayor or the council.

The mayor's closer knowledge of city problems may make him more influential. Lincoln's former mayor, Bartlett E. Boyles, explained, "The mayor, because of his relationship, knows more about city government than do the council members? Usually the council follows the mayor's lead because the mayor is usually on top of the problems."

Many of the leaders feel that the citizens have some effect on the decisions made by city councils.

**Guided and Advised**  
Rev. C. H. Prouty of Nebraska City stated that the commissioners are guided and advised by friends and business interests, and sometimes cowed by those who are outspoken critics of change and expenditure. However, he said that in the final analysis, the commissioners, in session, make the decisions.

Obviously, by law, the councils (including the mayors), make the final OFFICIAL decisions. But who, if anyone, influences those decisions?

Writers of fiction—particularly for television—delight in giving that influence to everyone from the councilman's wives to their barbers. Fact would seem to bear out only one sure-fire line of influence. The former (the wives) do influence the latter (the barbers)—where the councilman's haircuts are concerned.

Beyond that, who influences the councils? Is it the mayors?

Apparently, the mayors in Nebraska cities have little such power. Only one interview indicated that the mayor had any special influence. He said:

"It seems that when our mayor stands to speak in a council meeting, all of the council members begin shouting 'aye' to show that they are in favor of any

proposal which the mayor may make." He added, however, that if a weaker mayor were in office, "this situation might not occur."

**Presiding Officer**  
Most frequently, however, the mayor is described as the presiding officer of the council and as head for the city, the person who delivers all dedication speeches and makes proclamations for the city.

Except for these areas, the mayor is labeled as a council member whose power is no more concentrated than that of the other council members.

In this light, another question follows: Does anyone exert any special power in city government? Is there an "O Street Gang" in Lincoln? Do North Platte officials feel the pressures of railroad interests? On the trail of that kind of influence, Nebraska city officials were asked:

Are you aware of special interest or pressure groups working to influence municipal decisions?

All of the officials were aware of such groups. However, they indicated that only minor forms of influence result from groups "lobbying."

The eight Chambers of Commerce lead the list of special interest groups mentioned—39 of the leaders cited these groups as "organizations which work for the individual and combined interests of their members." (In fairness, ob-

servers pointed out that this is one of the main functions of a Chamber of Commerce.)

**Proposals Followed**  
Gerald Whelan, Hastings city attorney, commented, "It is my opinion that when there is merit for the entire city, the proposals of the Chamber of Commerce are followed, as the Chamber's proposals speak for the members of the business groups in town."

Only one city official mentioned excessive Chamber pressuring. He maintained that several members of his city's Chamber have exerted a great deal of pressure on him to gain their ends. He added, "The fact that I don't seem to be very susceptible to their pressure has not particularly endeared me to them."

The Chambers of Commerce were not alone among the pressure groups cited. Others, and the frequency with which they were mentioned, included: Liquor promoters (29); P.T.A.'s and other youth groups (21);

Ministerial groups (16); Labor organizations (14); Specialized business groups (8); Organized club interests (4).

One official said that special interest groups cannot be described as "power behind the throne" organizations, although certain ones have influence when policies affecting them are being considered.

"This is not all bad. Council members ought to know the mind of various groups on matters to be decided. The problem is to make sure that the best interests of the community always prevail over the particular interests of small segments of the community," the official noted.

Lincoln's Mayor Boyles bluntly denied pressure group influence. "It is simply not true that pressure groups make decisions," he said. "We go along with their wants only when the independent-thinking council decides an issue in the way way as the group is thinking."

Now, how about the newspapers? Does the editorial which supports a proposed school bond have any effect upon the voter's decision? Should a candidate for city office "give up" on the coming election if he has failed to receive endorsement from the local paper?

Those interviewed gave the newspaper editorial pages little credit for swaying council and public opinion.

More specifically, the civic leaders felt that either council members and voters make it a point to go against the newspaper's stand on an issue, or they formulate their own opinions after reading straight news stories which present both sides of a question.

But, just how much influence do the newspapers have in making city decisions? Do the papers exert more influence than city officials care to admit? (This question is, as yet, unanswered.)

