

Editorial

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Ethics

Senators may want to resign

It wasn't long ago that the impeachment and criminal trial of former Attorney General Paul Douglas raised serious questions about the ethics — or lack of them — of state government officials. Now it's happened again.

Omaha Sen. Bernice Labeledz and North Platte Sen. James Pappas have been charged with felonies stemming from their involvement in the petition drive to put a lottery proposal on Nebraska's ballot. Also charged were Lincoln attorney Walter Radcliffe, one of the Legislature's most active lobbyists, and three officers and a lobbyist of Lottery Consultants of Nebraska Inc.

In one sense, this is a new situation because a state senator has never before been charged with a felony while in office. But if it appears that Pappas and Labeledz will have to stand trial on the charges, they should remember the spectacle of the Douglas impeachment trial. It might then be best for them to do what Douglas failed to do until too late: step aside.

No one can peer into the minds of those who got themselves into such a mess over the petition drive. But state law is crystal clear. You don't circulate a petition unless you're a registered voter; you don't sign one as a circulator and let someone else do the circulating; you don't pay circulators any more than expenses for their work. From the evidence revealed thus far, it appears the two senators violated the law.

It's still not clear the two will even have to stand trial. On Fri-

day, Labeledz and Neligh Sen. John DeCamp, the third organizer of the petition drive, asked for injunctions against possible prosecutions in the case on the grounds the state law is unconstitutional. If the law is thrown out, then Pappas and Labeledz are technically off the hook.

But if the law is upheld and the case goes to trial, the senators should consider that more than their personal conduct will be at issue. If Pappas and Labeledz remain sitting members of the Legislature, many Nebraskans also will be judging their government as the case proceeds.

Government at every level is already held in low regard by the people, which is a dangerous condition in a democracy. A criminal trial while Pappas and Labeledz remain in office will hurt the Legislature's credibility as surely as the attorney general's office suffered during Douglas' impeachment trial.

Even if the law is thrown out, the appearance of impropriety rising from the petition drive would make it difficult for Pappas and Labeledz to function as elected officials. Because Pappas' term expires in January, he could avoid resigning by withdrawing from his re-election campaign. Labeledz, who has two years left in her term, would have a tougher choice to make.

Pappas and Labeledz are entitled to their day in court if they must stand trial, but the Legislature shouldn't have to stand trial as well. In that case, the two should consider leaving the Legislature for the sake of the body they serve.

Are we all crooks?

Survey raises questions about society

The findings of an unscientific survey of UNL criminal justice students released last week are enough to make more than a few parents wonder just what kind of kids they've raised.

More than 50 percent of the 250 students responding said they'd shoplifted, drank illegally, driven while drunk, vandalized, used marijuana or stolen something at least once in their life. And more than 20 percent, still a considerable percentage, admitted to gambling or using cocaine.

You may remember hearing something like this before. That's because Chris Eskridge, the criminal justice professor who conducted the survey, gave 539 UNL students a similar survey last year.

What's interesting is that 75 percent of those who answered the survey felt they were basically law-abiding. The numbers, however, tell a different story. On all but four of the 24 questions dealing with a given violation of law, at least one in 10 said they had broken that law at least once.

As might be expected, the highest percentage of students,

90 percent, said they had taken a drink while still under age. Seventy-six percent said they had driven while drunk, while 67 percent had stolen something from a hotel or motel. Fifty-five percent said they had used marijuana and 23 percent cocaine.

Particularly interesting is that 8.5 percent of men surveyed said they had forced a woman to have sex at least once, while 27 percent of women said they had been the victims of such incidents. When it comes to academic matters, the picture of those surveyed isn't pretty either. Eighty-four percent said they had cheated on a test, and 36 percent had done so on a term paper.

Eskridge was correct to point out that the study was not a scientific survey and doesn't carry as much weight as a Gallup or Harris poll.

However, scientific or not, the survey makes you stop and think about today's society. When 75 percent think they're law-abiding but more than 25 percent admit to breaking the law in one or more cases, one wonders what meaning "law-abiding" has in our generation.



Liberal solutions are outdated

Civil rights policy should offer equality instead of victory

The well-publicized dearth of original and creative liberal policy proposals can be traced to one characteristic of the liberal mind: Its tendency to engage in political reductionism. This tendency results in appeals for the state to address not only political problems through the political process, but also social and economic problems where governmental intervention is less obviously helpful.

Little better example of the ineffectiveness — and the counterproductivity — of such an approach exists than in the arena of civil rights.

