

# Editorial

## State lottery unproductive in long run

Gov. Bob Kerrey appeared on the CBS Morning News this week to explain why he is opposed to a state-run lottery in Nebraska as a way to earn government revenue. He said some smart things: "First of all, you don't always make money. It can lose money."

Yes, lotteries can be a risky venture. Kerrey also said, in so many words, that he didn't want to stretch himself too thin, try his luck too much.

"You can only do so many things and do them well," according to the Lincoln Star. Such as end the Commonwealth Savings Co. disaster quickly and fairly.

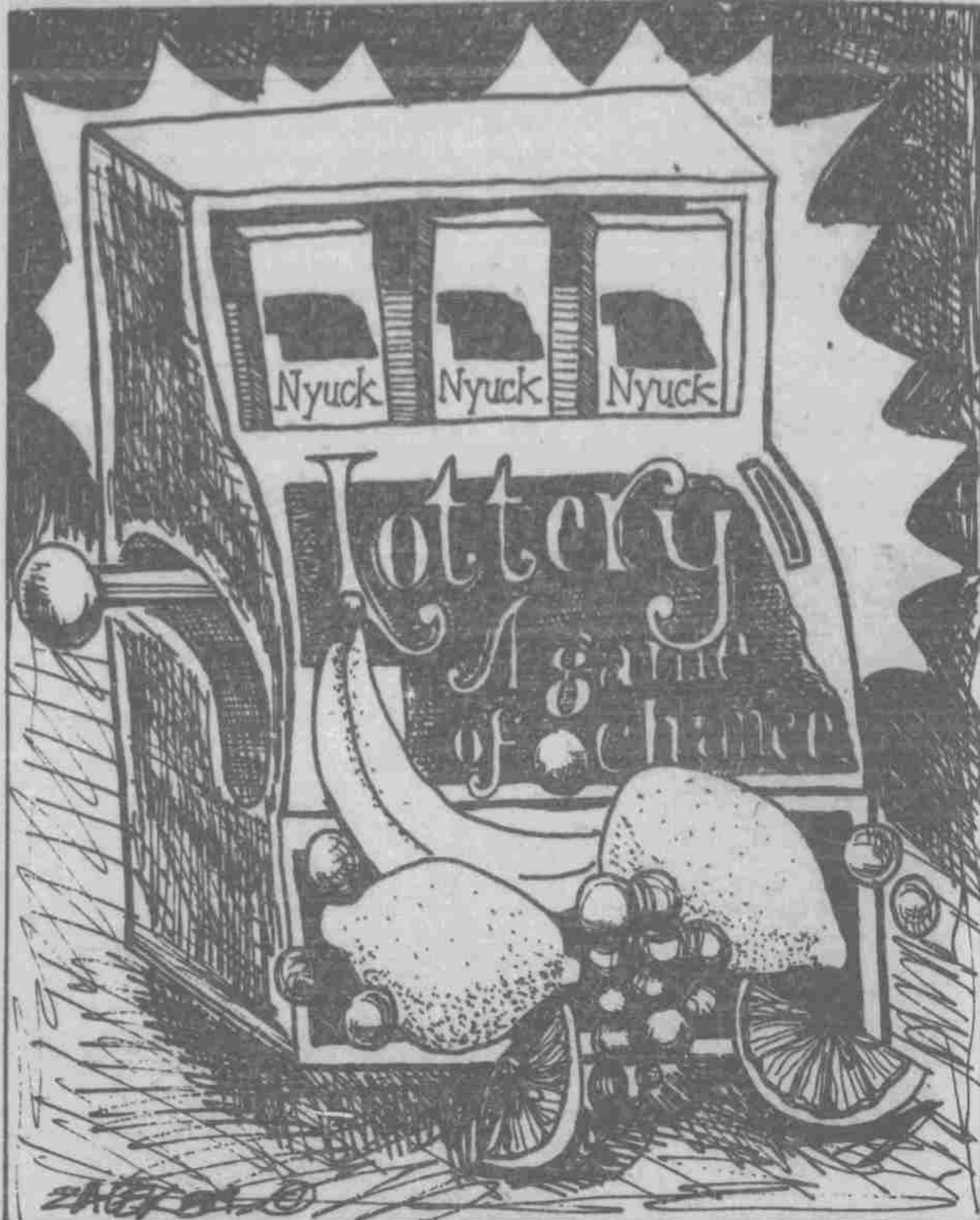
Still, Kerrey's basic hesitant feelings toward a Nebraska lottery are right, but for another reason than the lottery losing money or the government losing face.

