

Editorial

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Impending doom? U.S. colleges get a bad rap

The recently released education report headed by former Education Secretary Terrel Bell just muddies the waters of higher-education reform. The most newsworthy proposal was the call to double the number of adults with college degrees by the year 2000.

There is certainly value in studying and proposing reforms for post-secondary education. But the Bell report's scope is not holistic enough to merit taking its recommendation seriously. The report laments education deficits that are more appropriately addressed by elementary and secondary schools.

The report argues that "America has far too many people whose abilities are never awakened." Certainly nobody quibbles with that assertion. But far too many people already attending post-secondary institutions do not have the skills necessary to allow their abilities to be awakened by colleges and universities.

If this primary problem is not first faced and dealt with, simply playing the numbers game and expanding enrollment in colleges and universities will result only in a massive waste of resources and will end in frustration for all concerned.

In a press interview Bell himself made the point: "It ought to be easy to get in, but we ought to make it more meaningful and difficult to get a degree." So while universities are supposed to let in more people without the requisite skills to succeed, these same schools are expected to turn around and then flunk these people right out. What sort of reasoning is that?

Institutions of higher learning should not be turned into schools primarily oriented toward developing basic skills and learning behaviors, they should be places where these fundamental blocks are built upon. Bell's proposal deleteriously attempts to expand the scope of the university's mission.

On a more positive note, the Bell report's recommendation to support greater access to financially disadvantaged groups should be heeded.

It is a shame that competitive candidates for post-secondary education cannot complete their schooling because of extraordinary financial pressure. Certainly in a land of opportunity, money sufficient for investment in America's future could be found. There is little question that the money would be well spent.

No swimming allowed Closing of Coliseum pool unwise

No swimming: At least not in the UNL Coliseum swimming pool.

The pool will remain empty after a committee organized by John Goebel, UNL vice chancellor for business and finance, made the recommendation when they found it was too expensive to update the pool's equipment.

Goebel said in Sunday's Omaha World-Herald that it would cost the university as much as \$50,000 to \$70,000 for repairs. And with the ongoing budget cuts already digging into the university's academic programs, a pool doesn't seem to be worth that much money.

What this situation really points to is the need for the university to build a new campus recreation facility; one that wouldn't be paid for from the ever-decreasing budget.

The closing leaves only one pool available to students, the one at Mable Lee Hall. UNL has two other pools, one at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, the other at Abel residence hall. Devaney is only open to varsity athletes and Abel is only open to the residents of the hall. Goebel said Abel provides the best solution to the inevitable overcrowding.

Abel, too, will have to undergo some reconstruction in order to be open to all students. Goebel said it would need larger rest-

rooms and showering areas would need to be built.

Really not much of a solution, considering it's still going to cost the university money.

Programs are being affected by the closing. No classes yet, but water polo that used to last two to three months is now in one weekend. Family swimming hours have been eliminated.

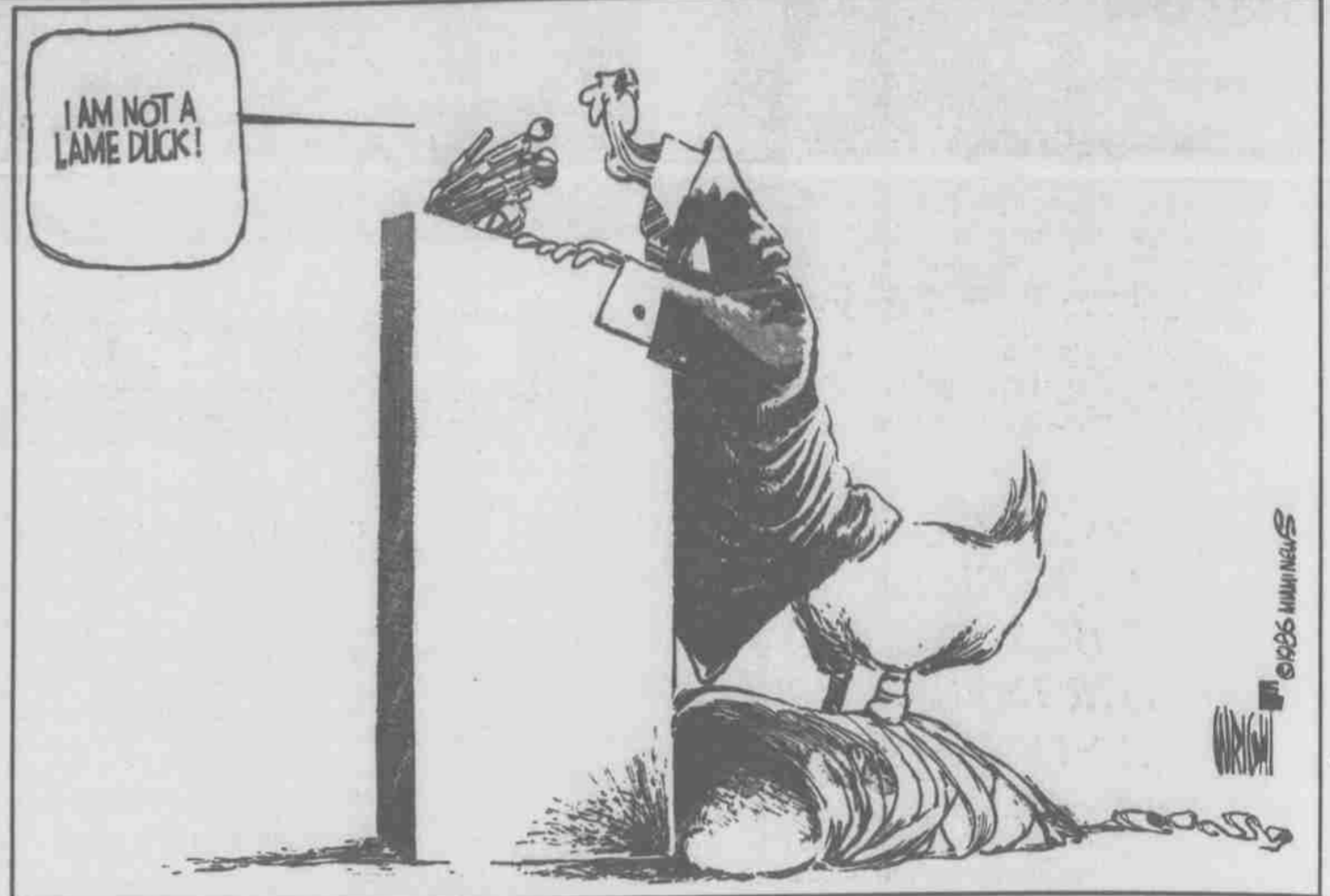
The Coliseum's pool is just another example of the atrocious recreational facilities available to students on campus. If one remembers, last semester the administration thought about closing the Men's Physical Education Building. Part of the reason — the building was decrepit.

