

Editorial

Decision making: A process as wild as the end results

As vacationing students, most of us probably spent the week before Christmas sitting around watching presents pile up under the tree. In Washington, however, things were not quite so placid.

The lame-duck Congress was finishing up its session and the situation was a bit tense as bargaining went on over the budget for the next fiscal year. An examination of that bargaining process may give us a clue why the problems of the country are not ironing themselves out quite as fast as we would like.

As outsiders to the Washington wrestling match, it is convenient for us to blame Congress and the Reagan administration for our economic woes. But the recent bustle that resulted in the passage of the infamous gas tax demonstrates that the blame is not so easily pinned.

Our own Sen. Edward Zorinsky didn't even hang around for the final vote on the bill. He split for Omaha instead. He told the World-Herald that he left "when it became apparent that the inmates had taken over the asylum." The fact that a senator is having problems unraveling the tangle of the legislative process doesn't exactly fill one with confidence in the system by which we govern ourselves.

Could it be that our problem is not only the economy but also the methods by which economic decisions are made? If the inmates have indeed taken over, that may be the case.

It is normal for items to be juggled in and out of the spending bill before it resembles the budget that Reagan will present later this month. The jobs program got knocked out, as did the funds for basing and deploying the MX in Wyoming.

Then, however, came the nickel-a-gallon gas tax proposal. Reagan supported it, claiming it would provide jobs and revitalize America's highway and interstate system. But four Republican senators — Jesse Helms, Donald Nickles, Gordon Humphrey and John East — ganged up in opposition to the tax. Together they managed to filibuster for 10 days, stalling a vote on the bill. East held the floor until after midnight Dec. 18, determined to keep the tax from being passed.

According to Time magazine, cots were set up in the cloak rooms of the Senate for the senators to take catnaps on while they waited for the filibustering to end so the vote could take place.

When the confusion finally did subside, the tax was included in the spending bill.

'Kerrey-Kennedy similarities are many indeed'

A new era was ushered into Nebraska politics Thursday afternoon: The Robert Kerrey era. Never in state history has a governor ever received such phenomenal amounts of national attention.

Newsweek and the New Yorker printed paragraph after paragraph of platitudes



Mike
Frost

on the new chief executive. MacNeil and Lehrer gave him a whole segment (the PBS equivalent to the Congressional Medal of Honor) on Kerrey's burgeoning political dynasty. In the eyes of many, Robert Kerrey has arrived as a national political figure.

While quite a bit of media attention has been paid to Kerrey's rise from political obscurity, considerable space has also been given to the notion that Kerrey, in the words of Newsweek "...reminds (one) of young John Kennedy."

The Kerrey-Kennedy similarities are many indeed. Now, Ripley's Believe It or Not, the same people who gave us the



The bill, however, was 300 pages long. "There is no way anyone can understand what is in there," Sen. J. James Exon said when the World Herald asked him about it.

Furthermore, before the Senate filibustering ever started and the bill came to the House for a vote, there were only 35 copies of the bill to be distributed among the 435 members of the House of Representatives, according to Darwin Olofson of the World-Herald's Washington bureau. How can a legislative body be expected to effectively examine the pros and cons of budget proposals when they cannot even review the material thoroughly?

How can an inclusive, coherent, effective budget be drawn up in the midst of a flurry of filibustering and feistysenators? What is important here is not whether or not the gas tax should have been included in the spending bill, but whether Congress even had the chance to make that or any other decision effectively. It is scary to think that decisions with potentially vast impact were made in the circus that went on at the close of the 97th Congress.

In her column in Newsweek magazine, Meg Greenfield wrote that the problem is

that our representatives are shirking their responsibilities as legislators. She is right when she says that they spend more time arguing than they do reaching decisions. But perhaps that is the fault of the legislative process rather than the legislators.

A system more closely aimed at reaching agreement would suit us much better than a menagerie of flustered senators finally conceding to compromise in the wee hours of the morning. Our economy is having problems because it is unprepared to deal with the changes it is undergoing, and it could be that our legislative system is suffering from the same malady.

David Thompson

Editorial Policy

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was never divorced, but *his* youngest brother Edward is getting one.

10. President Kennedy loved to sail. Governor Kerrey loves to go to sales.

11. Kennedy's secretary's name was Lincoln. Kerrey lives in Lincoln and has driven a Lincoln as well.

12. While President, John Kennedy awarded many deserving Americans medals of honor. While governor, Bob Kerrey will probably make several people honorary members of the Nebraska Navy.

13. Both Kerrey and Kennedy were members of the Bo Diddley Fan Club.

14. President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Occasionally, Governor Kerrey views the TV show "Dallas."

Yes, the coincidences are uncanny. One would expect Kerrey to use such similarities to catapult him into national office.

His inaugural address, stressing such Nebraska issues as nuclear defense, federal budget deficits and the computer age, clearly illustrated his mind is only on state government. However, it will be interesting to see if the New John Kennedy can be happy with Mel Mains after he's had MacNeil-Lehrer.

Letters

A fire on every TV

I have a modest suggestion for the natural gas companies that serve us. It wouldn't cost them very much and should help natural gas users — especially the middle- and low-income users.

I can well appreciate the need for gas companies to have price increases so that they can make investments to find new gas supplies. By paying our gas bills, we consumers can "keep a good thing going" as the gas company ads say. Natural gas is a clean, efficient way to cook our food and heat our homes.

I must confess, though, that many gas users are having difficulty during these hard times in paying their gas bills. I have an idea that just might work. But the gas companies have to do their part so we could have an alternative source of energy to warm up our chilly homes.

I suggest that InterNorth, the Omaha Metropolitan Utilities District and Minnegasco sponsor a new 24-hour cable TV channel. The channel's TV camera would be aimed at a big roaring fireplace during the cold winter months, so for very low cost, all of us could experience a fireplace in every room that had a TV. Also there wouldn't be a pollution problem of burning wood.

We could then afford to pay our gas bills and conserve gas by watching what I propose we call the "Fireplace Channel." Please send your letters of support to the gas companies and your cable TV company. If we all work together we should be able to solve our heating problems.

Ron Kurtenbach

Letter Policy

The Daily Nebraskan encourages brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others.

Anonymous submissions will not be considered for publication, and requests to withhold names will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

Submit all material to the Daily Nebraskan, Room 34, Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588.