

Editorial

Defense Department needs to wake up

The U.S. Department of Defense's bias toward high-tech, high-cost equipment is costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

This bias clearly is illustrated by the Pentagon's drone program.

Last December, 28 U.S. Navy jets flew over the Shouf Mountains near Beirut to strike at Syrian anti-aircraft positions, Newhouse News Service reported in the Sept. 4 Lincoln Star. Two planes were shot down; a third plane barely made it back to its aircraft carrier.

A similar attack by Israeli aircrafts a year-and-a-half earlier wiped out 19 missile batteries and lost only one plane. The difference — Israelis used drones; unmanned aircraft used to locate targets and draw enemy fire.

The United States and Israel began drone programs at roughly the same time, Newhouse reported, but the U.S. program has yet to get off the ground, while Israelis have been using their cheaper, effective drones for years.

After the Israeli attack, an Israeli official briefed the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff on the use of drones. The official mentioned the \$50,000 price tag and the generals began to laugh. The official said the generals wouldn't believe the drones would work unless they added another zero to the cost, Newhouse reported. The Pentagon's drone program has a staggering \$2.4 billion budget.

The U.S. drone, named Aquila, is probably years from being flown. Costs have escalated, the technology has changed since the program began in 1974 and Aquila is not scheduled for field use until 1987.

Newhouse said Israeli officials claimed that "just the interest costs on Aquila would have paid for our entire project."

The Pentagon could take a lesson from the Israelis. Aquila might be easily redesigned to follow in the footsteps of Israel's



it's cheap, effective drone. But the military mentality seems too ready to spend money and to avoid help from "outsiders."

In this case, the taxpayers could be saved millions, maybe billions of dollars by mimicking the Israeli drone. Why not? The Israelis also point out that the Pen-

tagon's approach to Aquila is wrong-headed. Instead of quickly producing a prototype and testing it in the field, the United States is putting all its eggs into one basket, so to speak. If the high-tech, computer-laden Aquila doesn't perform the way the generals want it to perform, the whole thing may have to be rede-

signed. If it was tested and modified over the years, a more effective, cheaper weapon could be produced.

The defense program has grown more than any other recipient of U.S. tax dollars over the years. A lot of that money has been thrown away on \$600 hammers, \$300 screws and \$2.4 billion drones.



Corn dogs, pigs, smiling people overshadow stuffed strawberry

Corn dogs and lemonade, pork chops and corn on the cob, elderberry jelly, quilts and friendly people — these are a few of my favorite things.

It's nice to sit down at a picnic table and have someone pass me the barbecue sauce and paper towels, and order more in case I need it.



Christopher Burbach

An easily recognizable division separates the down-home and the down-the-drain sections of the Nebraska State Fair. I could almost feel the difference as I walked through the fairgrounds Saturday.

Caustic jeers from carny barkers, metallic whines and clouds of diesel smoke from rides and pokes with a sharp financial stick assaulted me as I walked through the midway. Just watching those machines, like whirling centrifuges separating their victims' innards from their bodies, made me feel a little queasy. And watching sharpies at "games of skill" separate people from their money made me a little angry.

I tried a basketball game — you're right, I should have known — and won a miniature stuffed strawberry for two bucks and three straight baskets.

"C'mon, win a bigger prize for the lady," my tormentor grated.

When I asked him to point out the next largest prize I could win (large is a relative term here, folks), he declined, he just doesn't do that. I think I can understand why — the next prize was probably a stuffed rutabaga.

All that merely lurks like a sideshow in the shadows of the real State Fair, at least for us fuddy-duddies. The main attraction is the food, the big pigs, the horse

shows, the arts and crafts, the marching bands, the pickles, the people.

Farmers, bankers, fat kids, skinny kids, cowboys, urban cowboys, folk with funny, fuzzy antennae on their heads and barbecue sauce on their shirts — smiling.

I crossed the midway/good life border and encountered a marching band and drill team from Ralston, tooting and sweating. I followed around the band a woman who pulled her child behind her in a wooden wagon complete with mattress, modern-day pioneers.

In safe territory, I chowed down a corn dog (I ate six last year) and chased it with some freshly squeezed if sugary, lemonade. The food was expensive, but it delivered some satisfaction, unlike the games of skill. I walked on to find the pigs with a little ketchup in one of my dimples and a little mustard in the other.

Big, beautiful horses pranced around in the coliseum under the rein of riders in polo shirts, T-shirts, jeans, some in traditional riding gear, but all in boots. There were a few 4H kids, somebody's mom, a city boy, and they all belonged together on their horses.

So did the quilts, the photographs and the other crafts that were created all over Nebraska to hang at the fair. The quilts were particularly pleasing. My favorite was a rather plain piece decorated with delicate, daintily embroidered flowers. Functional art, toiled over and shered with fellow Nebraskans — much nicer than a stuffed strawberry.

I finally made it to the pig barns, but the beautifully obese cervines had already left town. That was a major disappointment, only partially abated by the goats, lambs and horses which remained. I never liked goats. Anything that would eat Ma Kettle's underwear is no friend of mine.

These things are the spirit of the Nebraska State Fair. These things we have to celebrate — our heritage, our ways of life, our work, our leisure, each other. These things make the State Fair a good experience, a tradition worth continuing. Especially the corn dogs.

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