

opinion/editorial

Lincoln isn't immune to bigotry

City law should protect gay and lesbian rights

Civil rights in the United States is a passionate and often divisive issue.

It's hard to admit, but many people in the United States would deny many rights to others that they have. The city of Lincoln is about to conduct a litmus test to determine how supportive it is of equal rights for all citizens.

This Tuesday, the city's Human Rights Commission will sponsor a public hearing to discuss a proposed lesbian and gay rights amendment to Lincoln's Human Rights ordinance.

The amendment seeks to add lesbians and gay men to a list of protected classes in the ordinance. The ordinance was created in 1966 to protect citizens from discrimination.

Five groups were protected in the original version and the ordinance has been amended to include five more groups.

The ordinance states that it "is the intent, purpose, and public policy, of the city of Lincoln to protect, preserve and perpetuate all constitutional

rights . . . by using the most effective lawful means or methods."

The law prohibits discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on "race, color, sex, religion, disability, national origin, age, ancestry, marital status, or receipt of public assistance."

The question of civil rights for gays and lesbians has faded from the national scene since Anita Bryant began her senseless inquisition. Nevertheless, society cannot stop its fight for all citizens being able to benefit from equal protection under the laws.

While some cities like San Francisco have recognized their large gay community, and dealt with its members as people entitled to fair housing and employment, many other cities have remained cautiously behind.

It is time for Lincoln to take the necessary steps to afford adequate protection from narrow-minded people who, if given the chance, would

deny lesbians and gay men an equal opportunity to find a job, buy a house or rent an apartment and have access to basic public services.

The Lincoln Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights, which is organizing support for the amendment, lists over twenty local and state organizations endorsing the proposed amendment.

The list includes the ASUN Senate, the UNL Human Rights Committee, the Women's Resource Center, the American Association of American Professors, the Lancaster County Democratic Party and the League of Women Voters.

By including "sexual and affectional orientation" to the ordinance, Lincoln will ensure its lesbian and gay community the equal rights it deserves.

Discrimination and bigotry exist in America and Lincoln is not immune to its poison. We hope the proposed amendment is greeted with strong support so the city council will react favorably to its inclusion in the ordinance.

Babbling, ballroom, Bush and Brooke

Some papers call it "All in One Paragraph." Others call it "From the Editor's Desk." Still others call it "The World Around Us." What "it" is is babble about the news of the day. I'll be equally as cliché and call what follows "On My Mind."

On my mind:
If Paul Volcker wasn't a shot in the arm for the image of UNL students, I don't know who ever will be. Volcker, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, drew a crowd of students and others that filled the Nebraska Union Ballroom, an adjoining room and the surrounding halls.

patti gallagher

After only 30 students showed up to hear Ramsey Clark, former U.S. attorney general, speak last month, I was beginning to think maybe UNL students really only are interested in football and beer. Hats off to the College of Business Administration, organizers of the speech, for proving me wrong.

A sidenote to the Volcker speech. Because the ballroom was so full, because the halls were so crowded and because NU President Ronald Roskens arrived so late, Roskens and his men-in-suits had to sit in a sideroom where the speech was piped in. It was truly pleasing to see Roskens folded into a tacky crushed velvet couch in a room with 46 other people, about half of them students. Who says our president never comes down from his ivory tower to mingle with his subjects?

"Majestic" was the word ABC's Frank Reynolds used when the Columbia Space Shuttle lifted off Thursday morning.

