

Editorial

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Jeff Korbelik, Editor, 472, 1766
James Rogers, Editorial Page Editor
Gene Gentrup, Managing Editor
Tammy Kaup, Associate News Editor
Todd von Kampen, Editorial Page Assistant

Out with exit polling Early polls are 'potential folly'

Today's mass media can't seem to resist the urge to tell us what happened in an election before all the votes are counted. Although they're often right, Tuesday's elections left us with several examples of the potential folly of early projections. "Exit polls," surveys of voters as they leave the polling place, have been widely debated since they were used in 1980 to project Ronald Reagan's victory three hours before the polls closed. It was widely charged that the networks' early "call" of the race, which prompted Jimmy Carter to concede shortly afterward, caused many West-Coast voters not to vote and changed the outcome of several local elections.

This year, the networks decided the two-woman governor's race had enough national interest to justify an exit poll. Based on its poll, CBS News declared Kay Orr the winner at 8:52 p.m. Tuesday night, about an hour after the polls closed. But Helen Boosalis led at the time in votes counted, and it wasn't until midnight that election returns confirmed the poll.

Closer to home, local media proclaimed about the time Boosalis conceded that the state's seat-belt margin had been retained by about 30,000 votes. The law's supporters declared vic-

tory Tuesday night, but woke up Wednesday to find out western votes hadn't been figured into the projections. In the end, the seat-belt law was repealed by a slim margin.

The same thing happened with Proposed Amendment No. 1, which would have changed the Legislature's starting date next session from Jan. 8 to Dec. 3. Reports that the amendment had passed prompted Gov. Bob Kerrey to say Wednesday he wouldn't call a special session on farm matters after all. But, once again, western votes that hadn't been counted overturned the amendment.

Since the media didn't "call" any races until after the polls had closed, these mistakes didn't change voting outcomes. But they remind us that such projections, made at the wrong time, may make voters decide voting is a waste of time. In a sense, that takes away his voice in the final decision.

Conceivably, this would be an argument for banning all kinds of pre-election polls as well. That's probably not justified. But it might be a good idea for the media to simply stick to saying, "X is leading with Y percent of the votes counted," until all the votes are in. It's safer — and it makes for a better race.

Paid in blood money Arms sales to Iran compromising

The ongoing revelations about officially approved arms sales to Iran are severely disturbing. If the stories are true — and most of the evidence currently points to their veracity — the integrity of the U.S. government has been greatly compromised.

First, there is an arms embargo supposedly prohibiting the sale of U.S. arms to Iran. This was placed upon the country in reaction to the Iranian hostage crisis and is aimed at preventing the continuation of the institutional terrorism of the Iranian regime.

Last year a number of individuals who thought they were working with U.S. government approval were arrested for breaking that embargo. Their cases are being re-examined under the light of the new revelations.

Additionally, the United States is supposed to have a hardline policy against negotiating with terrorists for the release of U.S. hostages. This policy was bridged in the Daniloff case. As a result of the inconsistency, U.S. officials apparently began to negotiate with Middle-East terrorists as well as the Soviets. When push comes to shove, U.S. officials are all too willing to forego the long-term gain of the "no-negotiation" policy for the short-term gain of "successfully" achieving the release of the hostages.

State Department officials have asserted that no negotiation was had with the terrorists — just with Iran. But if Iran has so much power over the terrorists that that nation could secure their releases, there is precious little real distinction between the terrorists in Lebanon and those in Iran. The United States clearly provided some benefit — either directly or indirectly — to the terrorists. Why else would the release have been secured?

Finally, there is the disturbing spectre that the price of the recent hostage release (and perhaps others in the future) is paid in blood money.

It is commonplace to prefer the well-being of those we know to the well-being of unknown others. But how can the U.S. justifiably refuse to look beyond the "good news" of hostage releases and not see that lives of a handful of Americans might have been (or be) purchased with the deaths of thousands of Iraqis. (Iran and Iraq are currently in the midst of a vicious war. Iran needs the U.S. spare parts in order to keep its war machine going.)

While Americans rejoice at the release of one hostage, and hope for more in the near future, it would do well to think of the high price: Hypocrisy and death. The price may be too high.

Election results unexpected

Rural Nebraskans win their fight for survival at ballot box

A couple of my journalistic friends and I were touring the campaign parties Tuesday night in search of election-night color stories. While we were taking in the early-evening hoopla of Kay Orr's party at State Fair Park, I ran into Rick Baum, lobbyist for the Nebraska School Improvement Association and a leader of the fight to repeal LB662.

Baum was beaming as he told me the suspended school consolidation and finance law was going down to defeat by a wide margin. When I asked him what was causing LB662's resounding defeat, he thought for a minute and said: "Part of it is that the people in the rural areas are fighting for their survival. This bill was just one more example of the government trying to take their rights away."

That statement, plus my own background as a western Nebraskan, tells me much about why the 1986 state election went the way it did. There are other reasons why Kay Orr won, LB662 was routed, and the seat-belt law was upset in a close race, but one has to conclude from the results that conservatism is alive and well in Nebraska.

Let's not forget so soon, none of those three races were expected to turn out quite the way they did. Liberal strength in the cities helped put Bob Kerrey into office in 1982, and there was little reason to suspect much of a change this time. That meant Helen Boosalis had a good chance of winning and the seat-belt law probably would be retained. If LB662 failed at all, it wouldn't be because liberals disagreed with the law's goals — only with its tax increase.

But when election day came, LB662 lost by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, an initial 20-point lead for the seat-belt law was wiped out and early-evening smiles for the Boosalis camp turned into frowns. The 62-country 3rd Congressional District, where Republican elephants run free and unthreatened, delivered majorities for Orr and against the two laws

that ran between five and nine percentage points ahead of the statewide totals. Except for Lincoln and Hall counties, which contain the state's third- and fourth-largest cities, every county in the district with a city over 10,000 population went to the Republicans.

