

Editorial

Commission on Status of Women must stay open

Nebraska will be without an important service if the state Commission on the Status of Women perishes because of the severe budget cuts the organization suffered this year.

Instead of receiving the \$220,000 it had requested this summer, the commission was granted only \$30,000 — just enough for the commission to close its doors and hand out unemployment checks to its staff.

Because the commission's work was not yet finished, its members refused to terminate the organization, said Ada Munson, commission chairwoman. Instead, the commission has reduced its staff from eight to two people, moved to a smaller office in the State Office Building where rent is cheaper and cut back considerably on its services. The organization now relies on private support, Munson said.

With private funding, Munson said, the commission should survive until next June. But without public money, the future of the organization is uncertain.

Without proper funding, the commission will not be effective in helping women and the state.

Last year, the commission received about 6,000 phone calls requesting information about legislation, publication, technical assistance and legal action.

Many times, Munson said, women seeking legal advice used the commission as a type of referral service. Because of the reduction in staff, no commission members can help callers.

Statewide forums on the status of women, which are presented by the commission, also could be eliminated because of the cut in travel expenses.

Nebraskans need and use the commission's services. Without it, women and others will have difficulty getting needed help.

The commission merits enough of the state's tax dollars to help it continue until members think their work is done.

But the commission still has work to do.

In 1980, Nebraska women earned only 64 percent of the amount paid to men. And in 1983, 75 percent of women government employees in Nebraska were in the lowest paying jobs — office and clerical work.

And Munson said rural women and single parents still need support from the commission.

State legislators should be concerned about the plight of Nebraska women. After all, about half of Nebraska's 1.5 million voters are women.



Ironing depresses columnist

My laundromat is a grim, depressing place. Not only is it dank and seedy, but it spells trouble for me in one little word: wrinkles.

I can't go there without thinking of Duncan, a character in one of the books I read for Canadian literature class. Duncan was a compulsive ironer. He was always begging his friends to loan him their wrinkly blouses. I wouldn't want him for a love interest, but I'd fix him a good dinner if he would come over once a week and do his thing.

There's no money to be made on an "I Hate to Iron" book, but I could write a million words on the subject. Ironing is an unpleasant, boring, incredibly short-lived task. Plus, you have to pay attention or you'll iron in creases that look worse than the wrinkles.

My roommate and I struggled for years with the little table-top ironing board my mother gave me one year for my birthday. I guess its diminutive size was her concession to my known distaste for the pressing game. It was supposed to be handy and unobtrusive, just for minor jobs or something. But it was never unobtrusive, and we never used it on a table. It was permanently set up in a corner of the dining room and we sat

on the floor to use it, generally one after the other at 7:30 a.m.

My great aunt Mabel died last year, and I got first crack at an 82-year accumulation of household goods. I felt fortunate, since most people have to get married to score a windfall like that. Not only did I get muffin tins, placemats and myriad other fun stuff I would never actually buy, but I got her rickety old ironing board. It's one of those full-sized, primitive wooden models with thick padding and shaky legs.



Colleen Holloran

We've got it set up in the extra bedroom — permanently, I'm afraid, because it makes a swell coat rack, too. I was hoping some of Aunt Mabel's karma would come along with her ironing board, because she and Duncan would have had a lot of common ground. She went after sheets, towels

and underwear. She was just a step below Erma Bombeck's old neighbor, Mrs. Beck, who ironed the tongues of canvas tennis shoes.

I recently ruined a silk blouse on the ironing board/coat rack, so I'm more wary than ever now. Certainly I know all the tricks: Wearing suits is the best one because all I have to do is smooth out the wrinkles on a six-inch panel across the front of the blouse.

Like practically everything, my aversion to ironing probably goes back to my Catholic upbringing. Every Sunday night I had to stand in our musty laundry room and iron five white uniform blouses.

Maybe I could do a takeoff on my favorite Tillie Olsen short story, "I Stand Here Ironing." Mine would be about a young girl whose mother refuses to let her go to school in wrinkled blouses. She can hear all the neighbor kids outside playing kickball while she toils inside next to a mountain of blouses and her father's handkerchiefs. I would call it "I Stand Here Seething."

When the royalties start pouring in I'm not going to waste any time. Forget Tidy Troops and personal secretaries — I'm hiring an ironing service.

The tough life of a convicted killer

It's impossible to ignore a letter that begins with the poignant words: "A mother's plea." Especially when the mother says she is fighting for the life of her son.

And as Delores Maxey describes it, the situation does sound desperate.

Her son, Brian, happens to be an inmate in an Illinois state prison, first in Joliet, and most recently at Pontiac.

Mrs. Maxey writes: "My son's life is at risk because of violent inmates and gang members who control the inside living of other inmates. . ."

Last June, she says, her son was "brutally stabbed" in the face by prison gang members because he refused to join a gang. The wound required 32 stitches and he has almost lost the sight of one eye.

Because of the attack, she says, she pleaded that her son be transferred to a safer prison.

But instead, she says, he was transferred from Joliet to Pontiac, which isn't any safer. The gangs, she says, are still after him.

She has written to newspapers, state officials, prison officials, anybody she thinks might help in her crusade to save Brian's life. And she has had some publicity.

After I read her most recent letters, I phoned Mrs. Maxey and asked her to elaborate.

"Brian wouldn't go along with the gangs, he wouldn't join, so they came into his cell and two of them stabbed him. Now he might lose the sight of his

eye. "They have put him in protective custody. That means nobody can get near him. He's isolated from the other prisoners. But that wouldn't have to be if they would just transfer him to one of the other prisons, where the gangs don't operate that way."

She was talking about one of the more benign institutions, where there are fewer violent, hardened criminals.



Mike Royko

After she talked about this, I asked her what her son had done to get into prison. She has never mentioned that in her letters.

She paused, then said: "Murder." But she was vague about details of the crime. She turned the conversation back to her son's safety.

"They keep saying they are reviewing the case, they are always reviewing it. But my son is in danger. And he should be better protected. He should be transferred."

After talking to her I decided to check on how her son, Brian, landed in prison.

We can begin with Sarah Harmon, age 16. She was in a Chicago disco and

rejected Brian's amorous advances. So, he followed her from the place, raped her, strangled her and dumped her body into a South Side river. Then there was Katrina Tolbert, age 14. He decided to have sex with her, too. And when he finished the rape, he strangled her and left her body to rot in a nearby forest preserve.

He pleaded guilty to those two murders, as well as to another rape along an expressway in which he allowed the victim to live.

He also was accused of a rape-murder in Alabama, but never stood trial for that one.

And that's why Brian, now 29, has been in prison for the last seven years. Simply stated, he liked raping and strangling teen-age girls.

Well, state prisons can be harsh places, as Brian has discovered. Inmates do get hurt or killed. There are gangs that are extensions of the city street gangs.

But those brutal prison conditions are something that a person should really think about before he squeezes the life out of some kid's throat and tosses her into a muddy river.

That's one of the reasons why many of the prisons are overcrowded, unpleasant, even dangerous places: Most of society knows that they are filled with people like Brian. And most people would vote "aye" to having Brian taken from prison and tossed into that same

Please see ROYKO on 5

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