

Editorial

Wide-open primary bill undermines two-party system

Once is enough. Nebraska's not-so-successful experiment with a non-partisan Legislature should be enough to teach us that there is nothing evil about the nation's two-party system.

Apparently, at least one state senator thinks otherwise. Sen. Tom Vickers of Farnam has introduced LB909 which would make Nebraska a "wide-open" primary state and further diminish the role of parties in our political system.

Only two states — Washington and Alaska — have wide-open primaries, according to the *Omaha World Herald*. Under that system, candidates no longer are required to indicate their party registration. All of them are placed on a single primary ballot and all voters, regardless of party identification, are allowed to choose from the entire ballot.

Eight states have an open primary system where the Republican and Democratic candidates are listed on separate ballots, but voters may choose either ballot before entering the voting booth.

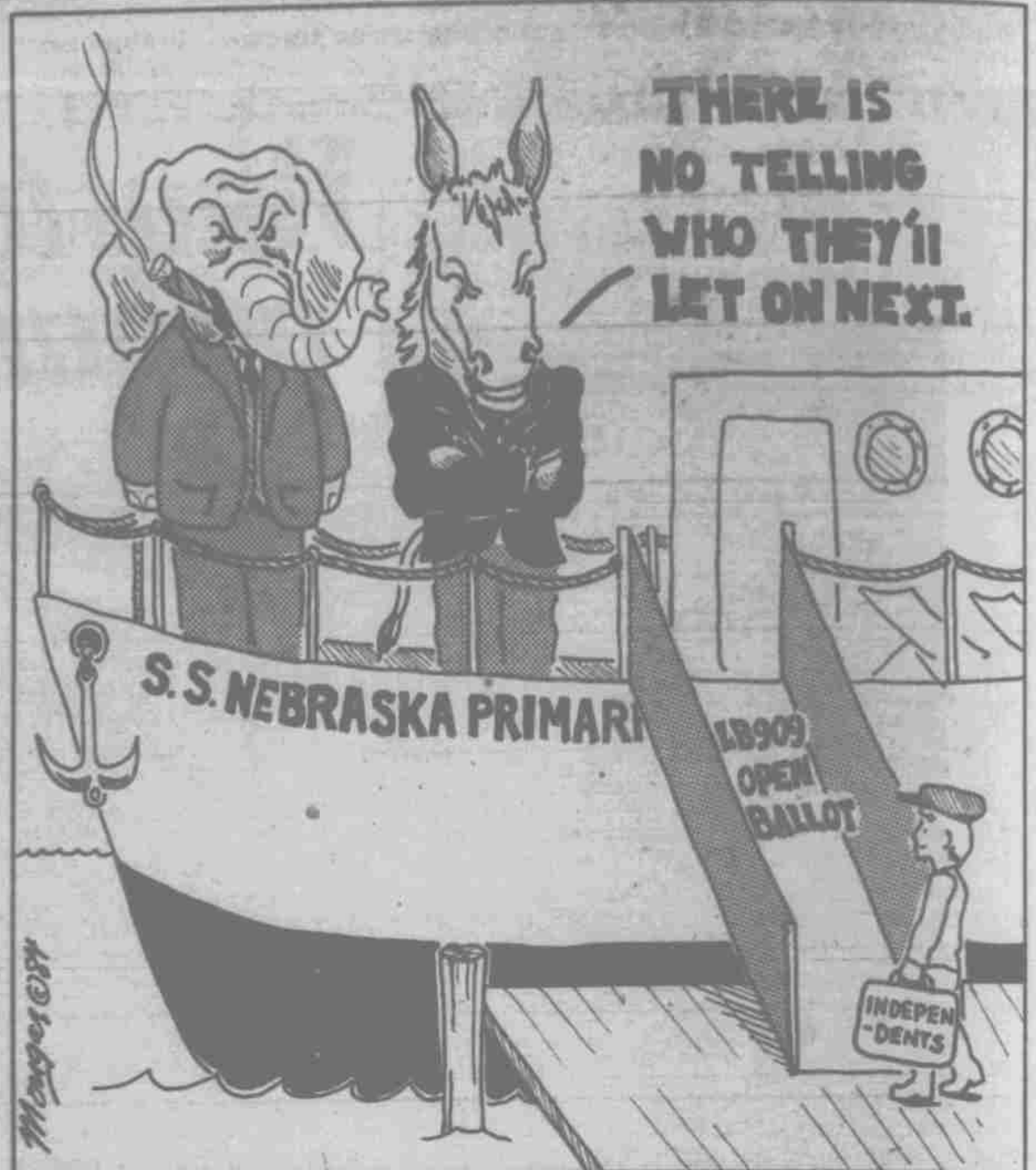
The most popular system, however, is the closed primary currently used in Nebraska. Each party's candidates are listed on a separate ballot and voters may vote only from the ballot of their party. Independents can vote only in the non-partisan races.

