

Editorial

Insanity bill awaits Kerrey's signature

The Legislature last week took a giant step toward improving Nebraska's legal system. Now, it is up to Gov. Bob Kerrey to make the change into law.

LB183, sponsored by Sens. Carol Pirsch of Omaha, Elroy Hefner of Cole-ridge and John DeCamp of Neligh, would shift the burden of proof in insanity cases from the prosecution to the defense. It passed final reading 27-18 Friday and now awaits Kerrey's signature.

The governor told the *Omaha World-*

Herald Saturday he is leaning toward not signing the bill but said he will talk to its sponsors before making a final decision. The Legislature would need 30 votes to override his veto.

Kerrey is to be commended for seeking out both sides of the issue before making a decision. But the hope here is he will sign the bill and put an end to the mockery some criminals have made of the court system.

Opponents of LB183 argue that it would be the first step toward destruction of our system where suspect-

ed criminals are innocent until proven guilty.

They are wrong.

The bill has nothing to do with how a guilty or not guilty verdict is reached. Rather, it makes the logical assumption that a suspect is both innocent and sane unless proven otherwise in the courts. Nebraska law defines insane as being incapable of distinguishing right from wrong.

Instead, it seems that criminals have used the insanity plea as an escape from the punishment they have com-

ing. As a result, many convicted murderers, in this state and in others, have gotten off with only minimal sentences.

Anything that can help put an end to this nonsense would be a wise move. Forcing the defense to prove insanity seems to be a good move in that direction.

Gov. Kerrey would be doing his fellow Nebraskans a big favor by signing LB183. If he does not, Pirsch, Hefner and DeCamp should make an all-out effort to win an override from their colleagues.

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials represent the official policy of the spring 1984 Daily Nebraskan. They are written by this semester's editor in chief, Larry Sparks.

Other staff members will write editorials throughout the semester. They will carry the author's name after the final sentence.

Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees or the NU Board of Regents.

The Daily Nebraskan's publishers are the regents who established the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the newspaper.



Letters

Staff's ethics doubted

I am writing in response to the editorial headlined "Women's Resource Center ignoring majority needs" (Daily Nebraskan, Feb. 3). As an unsigned editorial, your entire staff must take responsibility for the sloppiness and questionable ethics involved.

First, the article asserts that the WRC "... is leading the campaign" to "ignore the majority's needs." The WRC did not initiate the campaign and did not present the petitions to the Union Board. Its only action was to agree to allow women to use the WRC space as one of several places to collect signatures. Editors as well as reporters have the responsibility to check out their "facts."

The WRC is concerned about majority needs on this campus; the needs of women, and men, who are concerned about the safety (not mere comfort) of women on campus. Many times I have entered the lounge on the first floor to find women who are reading, sleeping or nursing children in one of the few private and (relatively) secure spaces on campus. Thus far, I have seen no statements that ensure that the "computer room" will be a secured area. Thus, the many women on campus who would use the computers will likely be concerned about the security of this space once it has been turned over to its technological (and unsupervised) purpose.

Finally, I would call attention to the pattern of editorial comments and first-page coverage which has consistently preceded the annual review of the WRC budget. Without fail, an editorial such as this, with a misleading headline and fabricated set of "facts," or a new story concerning the WRC and its "investigators" surfaces a few days before that review for the general campus and the Committee for Fees Allocation to digest.

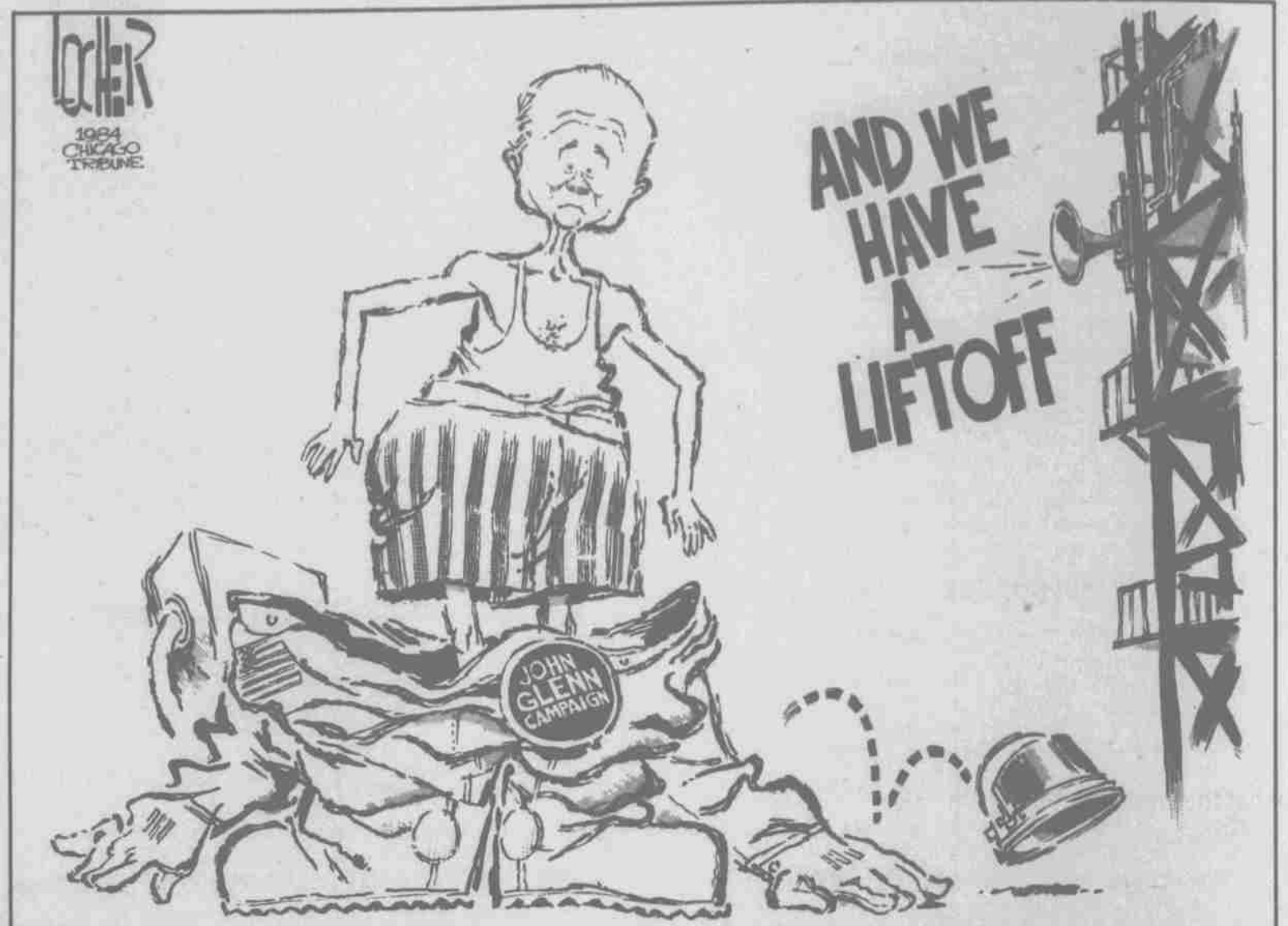
I hold your staff accountable for the inaccuracies and suspect timing of this editorial and others like it.

