

Rhetoric and reality

"Noble rhetoric alone cannot save this nation." During his short remarks to the antiwar rally at the State Capitol Saturday, former Nebraska Gov. Frank Morrison offered the above version of the adage that even President Nixon and his fellow followers of the Puritan ethic could be expected to believe: "Actions speak louder than words."

In reviewing the noble words of Nixon's inaugural speech, perhaps it would be well to keep in mind that past contrasts between rhetoric and reality.

The President again told his nation that "we stand on the threshold of a new era of peace in the world." According to military sources quoted in a United Press International dispatch from Saigon, 371 human beings died Saturday on the battlefields of Southeast Asia while America stood on the threshold of peace. And it has been during a time of "imminent peace" that President Nixon had unleashed one of the most massive bombing assaults in the history of warfare.

Nixon also spoke of last year's diplomatic achievements: "Because of America's bold initiatives, 1972 will long be remembered as the year of the greatest progress since World War II toward a lasting peace in the world." Obviously, significant possibilities of international readjustment are presented by the facts that an American president has walked in the Forbidden City and slept in the Kremlin. But America's "bold initiatives" of 1972 also included the carpet bombing of targets either in or tragically near the civilian centers of North Vietnam.

President Nixon submitted what may be interpreted as an explanation of that concept of an honorable peace which he has found so elusive during the last four years. "Let us build a structure of peace in the world in which the weak are as safe as the

strong—in which each respects the right of the other to live by a different system—in which those who would influence others will do so by the strength of their ideas, not by the force of their arms." Despite this attractive description of a new world order, many in America and around the world have not forgotten that one of the expressed purposes of the mining of North Vietnam's ports and of the recent heavy bombing of the North was to persuade the other side to enter into "serious negotiations." In his actions, Nixon has seldom been one to rely upon the strength of his ideas as a primary persuasive force.

Paradoxically, the President himself identified what has been the most serious flaw in his Administration. He said, "Let each of us reach out for that one precious quality government cannot provide—a new level of respect for the rights and feelings of one another and for the individual human dignity which is the cherished birthright of every American." Perhaps it is true that government cannot be the provider of a national respectability; at least it has not served in that role during recent years.

Americans have reached out for that "precious quality." But it continues to escape their grasp because the Nixon administration is unable or unwilling to encourage a national atmosphere in which "a new level of respect" can grow and flourish.

Tom Lansworth

Editorial columnists

This semester the Daily Nebraskan's columnists will include Bob Russell, John Vihstadt and Arthur Hoppe. Editorial opinions expressed in the Daily Nebraskan are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the staff.

Stopping the pusher, Rockefeller fashion

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by Randy Beam

No sooner had the Nebraska Legislature been gavelled into session than came word from Bellwood State Sen. Loran Schmit that he had a plan which would wipe drug traffic from Nebraska's countenance forever.

In Nelson Rockefeller fashion (in fact, Schmit's announcement followed by only days, an identical Rockefeller proposal), Schmit unveiled intentions to, among other things, ask life jail sentences for all drug pushers, with no parole.

In 1971, the Unicameral completely overhauled Nebraska's drug laws. The end product was a statute which had been sponsored by the State Crime Commission. Its designers included experts from all 50 states and the federal government.

Now, not two years, hence, Schmit insists on tampering with the law.

His solution—life sentences—is an audaciously simple solution to a very complex problem. In addition, his proposal carries the marks of bandwagon popularism which occasionally pressures bad legislation into law.

Schmit is making several false assumptions about his proposal's anticipated effect on drug traffic.

—The image of the pusher, garbed in a long trench coat with an upturned collar, tempting children from a dark street corner is a myth. People encounter drugs through friends, not nameless pushers. Even most heroin addicts first try that drug with friends who have used it but have not yet become addicts, the *Washington Post* reported in a recent study.

—The assumption that harsher penalties will dry up drug supplies to negligible proportions is false. Heroin addicts will continue to be heroin addicts even if Schmit's bill is passed. And where there's a buck to be made, someone will be willing to take the risk, no matter how great. Schmit's proposal would only drive up drug prices. Will that halt the crime that law enforcement officials say runs rampant in the nation's cities because of drugs?

—The most bothersome repercussion of Schmit's proposal is the handcuffs it would put on the courts. Shouldn't a judge or jury have the discretion to decide how great a menace to society a defendant is? Instead of limiting them, Schmit should offer the courts the widest possible latitude for sentencing.

The most disgusting aspect of his and Rockefeller's solution, and, in fact the most disgusting aspect of the solution that so often is seized upon is the assumption that all it takes is a new law to stop a social problem.

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