Vickers has suggested that a wide-open primary would help bring more people to the polls, but past rises in Nebraska voter turnout seem to be related to the issues, not the candidates, on the ballot. But we'll give Vickers the benefit of the doubt here. If nothing else, independent voters would be more likely to show up on election day if they could vote in the major races.

Still, having a larger voter turnout seems minor when compared to the disadvantages of a wide-open primary. Secretary of State Allen Beermann told the *World-Herald* that such a system could cause "election mischief" where voters go to the polls not to vote for their favorite candidates, but to vote for the other party's weakest candidates, thereby making it easier for their party to win in November.

More important, however, is that going to a wide-open primary would go against most of the rest of the country.

That's the system our entire election process is based on. Maybe it needs to be changed, but any kind of election reform will have to come at the national level or at least in some large states. Any attempt by Nebraska to change the system will only put the state more out of step with the rest of the United States.



Students complain too much, Allen gripes

Stop being so paranoid. You've got to learn to relax. Take things easy.

College creates pressure, all kinds of it. You can't let it get to you or you'll go crazy. They'll cart you away in one of those pretty red and white station wagons and put you in a padded cell



Bill Allen

and feed you hospital food for the rest of your life. Do you think pizza places deliver to padded cells? Think about it.

I have a friend who is constantly worried about missing classes. He has three alarm clocks in case the first two don't work. So I said to him, "What if you accidentally set them all for the wrong wake-up time?" His eyes got wide and he shook his head, then he set them all for different times. The next morning he forgot when his class

started. He let the pressure get to him.

I know people who won't go to class if they are running a few minutes late, because they are embarrassed. Last semester I walked into a lecture 15 minutes late. Everyone stared. The professor stopped. I looked at my arm, pretended to have on a watch and said, "Did you guys start early today?"

We're approaching that time of the semester when all I hear from people are complaints. I'm sick of it and I'm sure many of you are, too. You know how it is. You sit down at lunch with some friends, expecting some nice conversation about how great the Celtics are doing, or how much you are looking forward to the weekend, and what do you get? Complaints. This professor gave a bad test, or I'm flat broke or that woman is driving me crazy. I don't want to hear it. I want to eat my cheeseburger and fries and finish my Pepsi, then go for a walk if it's warm enough, and later, maybe study or

watch television. I lead a simple life, not letting undue pressure get to me.

So I'm going to list some of the complaints heard most often and give you my reaction to them.

1. **I hate Professor Whoever.** So what? You signed up for the class. Does it make you feel better telling me about it? What do you want me to do? Should I go to the prof and tell her she's been a bad girl and that she'd better be nice in the future? Give me a break.

2. **I hate this class.** So what? You signed up for the class. What do you want me to do? Should I stop eating lunch, grab your book bag, and start doing your assignments for you, or what? Give me a break.

3. **In a couple of weeks you'll start hearing this one. It's hot in here.** So what? You signed up for this class. If you can't stand the heat, drop the class. Last semester I had this class in Bessey Hall and the sun shone right in on it every afternoon. After about a week of sweating like a professional

wrestler I took a fan to class. It was a quiet fan, and the professor thought it was a good idea. As I walked across campus with my fan people looked at me as if I was weird. What's more weird, sitting in a classroom so hot you can't concentrate, or bringing a quiet fan to stir a breeze?