None of the officials think that the newspaper is effective in the pressure area. However, most of them said that their newspaper is effective in presenting every side of an issue.

"The ... papers would like to be influential," answered one Mayor. "However, many citizens are likely to vote against what the paper stands for."

He continued by crediting the newspapers with effectiveness in keeping city government matters alive for the reading public. He cited the example of controversial questions which are pending in City Hall.

"The paper takes a side while the controversy is still in the air, and in this way keeps the issue in front of the people, and thus keeps them stirred up," he explained.

Another mayor commented that the newspapers have absolutely no influence over decisions of the elected city officials, but that they have a certain influence over voter decisions.

Presenting a unique idea, one community leader remarked that it appears that councilmen govern the newspaper reporters, in that the facts reported are expressions of council members.

In the American system of government political parties play a vital part. This is particularly so at national and state levels. The party approach and its influence are less prominent in city government.

Columbus is the only Nebraska community included in this study which uses partisanship. Nebraska's non-partisan state legislature seems to encourage non-partisanship in city government. Apparently because of this, 36 of the community leaders polled felt that partisan politics in city government would tend to destroy the relationship of the city to the state.

Columbus spokesmen indicated that they are satisfied with their partisan structure, but they feel that prime consideration should still be given to the candidates' qualifications instead of their political parties.

None of the officials in the other towns felt that there is a need for partisanship

of Scottsbluff, likens the city manager to the manager of a large business. "Someone has to be at the head of it to get things done and keep employees going. The city council resembles the board of directors of a corporation," he said.

**Not In Agreement**  
Representatives of the commission form of city government (Nebraska City) don't agree on the effectiveness of their government.

The city attorney feels it is the custom in Nebraska City, although not required by law, that the commissioner who receives the highest vote is mayor, the one who receives the second highest vote, finance commissioner, and the one who receives the least votes is head of the street department and public property.

Concerning this custom, Gary Blakeman of the Chamber of Commerce, stated that he would like to see each candidate run for a specific office than see the jobs allocated according to the number of votes received. If this were the case, Blakeman believes that more people would be willing to enter the race as a candidate.

Hastings and Columbus representatives indicated satisfaction with their government forms.

Columbus city attorney Wilbur Johnson mentioned that under the mayor-council form there is direct connection between the residents of the city and the local government so that the various problems which arise can be given attention with a minimum amount of "red tape."

**Full-Time Mayor**  
"The only change I would recommend," commented one Columbus representative, "would be a full-time mayor, because there is too much work to be done on a part-time basis."

Hastings city attorney Gerald Whelan states that under their system the mayor has insufficient power, but a forceful mayor, if he so desires, can accomplish as much even though he does not have power under their ordinances. He adds that, by tradition, mayors are strong whether they have the legal strength or not.

Some North Platte leaders, although not dissatisfied with their present program, are concerned about lack of leadership in local government.

Who makes the decisions in these eight Nebraska cities?

This study did not unearth any one overriding answer to that question. But, as some students of government are fond of pointing out—"Cities are like people, and cities are made up of people."

### Special Education—

## Gifted Children's Parents Favor Class Continuation

A study of attitudes toward a special education class for the mentally gifted students indicates that those parents who opposed it were those satisfied with their present position in life.

A recent doctorate thesis prepared at the University by Donald W. Frazer, school superintendent of Atchison, Kan., sampled the attitudes of parents toward a special sixth-grade class in Atchison.

Supt. Frazer, who received his Doctor of Education degree this past month, found that 57.4 per cent favored continuation of the program, 21.1 per cent wanted it continued with changes, 17.1 per cent wanted it discontinued,

and the other 4.4 per cent had no opinion.

Surprisingly, the study found generally that a greater percentage of those with the higher income, level of education, and occupation were against continuance of the program.

"It has been demonstrated that the degree of satisfaction that the people in Atchison have enjoyed tend to develop an apparent unwillingness to support a program that would bring about any change of these conditions," the study said.

**His findings included:**  
—Of those making \$10,000 or more, 25.7 per cent wanted the program discontinued, compared with 3.4 per cent of the top income bracket wanted the program contin-

ued without changes, while 65.6 per cent of the lower bracket wanted it to continue.

