

Editorial

Nebraska could be 'real winner' with lottery

Let's face it. The state is broke.

Nothing is going to change that fact in any great hurry. But who's to say that a short-term remedy is so bad when a long-term remedy is not in sight?

Today, the state lottery bill, LB336 comes up for debate. And while the issue of establishing a state lottery is a sensitive one, Nebraskans deserve the chance to decide for themselves if they want one.

Opponents of the lottery are determined to kill the bill or tack on amendments that would make its passage unlikely. As LB336 reads, a state lottery commission would be established, with proceeds from lottery tickets providing property tax relief through the general homestead exemption program.

Rather than rush to create a system that has obvious shortcomings, it makes more sense to delay action and put it before the voters. That is what Legislative Resolution 10 aims to do — let the state decide on next year's ballot if they are for it.

The situation is similar to that in Colorado. A Sunday Omaha World-Herald article said that Colorado voters approved the establishment of a state lottery on a ballot in 1980. It finally got under way this year and its popularity and profitability have surpassed original goals. Colorado expected to gross \$60 million for the year, but that estimate has been changed to \$90 million.

Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm did not want to start a lottery. Our Gov. Kerrey seems to be of the same mind, and will probably veto LB336.

But if LR10 passes, Nebraskans would have the chance to decide for themselves if they think it's worth the gamble. If Colorado's success is an indication of what a lottery could bring to Nebraska, it's certainly worth a try.

Supporters say a lottery here could bring in \$20 million. If interest is strong on the ballot, that could be a conservative estimate. Nebraskans have a love for taking chances — just look at the Ak-Sar-Ben racetrack — not what one would call an unprofitable venture. And in a lottery,



the returns would be guaranteed — if not for the individual, for the state.

The businesses that would sell the lottery tickets would realize a profit; Nebraskans seem eager to buy Colorado tickets when available. According to the World-Herald, Kerrey said he was told that Nebraska is "losing \$100,000 to Colorado because of the lottery," and added, "Nebraskans are also going to Las Vegas and to New York to see plays."

Granted, money is always going to leave the state; the "good life" can only go so far. We'll never have the casinos. And they aren't about to transplant Broadway.

But we could manage to print up a few million tickets without much trouble, if that's what Nebraskans want. It could be just what we need to bail us out.

The state could be the real winner.

Watt: Scary enough to make people do something

Some time ago, I can't remember exactly when (was it after James Watt's famous analogy between environmentalists and Nazis?), former Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson said it was time for the guys in the white coats to come get the Secretary of the Interior.

Nelson, who now heads the Sierra Club, a major environmental group, is probably a little thankful for



Eric Peterson

Watt's pushy, "Nuke the Whales" posturing. Because Watt likes to talk so much, and so badly, his plans to dismantle his department aren't passed over and forgotten. And membership in environmental groups like the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society has jumped since Reagan and Watt took office. Watt is scary enough to make people do something.

Watt has, entirely by himself, become the most detested and ridiculed member of the administration, beating

out such promising candidates as David Stockman, the bright little boy with the big, trickle down idea, and a president who co-starred with a chimpanzee.

Two years ago, when he was at a dinner for fat cat Republicans in the San Joaquin valley (the kind who live in fake medieval castles on their vineyards and hire migrant workers to pick grapes at a piecework, starvation rate), Watt said, "I don't use the words 'Democrats' and 'Republicans.' It's liberals and Americans." And we thought he was such a rabid partisan.

But a half year later, Watt undertook in a letter on his off-shore oil drilling policies to insist that Jews had better support him if they know what's good for them: "If the liberals of the American Jewish community join with the other liberals of this nation to oppose these efforts, (to open up more offshore drilling areas) they will weaken our ability to be a good friend of Israel."

In January there was Watt's ultimate example of the failure of socialism: not the Soviet Union, but our own American Indian reservations. (Which I would say are the results of far too little state aid, and not too much; yes, I am one of those who think that throwing money at a problem can actually sometimes help.)

Election reinforces image GOP is not for blacks

At one of those Washington parties that are more fun in the movies than they are in real life, I approached a real-life senator and brought up the matter of Chicago — this was before the election. Would it not be wonderful, I averred (I aver only at parties), if Bernard Epton, who initially never expected to win anyway, simply pulled out of the race? The senator flashed me the smile of dismay and said, "But he can win."

There is in that remark all you ever need to know about politics — its ethics, its philosophy, its morality. It



Richard Cohen

is, like football, bridge and, until recently, war — about winning. After winning, there is nothing else and all the clichés apply — winning isn't everything, it's the only thing, and all of that.

And that, I suppose, was what was on the minds of the Republican Party (if a party can be said to have a mind) and the White House (ditto) when they threw themselves behind the candidacy of Epton, a reluctant and unlikely front-man for white racism. The word from the White House and from Republican spokesmen everywhere was that the GOP could not lose in Chicago. Either it would get itself a mayor or it would get itself the loyalty of countless blue-collar voters. Never mind the nation and never mind even Chicago: the GOP could not lose.

For that reason, the Republican Party gave Chicago its best shot. It dispatched John Deardourff, a media master respected for both his talents and honor, who promptly

dove right into the mud. It was he who coined the tag line "Epton — before it's too late." And it is too late for him now to say that he could not understand how anyone could read race into it.

In fact, it might be too late for the Republican Party to get out of the corner it has painted itself into. Somehow, the party of Lincoln has managed to transform itself into the party of Jim Crow. If it has not become identified with white racism, it has at least become the party you turn to when you want to express some sort of racist sentiment.

Blacks, of course, know this. They are now so solidly Democratic it's hard to believe that they were once just as solidly Republican. Franklin Roosevelt altered that, but it is not too much to say that the black vote was up for grabs until almost recently. Then, GOP opposition to virtually all-civil rights legislation, exemplified by the voting records of such presidential candidates as Barry Goldwater and, much later, Gerald Ford, all but iced it. Chicago put it away.

If is, of course, foolish to argue in the context of politics about morality when the only morality recognized is the numbers. And the numbers, the GOP concluded, were on its side in Chicago. At most, it could have a mayor in office, making it harder for the dead to cast their usual Democratic ballot come 1984. But at minimum, the election would accustom normally Democratic blue-collar voters to the strange sensation of voting Republican. Having done it once and having not been struck dead as a result, the voters then were supposed to be able to do the same thing in 1984.

You could make the argument that the Chicago election was a perfect example of media hype. There is something to that. Chicago is not America. It is not even a

typical big-city. Its Democratic machine protected it like an indulgent mother. And by wagging a threatening finger at Washington, D.C., especially during Democratic administrations, Chicago managed to live in a racial time warp. Sometime in the next decade, Chicago will have to move into the 1980s.

But media hype in an age of media hype is not something to ignore. Whatever the actual ramifications of the Chicago election might be, one for sure is a hardening of the image that the Republican party is not for blacks. And if it is not for blacks (or women or the poor), then it is not for anyone who cares about social justice. And unless you believe that intolerance is the wave of the future, that things will get worse and not better, then what the Republican Party won in Chicago was the right to be on the wrong side of history.

A couple or more contests like this and the GOP will, like its Chicago standard-bearer, not go from victory to victory, but to oblivion instead.

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