4. **I'm broke.** So what? What do I look like, the First National Bank of New York? If you want a loan, just ask. I'll probably say no, because I'm broke. You should have thought of that before you went to the Billy Joel concert. Or before you spent your last \$5 on a pizza last night. I wish I had.

5. **I flunked a chem exam.** So what? If you want help, and I can help you, I will. But please stop whining. Smile. Study for the next one. Do you think complaining is like a magic wand that will make a bad grade disappear? In the meantime, how 'bout those Celtics, huh?

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Sex stereotypes haunt women in politics

Those who poll the political consciousness of a country are a little bit like gold miners following the glitter. Sometimes they get the real thing and sometimes they come back with a wheelbarrow full of fool's gold.

For the past several years, these people have been digging away at the rich vein of opinions about women in politics. They keep emerging with nuggets



Ellen Goodman

of data about how much our attitudes toward female candidates have changed.

In 1940, for example, only one-third of Americans would have considered voting for a "uniquely qualified" woman for president. In 1977, 77 percent would vote for her. By 1983, most of us thought that there were too few women in public office, and the overwhelming majority claimed that they would not be at all influenced by the sex of a candidate. If anything, more said they were prejudiced in favor of a female candidate than against one.

But it turns out that some of this is glitter. We are now beginning to mine the mother lode of the political subconscious. Florence Skelly of Yankelovich, Skelly and White has just completed a limited study of some 200 voters for the National Women's Political Caucus. The early results suggest that the biggest gap of this political era may be between our principles and our behavior.

To put it simply, some three-quarters of those interviewed for the study said that the sex of a candidate has no influence on their vote. But when these people chose between hypothetical candidates for governor, they were highly influenced by traditional sex stereotypes. They tended to vote for men and only voted for women when they were clearly more qualified than the men.

A large margin of men and a much smaller margin of women agreed that men in high office were better at making decisions under pressure, better at dealing with big budgets, and at public speaking. Women in high office, on the other hand, were considered better at understanding the "human" side of issues, at bringing new and fresh ideas into office and at keeping well-organized.

After hearing this data, political consultant Bob Squires fantasized the perfect commercial for a female candidate. In one 60-second spot, she lands a multi-million dollar jet plane in an ice storm while caring for the male co-pilot who becomes suddenly ill. She then makes a brilliant presentation on a deal that involves millions, and whips the cash out of her briefcase while her name flashes across the screen. Decisive, caring, organized and able to deal with big budgets — the best of both sexes — she wins the election.

What we would not see in that commercial are any small children. This study picked up a definite bias against female candidates with small children.

The study was not all bad news. Male voters didn't overwhelmingly favor male candidates, and women were more inclined than men to judge female can-

didates openly. Indeed, a candidate's stand on issues, her personality, and her experience would wipe out the negative impact of her sex. Ironically, the best way for a woman to win is as an incumbent.

But there is this gap between our principles and our behavior when we face a choice between male or female politicians. I suppose that most of us knew or suspected this. After all, most of us know people who talk a better line than they feel. We've all been caught short by our own lingering prejudices.

Today, prejudice against women in public life is less acceptable. It's no longer fashionable to admit that you won't vote for a woman, no longer fashionable to wonder out loud if a woman can handle big budgets or crises. So our views have gone underground, to the subconscious.

I don't think we are necessarily lying to the pollsters, or even to ourselves. We are not hypocritical but, perhaps, hopeful. We know intellectually that it shouldn't make any difference if a candidate is white or black, male or female. So we prefer to believe that it doesn't make any difference.

Florence Skelly reads into the data "a profound hunger to do the right thing," and I think that's accurate. Our ideals are often a step or 10 ahead of us. As usual, we are struggling to catch up.

This time, if we close the gap between how we think and how we vote, we may also close the gap between men and women in public life. Right now, though, women have to keep flying airplanes through the ice storms.