

Editorial

Kerrey must renew commitment

Nebraska Gov. Bob Kerrey apparently has forgotten what he was elected to do.

Frustrated with four non-productive years under former Gov. Charles Thone, Nebraskans elected a governor they thought had the ability and dedication to solve the many problems that plague the state.

Instead, it appears they elected a governor who barely stays home long enough to know what the problems are, much less solve them.

The Omaha World-Herald reported Saturday that Kerrey has spent 55 of his 238 days as governor out of the state. Twenty-two of those were for official state business, but 33 were for personal reasons, the story said.

No one can deny that Kerrey's trips, along with his

frequent outspokenness on controversial issues, have helped draw national attention to the state's highest office.

The guess here, however, is that Nebraska residents would rather see their governor at home, solving the problems at hand, not hundreds of miles from here speaking out on some issue he has no control over.

That's not to say Kerrey should spend his entire term in Lincoln. Indeed, the governor has to maintain contacts with other officials to help promote the state's agricultural products.

But, Kerrey, who has been in office little more than half a year, has overdone it. He has taken numerous personal trips and "fact-finding" missions which were not necessary.

Kerrey's Chief of Staff Bill Hoppner told the World-Herald that the governor has not been out of Nebraska any more than his predecessors, but that his trips have been more visible because he "is reaching the public eye" and has been more outspoken.

Maybe so, but we believe Nebraska's governor has plenty to do right here in Lincoln. The country has more than enough elected officials to handle the national problems and Kerrey's outspokenness has done little more than insult and embarrass many Nebraskans.

Kerrey would be wise to renew his commitment to Nebraska before his credibility declines any further.

If he doesn't, he could find it difficult to lead the state the next three and a half years, and he could find the going rough if he chooses to seek another term in 1986.

Changing times leave family tree drawers out on a long limb

The girl is spending the summer with her extended family. She doesn't put it this way. But as we talk on the beach, 10-year-old lists the people who are sharing the same house this month with the careful attention of a genealogist.

First of all there is her father — visitation rights awarded him for the month of August. Second of all there is her father's second wife and two children by her first marriage. All that seems perfectly clear. A stepmother and two stepbrothers.

Then there are the others. There is her stepmoth-



Ellen Goodman

er's sister, for example. The girl isn't entirely sure whether this makes the woman a step-aunt, or whether her baby is a step-cousin. Beyond that, the real puzzle is whether her step-aunt's husband's children by his first marriage have any sort of official relationship to her at all. It does, we both agree, seem a bit fuzzy.

Nevertheless, she concludes with a certainty that can only be mustered by the sort of 10-year-old who keeps track of her own Frequent Flier coupons: "We are in the same family." With that, she closes the subject and focuses instead on her peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

I am left to my thoughts. My companion, in her own unself-conscious way, is a fine researcher. She grasps the wide new family configurations that are neglected by census data takers and social scientists.

After all, those of us who grew up in traditional settings remember families which extended into elaborate circles of aunts, uncles and cousins. There were sides to this family, names and titles to be memorized. But they fit together in a biological pattern.

Now, as my young friend can attest, we have fewer children and more divorces. We know that as many as 50 percent of recent marriages may end. About 75 percent of divorced women and 83 percent of divorced men remarry. Of those remarriages, 50 percent include a child from a former marriage.

So, our families often extend along lines that are determined by decrees, rather than genes. If the nucleus is broken, there are still links forged in different directions.

Last winter, the son of a friend was asked to produce a family tree for his sixth-grade class. But he was dissatisfied with his oak. There was no room on it for his step-grandfather, though the man had married his widowed grandmother years ago.

More to the point, the boy had to create an offshoot for his new baby half-brother that seemed too distant. He couldn't find a proper place for the uncle — former uncle to be precise — who he visited last summer with his cousin.

A family tree just didn't work, he explained. He would have preferred to draw family bushes.

The reality is that divorce has created kinship ties that rival the most complex tribe. These are not always easy relationships. The children and even the adults whose family lives have been disrupted by divorce and remarriage learn that people they love do not necessarily love each other. This extended family does not gather for reunions and Thanksgiving.

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The offender, the offended responsible for '80s gender gap

In the '60s it was the generation gap, in the '70s the credibility gap and now, the 1980s seem quickly to be shaping up as the decade of the gender gap.

The gender gap, for those whose subscriptions to Newsweek have lapsed, is the term the press has ascribed to the growing schism between President



Mike Frost

Reagan and alienated women voters. The situation has been exacerbated by Reagan's tendency to, in the view of his press aides, speak off the cuff, or, in the view of the women's groups, speak, period.

In a way, one must feel sorry for the president. One hates to call an oppressed group "naive." However, expecting a man who always has referred to his wife as "mommy" and labels woman's greatest achievement badgering man out of the Cro-Magnon period to trade in his greenbacks for Susan B. Anthony dollars seems a bit fantastic.

Clearly, then, the women's groups are simply expecting too much from President Reagan. The following examples graphically illustrate this point.

Women's rights:

What they want Reagan to say: "I firmly support the notion that all citizens, regardless of their gender, are guaranteed full and equal rights under the Constitution."

What he'll say instead: "Women's rights? You bet women are right. It's that blessed feminine intuition."

Spouse abuse:

What they want him to say: "There is no tolerance for this type of crime in America."

What he'll say instead: "I notice nobody seems to worry about battered husbands."

The gains women have made in our society:

What they want him to say: "Women's progress over the past few decades proves that, even with unnecessary obstacles, intelligence and perseverance can sometimes overcome illegally placed barriers."

What he'll say instead: "Betty Crocker is quite a gal, isn't she?"

Women in high government posts:

What they want him to say: "This administration will take all steps necessary to guarantee women parity in governmental hirings."

What he'll say instead: "Would you let your daughter marry one?"

The 1984 election:

What they want him to say: "Women's rights groups can play an important part in deciding who will be in the White House in 1986."

What he'll say instead: "Let's quickly repeal the 19th Amendment."

It is clear, then, that responsibility for the growing gender gap can be attributed to both the offender and the offended.

As for the president, he should try to temper his language somewhat when addressing the issue of women's rights. Instead of saying man's progress is due solely to female nagging, he should tactfully remark that women also helped by letting men drag them around by the hair. "A belated thanks," he might diplomatically add.

As for the women's groups, they should be prepared for the inevitable: their president telling them that "Really, some of my best friends are women."