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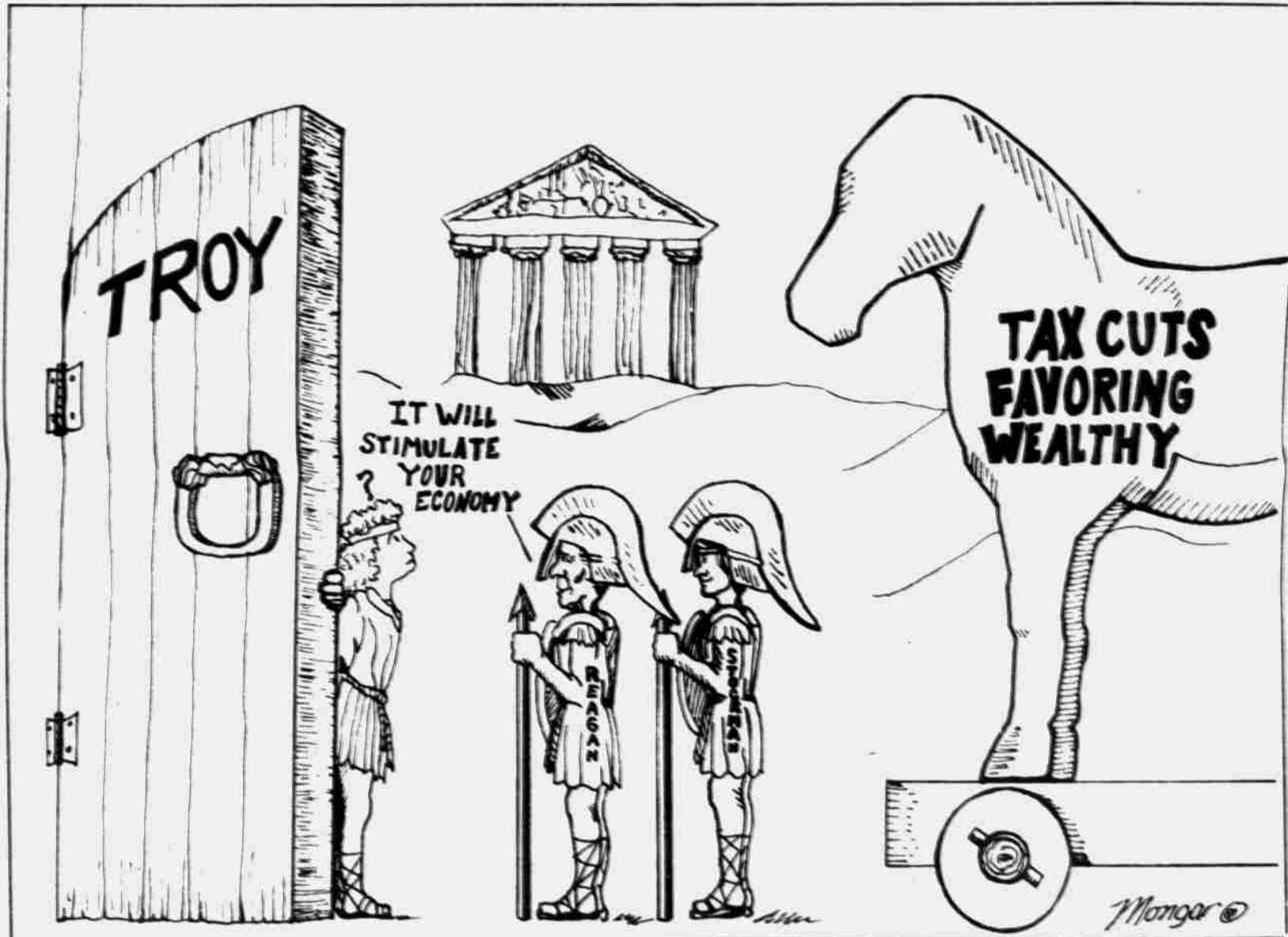
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Attitudes change but doubts linger

Boston —
This city is talking again about rape. The subject keeps coming up, rather like a sore we can't ignore and can't heal.

Because of two highly charged legal cases, we are arguing about sexual violence and sexual consent, about superficial change and ancient prejudices, about new laws and old attitudes.

The current controversy was ignited just when it should have been quelled: after two sentences of rape were handed down. In one case, three doctors were convicted by a jury of raping a nurse. In a second case, after plea-bargaining, five young men pleaded guilty to the rape of a 40-year-old woman.

ellen goodman

The doctors, who knew the nurse, and the young men who had met the woman at a bar, all maintained that the women were willing participants, not victims. The prosecution in both cases called it rape; the defense called it "consensual sexual adventure."

Despite the conviction of the doctors and the guilty plea of the five young men, it was lingering doubt about "consent" which cast the longest shadow over these cases.

Because of the doubt of colleagues, one of the doctors, out of jail on appeal, was given glowing letters of recommendation by superiors at the Harvard Medical School and even at the hospital where he and the nurse had worked. These letters — which never mentioned the rape convictions — smoothed his way into another hospital in Buffalo, N.Y.

Because of the doubt of a judge, all five of the young

men who pleaded guilty to gang rape were given suspended sentences and \$500 fines. These fines were to be paid at the rate of \$5 a week.

Of course, we might never have noticed these addenda of doubt, these bizarre footnotes to the judicial process.

But a few weeks ago the doctor with the perfect resume was accused of rape and assault by two more women who had been patients. Then last week, the judge who accepted a plea-bargain of gang rape discovered that such a light sentence was probably illegal as well as unconscionable. An outraged public did not agree that it was enough, as he claimed, to "put the fear of God into these guys."

These two cases were enough to jog our minds into thinking about what has and hasn't changed, in the law, in society, in our minds.

In the law, rape is defined neatly, as intercourse without consent. But consent is much tougher to define. The best of the new rape laws no longer allow testimony about a woman's sexual history. Yet in many minds there are only two sorts of victims: the virginal and the questionable.

These same new laws use staircase sentences to differentiate between levels of crime. Yet in many minds there are only two levels of rape: the "real" rape by a stranger with a knife in a back alley, and the questionable rape by an acquaintance.

According to FBI statistics, one out of every three women in this country can expect to be sexually assaulted. Of those who are raped, 60 percent will be raped by someone they know. Yet, virtually every rape defense between people who are not strangers will hinge on whether or not he forced her, whether or not she "consented."

So there is this further psychological gap over the very issue of "consent," between those women who identify with the victims, and those men who identify with the accused.

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