

op/ed

Today's voters indefensible, Shaw's theory still applies

It was Saturday night, and my roommate noted that this was the 42nd straight weekend I could reuse the blank pages of my social calendar.

When I responded that I had devoted my evening to exhorting UNL students to exercise their God-given right and duty of voting, he laughed.

"Tell me," he said, "have you never heard of Shaw's theory that democracy merely substitutes election by the incompetent many for selection by a corrupt few?"

"Next you'll claim that politicians only give us simple answers to complex questions," roommate continued, "but don't we let them get away with it? How many of us force a candidate to explain exactly how he's going to limit state spending without hurting state services?"

"You may be unhappy about the use of simple slogans, but voters eat them up."

Solution killed

"LB 301 is a good example. Its opponents say there's a better solution, but that same solution was killed twice in two years by the Unicameral. Has anyone ever asked them why they don't spend their money supporting some type of litter control instead of on a media blitz against it?"

I contended that most voters are intelligent and adopt a laissez-faire attitude only on issues that don't directly affect them.

"A lid on local government budgets won't affect them?" roommate responded. "Increasing state aid to education won't affect them? Enacting a bottle bill to clean up their state won't affect them?"

I pondered for a moment, then said that many voters are repulsed by a political campaign's yard signs and radio commercials.

Name recognition

"Perhaps," he said, "but if voters would bother to study the candidates themselves, why would politicians have to spend so much money just getting their names known?"

"And that's all a candidate tries to do. Voters know so little that they vote for people with nice names, or the name they remember from somewhere or the name that's listed first."

"Why else would the law require candidates' names to be rotated on the ballots?"

By then, I had but one defense: cynicism.

"Voters should be cynical about politicians," my roommate observed. "Who do you think elected them? If a voter wants better politicians it's up to him to force candidates to be qualified, and the only way to do that is to spend some time

studying politics.

"Besides," he said, "in the words of Hubert Humphrey, 'If you think politics is dirty—and if you're clean—get in there with your own brand of political soap and clean it up.'"

letters

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and I clearly differ on these points. Such an examination, I am sure, will show that the experience and qualifications that I present to the voters substantiates what I propose.

Doug Bereuter

Disappointing coverage

I am writing to convey my extreme displeasure at your editorial policy concerning the lack of review coverage for the recent School of Music production of the opera, *Werther*. (Oct. 26-29).

Although the regular music/theater reviewer was marginally connected with our production, his duties involved pre-performance administrative help only, and I fail to see how this could have affected his journalistic impartiality in any way. Indeed, had you bothered to read the review submitted to you, you would have found it an unbiased opinion that discussed both the strengths and weaknesses presented in the production.

Any reviewer educationally qualified to write for your paper on the subject of

opera is likely to be a School of Music student, and if this is viewed as a conflict of interest, then obviously your only alternative is uninformed criticism. If, however, it is your personal lack of appreciation for opera that leads you to suppose that this art form can be neglected by a newspaper editor, then I believe that you are laboring under a serious misunderstanding of the journalistic profession.

I am looking forward to seeing a change in your policy concerning future School of Music performances.

Edward J. Craft
Director

Editor's note: At the time of the assignment of the review of *Werther*, we were unaware that Richard Weigel was the assistant director in the production.

No matter if he had a walk-on part or a major part in the opera, this constitutes a conflict of interest.

We do not let any reporter involved in an organization, cover that organization.

We did read the review and because of the reviewer's conflict of interest, it was not published.

michael gibson

I replied that Shaw's theory was concocted in the 1910s, when the high illiteracy rate and sparsity of information insured that few voters knew who they were voting for.

"Indeed," he agreed, "we have now progressed to the point where, according to a UNL survey, almost 31 percent of Nebraska voters know who their state senator is. I wonder what percentage know their senator's stance on state spending, state aid to education..."

Stands not clear

"That's not the voters' fault," I attacked. "Candidates rarely say where they stand on an issue."

"Did anyone ever ask them?" countered roommate. "Newspapers are full of articles describing candidates and their opinions, but how many Nebraskans read them? How many have bothered to write a candidate about an issue?"

I sensed my defense of the American voter was in slight trouble.

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