The reason is a moral one: What kind of people try their luck at lotteries? People who have nothing to lose, that's who. People who really have no extra money to spare, but who keep hoping that if they get the lucky number they'll never have to worry about anything

again. Think about it. Have you ever heard of a run-of-the-mill middle-class housewife winning a lottery? Doesn't it seem the lucky winners are usually people who replace light bulbs and live on the edge of poverty? Nothing wrong with that, but in the long run lotteries don't make people productive.

Gov. Richard Thompson of Pennsylvania said his state's lottery has helped raise \$500 million for human services programs. But does it solve anything, or does the circle keep repeating itself, except for the person or people who happen to buy the right ticket?

The initial investment in researching and setting up a Nebraska lottery should be spent on better things. If the government of Nebraska needs revenue so badly that it is thinking about investing in a lottery, then it should think about investing in human services programs in the first place — the kind that help people become better, productive citizens who depend on themselves, not games of chance.



## Fast-paced technology changes emotional ties

My young friend does not need me to teach her how to tie shoelaces. Between her first and third birthday, laces have become nearly extinct on shoes her size. They were done in by Velcro. The role that I had honed over years of teaching — left over right, under and pull — has also become extinct, done in by Velcro.

### Ellen Goodman

This girl won't experience the frustration or the accomplishment of learning this task. Nor will I experience the frustration or accomplishment of teaching it. But no matter. Life is easier with Velcro.

My young friend does not need me to teach her to tell time either. Children do not tell time anymore. They are told it by the watches on their wrist. The big hands and little hands that I had decoded with my child, nieces, cousins, and the children of friends are being replaced inexorably with digits. It is easier with digits.

I don't rail against these artifacts of progress. I am a fan of Velcro, and absolutely neutral on the subject of digital numbers. But the non-needs of my three-year-old friend have given me some odd thoughts about old ties

and old times. I feel suddenly like a loyal and competent employee whose work has been cyberneticized. I am skilled with skills that are unneeded.

I know there is something essentially modern in my dilemma of defunctness. Clocks and shoelaces are not major losses to me or to this little girl, but they are small examples of what happens routinely in our culture. Technology changes so quickly, we hardly have a chance to teach our children what we know before it becomes irrelevant.

Once, crafts were handed down from one generation to another until families were named after them — Millers, Smiths, Taylors. Now skills have a shelf life shorter than our own. The state of the art is transient. So we have transformed the oldest kind of emotional relationship: the elder as guide, parent as teacher. We are no longer as sure that a younger generation can be prepared for the world by an elder generation.

In a dozen, hundred ways, "improvements" disrupt the lines of inheritance. In high-tech societies it is no longer the elders who hold the secrets, no longer the young who are to be initiated. Knowledge is more egalitarian. Indeed, in the Silicone Valleys of our culture, it is the young who decode mysteries.

I don't want to overstate my case of ties and times. Perhaps I cannot teach

a 3-year-old shoe-tying, but I have a 16-year-old daughter with an automobile learner's permit. We practice hill starts as I once did with my parents, and still on a shift car. Most of us have taught someone younger how to throw a ball, bake cookies, hammer a nail or thread a needle.

Still it seems to me that discontinuity is a real tradition among us. The tradition of grandparents who are experts in the intricacies of carriage-driving just when cars appear. The tradition of elders who have mastered elegant script when typewriters are invented. Friends who are experts in multiplication tables when calculators become common. We can all remember the catalog of 19th-century homemaking skills passed down from parent to child, and now reduced to a single lesson in comparison shopping.

Over time, how many of the functions of families were whittled to a core. Families lost much of their economic glue, the fierce tribal security need for staying together. Families function now, for stronger and weaker,

mostly as the emotional and caretaking center of our lives.

Similarly, less technical teaching goes on in familial ways. We no longer really expect one generation to pass on its daily technical curriculum to the next. The informal teaching that goes on in our lives today is about subjects outside technology, and outside time.

We show our children, grandchildren, young friends how to smell a ripe cantaloupe, pick up a frog, watch for poison ivy, and understand each other. We learn to make generational ties — or should I say generational Velcro — by sharing ourselves rather than our crafts. The one skill that is not obsolete is understanding of nature, especially human nature. Most of the experts on human behavior are amateurs.

So I won't teach my small friend how to tie shoes or tell time this year. But maybe, by hanging out together, now and again, I'll pass on to her what I learned from my elders: some small things about connections that are timeless.

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