In a way, the Democrats were unlucky. Had Kerrey run again, the Democrats



Todd von Kampen

would have had a popular incumbent going for them — and popular incumbents have a much easier time collecting votes. The tax increase in LB662 and Boosalis' support of it cost the Democrats some urban votes, while Orr's strong pro-life stance on abortion played better than Boosalis' not-so-qualified approach in heavily Catholic and Democratic South Omaha. So it can't be said the west dictated its will.

But it seems clear that a solid bloc of outstate voters toppled the seat-belt law, turned LB662's defeat into a rout and gave Orr a comfortable majority. That bloc hasn't been that solid in several years. To understand why, it's necessary to know how outstate Nebraskans feel about themselves and the life they've built for themselves over the years. Despite the influences of modern times, those feelings haven't changed much.

Western Nebraska farms and ranches have had their economic problems just as the rest of the state has. But it seems to me that many people out there are still happy. Family and religious life is still strong, our schools do a basically good job of educating the young and the land remains largely untouched by

the scourges of modern civilization. We outstate Nebraskans feel we've got "the good life," and we don't want anyone toying with it.

As long as the government left the rural areas to run their own affairs, it didn't really matter that the cities were becoming more liberal. But as liberal strength in the cities grew, so did their voting power in the Legislature. The passage of LB662, which had been defeated over and over again, signaled the cities were in control.

But it also shook up the outstaters. In their eyes, it's not up to Lincoln to tell them how to run their schools — or to buckle their seat belts or else. It was time to fight, and they fought at the ballot box. When Helen Boosalis came out in favor of LB662, it became obvious to many voters that they had to do three things to protect their interests: vote against LB662, vote against seat belts and vote for Kay Orr.

Two lessons can be drawn from the outcome. First, Nebraska liberals must hold their natural supporters in line to have any chance of winning. They might have done so this year, but Kerrey's withdrawal from the race meant his winning coalition of 1982 had to be built all over again. As Orr's narrow victory in Omaha shows, they couldn't quite do it.

As for outstate conservatives, the 1986 election shows they still have a lot of power if they use it. Since liberal power in the cities is here to stay, conservatives have to get out the vote and remain united in election after election. No longer can they take Nebraska electoral politics — and what they consider "the good life" — for granted. They fought for their survival in 1986 and won, but future events are bound to show their fight is far from over.

Stay tuned.
(Von Kampen is a senior news-editorial and music major from Ogallala and is DN editorial page assistant.)

Eternal fatherhood poses problems Menopause might be an advantage

I have a friend who is in his late 40s and trying to decide whether he wants to have children. This is not exactly a new question in his life. He has talked about it through 10 years and 10 relationships. Talked about it with women who weren't quite ready, with women who were eager, and with women who'd already had their fill.

I have another friend who is just past 50, just past one divorce settlement and three college tuitions. The current and younger woman in his life now wants to begin what he has just finished. He has to decide whether to recycle his life cycle.

I have listened to these two for some time now and have come to the conclusion that middle-aged men suffer from a distinct biological disadvantage: They don't go through menopause.

I know, I know. This is not a widespread opinion. The average man does not rage at the heavens because he has been denied the growth experience of hot flashes. Wishing menopause on men sounds like the sort of curse once uttered by covens of radical feminists at meetings in lower Manhattan lofts.

Indeed, if women could vote on their biology, they might well outlaw the "change of life." It seems like a leftover from another age, an appendix of inequality. If men can have babies into their 70s, why can't women?

I know more women who resent the midnight on their biological clock than men who would welcome it with hats and horns. Menopause just doesn't fit our social calendar. It certainly doesn't fit the all-American notion that we have interminable choices and unlimited options in life. The fertility deadline forces women to make those choices and take up those options.

Which is, when you come to think of it, an advantage.

If some single American men suffer from what the pop psychologists call the Peter Pan syndrome, it may be biology that has destined them for Never Never Land. Rooted in this life-long fertility, there is for some the sense that as fatherhood is open-ended, so is life. It allows some men to postpone so much, even maturity.



Ellen Goodman

I don't want to exaggerate this. I don't believe that fertility makes most men less aware of mortality. But it makes it marginally easier for men than for women to be alienated from their own life cycle. It makes it marginally easier for them to postpone paternity and also to push off the realization of age.

The physical symptoms of male menopause in the current jargon include a pulled muscle, a gray hair, an elevated cholesterol count. At midlife, men wrestle with limits. A 45-year-old will never again be the "youngest success" at anything; indeed, he may never live up to his own expectations.

But this is not a demarcation line. There is no clear change of life. There remains, at least in theory, the biological ability to start, or restart, to create. This possibility dangles over some men's lives in ways that do not always work in their favor.

Women are hardly without biological options. They have, for the most part, 30 or 35 years before they run out. But the knowledge that fertility is finite gives a contour to a woman's life. It

heightens her sense of timing. It may even help her to feel more in sync with each stage.

In this age, our psyches are not as tied to our biology as in the past. There are millions of us who choose to close options by sterilization. But this biological difference lingers.

What I have witnessed is not only the indecisiveness of my two middle-aged male friends, but the shock that senior citizenship brings to their elders. It seems to me that men have a much harder time coming to terms with retirement and old age.

Age seems to spring upon some men. Women, on the other hand, have an earlier warning system built into their biology. It may be easier for men to postpone the realization of age and harder to cope with it when it inevitably arrives.

I offer no solution for this imbalance and, no, I do not wish menopause upon my friends. They will have to make do with their minds. But for most of time, menopause has been looked upon as a female disadvantage. From my listening post, I am not so sure. Not so sure at all.

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