First, nobody questions the legitimacy of governmental action in support of the traditional civil rights concerns; there is an unquestionable political core to these types of civil rights issues. After all, the proposition that all people should be treated equally before the law.

I'm not disputing that increasing protection of civil rights affects economic and social circumstances. For example, enforcing a right to public education obviously affects social and economic outcomes. I'm not speaking of situations in which the object of regulation is still political or civil — and what the governmental school system does is clearly political.

Rather, the distinction underscored here is that there are political ends which political means can address, and there are also social and economic ends which the political process is ill-equipped to address.

Black economist Thomas Sowell argues in his 1984 book "Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality," that the shift over the past two decades in the "civil rights" agenda from political questions

to socio-economic problems distorted the inner logic of the original, compelling civil-rights argument: "Many Americans who supported the initial thrust of civil rights, as represented by the Brown v. Board of Education decision and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, later felt betrayed as the original concept of individual opportunity evolved toward the concept of equal group results. . . .

"Equal opportunity" laws and policies require that individuals be judged on their qualifications as individuals, without regard to race, sex, age, etc. 'Affirmative action' requires that they be judged with regard to such membership. . . ."

Jim Rogers



The distinction being made here was lucidly summarized in a quip found at the end of Sowell's book: "The right to vote is a civil right. The right to win is not."

That the politically oriented "civil rights" approach has been counterproductive in recent years is evidenced by the inability of the approach to articulate reasonable political solutions to the primarily social and economic problems plaguing minority communities in general, and the black community in particular.

The social problem of the destruction of the black family is a case in

point. During the discussion among some black leaders following a network documentary on the crisis, the most salient point was not really what was said, but how it was said. Overtly political rhetoric was avoided by even the liberal participants, while the more (historically) conservative language of community and responsibility was adopted.

Similarly, two decades of attempting to solve the economic problem of black poverty through the political process has produced few social results of value (and may have been seriously counterproductive to the fabric of the black community. These days, however, the rhetoric of some of the black leadership has changed from arguing economic equality as a civil right to supporting business development programs modeled loosely after the success of the Italian-American Bank of Italy (now called the Bank of America).

The bottom line is this: The political process is ill-suited to serve as the panoply of answers for whatever ails us. Serious distortion results when we try to force political solutions onto problems originating in social and economic institutions. Any political philosophy that ignores this fact runs the risk of being rejected as impractical in the long run.

The thrust of liberal policy initiatives over the last 55 years or so has been to seek political solutions to problems irrespective of the source of the problem. Today such attempts no longer work, and continued attempts to force the fit in spite of the facts are not only foolish, it's reactionary.

Rogers is an economics graduate and a law student.

Mommy, do Texans eat quiche? The passing of the days of red-eye

I am taking it upon myself to declare the myth image of Texas as being stone-cold dead.

Let Billy Bob and Bubba keep on wearing their snakeskin boots and Stetson hats, cooking whole steers on spits, bellowing for blood at football games, singing about Willie and Waylon and the boys and remembering the Alamo.

But it's all over. I have conclusive evidence before me of the wimping of Texas.

It's a breathless announcement about a new wine called — get this, pardners — "Texas First Blush."

The wine is a product of a Texas vineyard called Ste. Genevieve.

The announcement out of Fort Stockton, Texas, says:

"It's refreshing, crisp and just a little bit effervescent. That describes Texas First Blush, an exciting and

delicious new white wine with a mere touch of blush, from Ste. Genevieve vineyards.

A special tasting by celebrities of the first bottles of Texas First Blush will be held at events in Austin, Hous-

Mike Royko



ton and Dallas the second week of September.

"We wanted Texans to have a refreshing early wine, Henri Bernabe, a partner in Ste. Genevieve Vineyards said, especially during the warm months

of late summer when it would be appreciated the most."

As the French have their nouveau wines, we felt that Texans should have a nouveau of their own.

"Ste. Genevieve is helping establish a new Texas tradition: a thirst-quenching wine made in Texas for thirsty Texans.

"Texas First Blush is the very blossom of youthful wine for delicious and multi-purpose drinking. It's light and easygoing, capable of being appreciated and understood through enjoyment."

Oh, I can see it happening now, down around the Pecos territory.

"Howdy, Bubba."

"How-do, Billy Bob."

"Let's git us a drink, Bubba."

"Best danged offer I've had all day."

"Barkeep, some service here."

"What'll it be gents? Three fingers of red-eye? Or some bourbon with branch

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