

Religion, registration shouldn't mix at UNL

Those little, white religious preference cards tucked in with UNL registration packets seem so innocent. Besides being a good way for the shepherd to keep track of the flock, they're cheap, strictly voluntary and, of course, harmless.

Or are they?

A decision last week to stop mailing the cards seems not so much the result of administrative streamlining as, at least, the realization that religious preference cards don't belong in registration packets and, in fact, stick out like sore thumbs.

Directly following a study of the cards by ASUN Senator Doug Voegler and growing controversy over the NU Board of Regent's religion policy, the decision to drop the cards has brought religious leaders out of the woodwork to defend what they apparently think is a God-given right to free postage.

One editorialist, also a registered lobbyist, has been quoted as saying, "I probably will bring this to the Legislature, which has an interest in the funding of the University, and if necessary, to the NU Board of Regents."

Such a reaction, while it should probably be expected, is out of proportion to the question. Implied threats of running to the keeper of the University's purse strings smack of an overeagerness to bite the hands that have been kind enough to feed the churches' desire for an inexpensive way of doing their duty.

The first step should be the NU Board of Regents. If that body is unwilling to draw on its resources and come up with an opinion on the legality of mailing the cards, then and only then would a trip to the Legislature be in order.

Under the regents' present policy, if it exists in succinct enough form to allow interpretation, the preference cards are not the violation some claim them to be. While mailing the cards does use University resources, it does not constitute worship, testimony or the encouragement of any particular faith.

What it does represent, however, is something the regents have neglected to ban explicitly—University support of religious organizations.

By what right should the campus ministries be allowed to use the registration process to proselytize for free? Why shouldn't they pay their own postage?

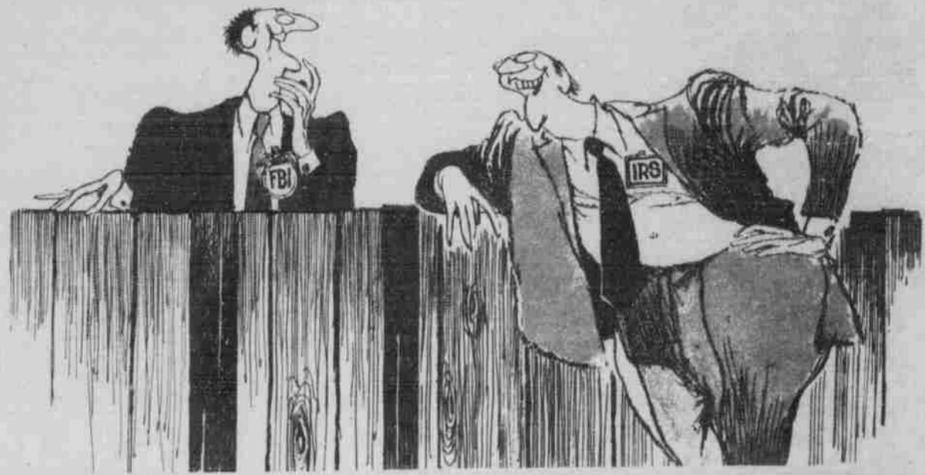
The usual argument is that the churches somehow contribute so much to a student's education that they earn the rights of a University department. They provide a service to students, their proponents say, and so are entitled to some sort of gratuity.

But that justification lacks something. It can also be argued that insurance companies provide a service to students, and the University is not about to start mailing insurance preference cards, even if they were "strictly voluntary."

Separation of church and state does not require the University to oppose religion. Nor should it be expected to give handouts to churches in the form of free mailing.

If the campus churches must depend on the state to keep their pews filled and the flock in line, they are in sad shape. The decision to stop mailing the preference cards is the correct one. The churches should get the necessary information on their own or pay the University handsomely for doing their recruiting for them.

Wes Albers



—And him at his age, a drive-in movie with that plump little secretary in the mini-skirt, the one with the dimple in her knees and him being married and all don'tcha know—

LBJ had his moments, too

It should be comforting to supporters of Richard Nixon who were shocked to hear the quality of language that frequented the Oval Office to know that Lyndon Johnson had his moments, too.

The new investigation of domestic spying by the CIA and FBI is finding that the White House was the scene of happenings during the Johnson years that show even more clearly what the term "national affairs" means today.

J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the FBI, played politics with tapes about sexual activities of prominent Americans. Keeping the hottest items in his private safe, he often leaked such information to LBJ to damage those he opposed.

Johnson, for his part, enjoyed the juicy gossip these materials supplied and the potential such material held for embarrassing his rivals.

Hugh Sidey reports that when a Johnson assistant once defended Martin Luther King's anti-war activities, LBJ exploded: "Goddammit, if only you could hear what that hypocritical preacher does sexually." And LBJ should have known, since he had tapes of King's bedroom activities which read "like an erotic book."

While publicly denying that the FBI was making prying wiretaps and continually denouncing illegal bugging, Johnson was receiving bugging on U.S. Senators and other Americans.

From this, it should be clear that Nixon did not invent illegal bugging and misuse of the FBI and CIA, but merely used them for his own slightly different purposes.

It seems that with Nixon we reached the crest of a flood of paranoia that developed throughout the 60's.

Originally such operations were justified by an appeal to some shadowy entity called national security. However, once paranoia allowed such operations to gather momentum, the distinction between the needs of national security and illegal bugging became blurred.

Beginning clearly with the Johnson

Administration, the politics of paranoia began to stretch the needs of national security to include U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, newsmen and others.

This creeping extension of domestic surveillance in the interests of national security ultimately led to the Ellsberg break-in, the Pentagon Papers trial, the bugging of Democratic National Headquarters, enemies lists. . .

The legacy of ten years of the politics of paranoia is not ended now that LBJ and Hoover are dead and Nixon is in forced retirement. Americans may smugly believe that, with Gerald Ford in the White House and Nelson Rockefeller hot on the trail, the dangers of internal espionage are past, but such is not the case.

rick johnson rhymes & reasons

The politics of paranoia goes beyond acts of wiretapping and bugging—it is a state of mind. This state of mind grows from and feeds upon Americans' long-standing fear of dissent.

Americans always seem to grow paranoid when doubts about the actions or viability of their beloved social system are voiced. Whatever the reasons that we are so sensitive about our system, for the most part we do react strongly to those who criticize it.

Regardless of whatever new controls may be placed on domestic espionage in the wake of the present investigation, we should not smugly suppose that the threat to personal liberty posed by domestic spying will end.

It seems that the politics of paranoia and its inherent threat will continue to haunt us so long as Americans continue to view dissent as an evil. It seems slightly unfair to expect more restraint in our leaders than we are willing to exhibit in our own lives. It may be that condoning is a matter of degree and position more than anything else.