—Of those living in Atchison 10 years or more, 22 per cent wanted it discontinued, while 52 per cent wanted it continued. But of those living in the city five years or less, only 2.5 per cent wanted it discontinued and nearly 70 per cent wanted it continued. "It would appear, therefore, that people who had had experiences in other communities were more readily willing to accept such a program."

—Of the parents at the extreme ends of the levels of education—below 8th grade and with college degrees—a smaller percentage were for discontinuing the program. Only six per cent of those below 8th grade wanted it stopped, and 11.7 per cent of the College graduates wanted it discontinued. However, 20.1 per cent of the high school graduates favored discontinuance.

—In an effort to determine the parents' attitudes toward the feeling that an elite group was being formed, Dr. Frazer found that less than 40 per cent of the parents felt that snobbishness would, or has, resulted because of the experience of children in the special sixth-grade program. "Many parents expressed an opinion that such snobbishness, if noticeable, is caused by the parents of the children enrolled in the special sixth grade and not from being a member of the special class."

—"Approximately 81 per cent of the people felt that there was no noticeable effect on the children because of the competition experienced in the special class." The thesis was done under the supervision of Dean Walter K. Beggs of the Teachers College.

## Dr. Lavocat Will Explore Neb. Badland

After 100 years to the month, France has again sent a famous scientist and explorer to study Nebraska in the old way—on foot and in rugged country.

The Abbe Dr. Rene Lavocat, presently consulting with University scientists at the State Museum, is preparing to spend much of the summer in the Nebraska Badlands.

Father Lavocat, a Catholic priest, famous geologist and vertebrate paleontologist, is associated with the Laboratory of Higher Studies at the Sorbonne, as well as with the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.

Not since Jules Marcou came here to study the geology near Omaha and Nebraska City in 1863 has a French geologist and explorer studied in the state. Marcou was considered the last of the French explorers in Nebraska and the first geologist to come here. He also had an appointment as a travelling scientist with the museum in Paris.

The Abbe Lavocat is an authority on the same age rocks in Europe that crop out in the Badlands. He is particularly interested in the deposits along the White River and has come to pursue a comparative study.

He will be accompanied in the field by Prof. and Mrs. T. M. Stout of the department of geology and the University State Museum. He has spent the past several days conferring with Professor Stout and Dr. C. Bertrand Schultz, Museum director.

Father Lavocat is an old hand at living under hardship. He has led geologic expeditions on foot in France, Algeria, Morocco and Madagascar and once walked 6,200 miles on his expeditions across the Sahara.

University scientists said they were particularly delighted to have Dr. Lavocat study with them. He is the official guest of the State, the State Museum, the department of geology and the Conservation and Survey Division of the University of Nebraska.

## All-State Performances Highlight Concluding Week

Nebraska lovers of the fine arts will have the opportunity this week to see and hear the work of the most promising young high school students in the state.

The final week of the University of Nebraska All-State High School Course is packed with public performances by the more than 400 students attending this year.

The agenda for the week includes plays, art and journalism exhibitions and a number of musical performances.

The week's agenda beginning today:

**Tuesday—Band Concert,** 160 students, under the direction of Jack Snider, director of the University of Nebraska Marching Band, 7:30 p.m. Nebraska Union.

**Wednesday—"An Evening with Rogers and Hammerstein,"** 150 voice chorus directed by John Moran, All-State director, and a 90 piece orchestra directed by David Fowler, associate professor of music education, 7:30 p.m. Nebraska Union.

**Thursday—Chorus concert,** 200 voices under the direction of Richard Grace, assistant professor of music, 7:30 p.m., Nebraska Union.

**Friday—a play, "Skin of Our Teeth,"** directed by Dr. William Morgan, assistant professor of speech and dramatic art, 7:30 p.m., Howell Memorial Theater; Orchestra Concert, 90 pieces directed by David Fowler.

**Saturday—a play, "Chanticleer,"** directed by Dallas Williams, professor of speech and dramatic art, 7:30 p.m., Howell Memorial Theater; combined band, orchestra and chorus concert, 7:30 p.m., East Stadium; Art Show, 10 a.m., Nebraska Union.

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