



## ASUN gerrymandering

Talk of UNL student government being mickey mouse is perennial, but those comments need not be quite so critical. ASUN can perform a valuable service, but it seems that this particular form of government in many instances gets caught up in petty politics too soon and too often, often resembling other forms of larger governments we live with in this country.

This week before the ASUN Senate is a proposed set of guidelines intended to govern the structure of the ASUN elections to be held in March. The report originally called for the polling places for the election to be located in several campus classroom buildings and the Unions on the City and East Campuses.

When the report was first presented to ASUN last week it then contained a list specifying these

particular locations. When it met with bitter opposition from some senators the report was tabled. It is expected to come up again Wednesday only slightly modified.

The central issue raised by certain senators regarded the report's not naming residence hall locations as polling places. Those presenting the Electoral Commission report contended that dorm polling places would tend to bias the overall vote in favor of dormitory residents.

Now it is said that the report to be presented this week provides no mention of polling places. It is also said that the Electoral Commission plans to continue to avoid use of residence halls as places for students to cast their ballots.

The initial recommendation of the Electoral Commission is to be considered as an attempt at poor political gerrymandering at best. The arguments against having polling places in residence hall locations are equally feeble.

ASUN senators should at this point be vividly concerned about involving as many students as possible in the spring elections. Residence hall locations would certainly serve as a vehicle for increasing student participation in the elections.

The Electoral Commission and the ASUN Senate should seek as many polling locations as possible. The addition of residence hall locations is the best way.

## Right on Masters

All things must pass.

Masters Week has indeed passed, but not without considerable exposure to this community. The list of graduates of UNL who were invited back to the community to share their successes on Monday and Tuesday of this week was indeed impressive. They visited classrooms, students, faculty members and served in a variety of capacities beneficial to many.

The Mortar Board chapter and Innocents society, with the tremendous cooperation of several administrators are to be complemented on the fine program that availed some of this institution's finest products to the entire University.

Barry Pilger

editorial

"Profits Soar 160% At Merrill Lynch"  
"Merrill Lynch Indicates Profit Plunged in June"

These are two headlines that were published the same day, the first in the *New York Times*, and the second in the *Wall Street Journal*. The first emphasized six-month figures, the second emphasized quarterly figures. Both headlines are credible, but they leave readers with entirely different conceptions.

Such discrepancies are unavoidable; they result from perception, selection and emphasis on the "newsworthy." They are common enough that many readers give guarded acceptance to newspaper objectivity. An Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) study showed that 49 per cent of respondents believed their newspaper's stand on politics affected news stories in the paper.

Distrust of the news media is unmistakable in popular allusions to the "credibility gap." Like most overused phrases, however, "the credibility gap" has become nondescript and misunderstood. It casts a slur on the news media—whose shortcomings are largely unavoidable. Failings in newspaper production, by themselves, do not account for the difference between what is real and what is reported.

The greatest distortion of news today is done by those who manufacture news—individuals, groups, businesses or officials who synthesize events in order to direct desirable public attention to

specific information. Several writers have termed such planned news "pseudo-events."

Pseudo-events include news conferences, recognition banquets, interviews and deliberate government "leaks." In a recent issue of a Lincoln paper, four of seven front page stories fell into this category.

A pseudo-event may also be a demonstration or a sit-in, instruments through which minority groups gain public sympathy.

Maneuvering into the news spotlight is not objectionable if it is done in the public interest—in the context of legitimate public controversy. But it is questionable when it is done by the government in an effort to project a favorable, but inaccurate, image. In this setting, it does not add information, but subtracts or selectively discloses it.

The recent government injunction against two newspapers for publishing the ("Pentagon Papers") caused Max Frankel, Washington bureau chief of the *New York Times*, to reflect, "The uses of top-secret information by our government in deliberate leaks to the press for the purposes of influencing public opinion are recorded, cited and commented upon in several places of the "Pentagon Papers" study. Also cited and analyzed are numerous examples of how the government tried to control the release of such secret information so as to have it appear at a desired time, or in a desired publication, or in a deliberately

loud or soft manner for maximum or minimum impact."

He noted there were numerous records of classified information that was "leaked" without officially being declassified.

The government classification of information is undefined and arbitrary. Tom Wicker, associate editor of the *New York Times*, reports that one high government official said he routinely classifies any thing that goes through his office "top-secret" because "nobody has given him really rational reasons for classifying a document or not." Wicker reports that several hundred other people have similar power.

A certain degree of news manipulation by public officials can be expected. But arbitrary classification and selective disclosure of government operations allows the public to be deceived and misled.

More rigorous criteria for classification are necessary not only for greater news credibility, but for effective policy-making itself. Both the public and Congress are hampered by limited access to information about executive functions.

A classification system that is maneuvered according to the political whim of administrators is intolerable. Only when meaningful information is widely disseminated are policy decisions responsible and public officials accountable.

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