Helen Moore
assistant professor and chair
women's studies

Editor's Note: The Daily Nebraskan apologizes for any statements which implied that the Women's Resource Center was solely responsible for the petition drive to keep the first floor women's lounge open. As stated in the preceding letter, the effort was initiated by several individuals who used the WRC as a collection point for signatures.

This newspaper opposes the petition drive, however, and believes that because the WRC allowed signatures to be collected in its office, it must accept responsibility for the content of the petitions.

More letters on Page 6



Hypocrites punish unwed mother

If they ever give a college board test to students of hypocrisy, I am sure the teenagers of Marion Center, Pa., will score way up in the 700s. Teenagers are always the great hypocrisy spotters in our culture. The past few months, they've had a lot of extra practice in this small rural town.



Ellen Goodman

The central characters of the case that has put Marion Center on the sociological map include 17-year-old Arlene Pfeiffer, her five-month-old daughter Jessica, the school board and the National Honor Society.

Arlene, a high school senior, was class president for three years, student-council president last year and a member of the honor society since 10th grade. But in August, she gave birth to Jessica and decided to keep her. In November, Arlene was kicked out of the honor society by her high school. In January, the school board agreed to her removal. Now Arlene is taking her case to the Human Relations Commission and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

What is at issue is not her grades—they have remained high—but two other qualities the honor society demands: "leadership and character." The question is whether an unwed mother has lost her "character," whether she would "lead" others in the wrong direction.

It is easy to follow the trail of hypocrisy in this move against Arlene, easy as a multiple-choice questionnaire. To begin with, the school didn't strip Arlene of her honor society epaulets because she had sex, but because she "got caught." About 37 percent of the 16-year-old teenagers in this country have had intercourse. Arlene was judged to have less character than those who didn't get pregnant.

Then too, if Arlene had not had her baby, she surely would have kept her membership. A little less than half of the teen pregnancies end in abortion. So she was judged to have less character than a girl who chose abortion.

Perhaps it would have been all right if Arlene had given her baby up for adoption. Or if she had married. No one, for that matter, ever questions the character of an unwed teenage father.

Indeed, it is difficult to identify exactly what piece of Arlene's behavior—sex, pregnancy, motherhood, singleness, none of the above—the school wants to punish. This difficulty speaks to the confusion of the adults in this situation.

A generation ago, unwed pregnancy produced a shotgun marriage, an illegal abortion, or a six-month stay out of town. A decade ago, a pregnant teenager could be barred altogether from school.

Now those of us who shepherd kids through the high-risk years know that early parenthood is still the surest, most direct route to a diminished future. But we are told that some of the young mothers who have kept their babies were inspired by fairy tales of Hollywood love-children. Many of us now share an underlying anxiety that if we make unwed motherhood appear acceptable, we may make it more possible, and then more likely. If we pin a medal on Arlene Pfeiffer, does she become a role model?

"They said," recalls Arlene Pfeiffer, "that by 'leadership' I might lead others to do it—to get pregnant. But I don't go around saying 'stand in line and get pregnant.' Nor do girls follow the leader into pregnancy."

For all our anxiety, we have no evidence to prove that lifting a sanction produces a bumper crop of babies. On the contrary, we know that teenagers don't get pregnant because they want to.

The saga of Arlene Pfeiffer who mothers by night and gathers honor grades by day, who lives at home with parental support and child-care, is an exception. If we are afraid of lauding her success, it is largely because of our own failures. We've done a poor job of discouraging early sexual activity. A poor job at getting teenagers to take more responsibility.

As for Arlene, she is pursuing fairness through all the flak of hypocrisy and ambivalence in Marion Center, Pa. I think she's giving the adults a lesson in "character" and "leadership."