A campus of 24,000 students should not tolerate inadequate facilities. A look around the Big Eight and one can find large recreational facilities. One also needs to look at the number of students on this campus who use the facilities. The numbers are high and are reason enough to take a closer look at the problem.

The university, though the NU Foundation, could solicit outside money to fund a new facility. They did it for the training table and the Lied Center. Why not a rec center?

Something needs to be done. The problem is only getting worse and is still costing money.

I AM NOT A
LAME DUCK!



Valuing Midwestern boredom Bohemians find hometowns both tormenting and inspiring

After many years of discontent and vacillation, I have finally decided that I like living in Nebraska. I don't exactly love the thought of residing in a region where agriculture and football games are cultural phenomena, but I have learned that living here can be both satisfying and creatively stimulating.

I'm not talking about all the trite Great Plains literature and the fresh air and open spaces. I'll take smog and subways over Willa Cather and the Sandhills any day. The homogenized sterility, old-world morality and prosperity of the Bread Basket seem to form a void in creative Midwesterners that forces them to search for a way out of the mainstream and its virtuous "peace and quiet."

However, the "peace and quiet" of the Midwest gives social infidels a chance to contemplate and a reason to create. In their hometowns, artists, actors, writers, musicians and poets are considered "eccentrics" or "characters" to the locals who don't always understand them or respect them. But the static social milieu becomes part of the basis for their creative energy, anger and artistic vitriol.

And such feelings don't occur only in the heartland of America. Alienation is the virus of small towns everywhere. In France, the Bohemians of the pastoral regions flock to Paris. In Holland, they run to the chaotic freedom of Amsterdam. And in England, a country filled with grimy little industrial towns, the kids make a beeline for the cosmopolitan veneer of London.

In America, Los Angeles and New York are the meccas of modernity, where small-towners congregate to escape the indolent world of coffee klatches and rumors that they were raised in. But in the big city, it seems as

if everyone is an artist, and competition becomes tremendously intimidating. Sometimes competition is so high in the upbeat urban world that transplants decide to give up their goals and return to the "peace and quiet" they



Scott Harrah

abhorred as children.

In a small town — or a big small town like Lincoln — the bohemian can be a novelty item, ridiculed and admired for being "different." In the melting pot of Manhattan or any other mecca for outcasts, everyone is quirky, and nobody really cares if one is offbeat. Perhaps the main difference between a small town and a metropolis is a matter of conformity. In Lincoln, everyone tries to be like everyone else; in New York, people make an effort to be marvelously original, and sometimes it is difficult to live up to such a rule.

It takes time, but eventually creative people learn that their hometown is also their Muse, and it must be tolerated and appreciated instead of hated. The Midwest and its counterparts represent a standard of normality and the flawed virtues that standard is based on. To challenge normality in a place where it is lauded is the ultimate test of emotional and artistic strength, for it makes one aware of one's background and the entropy it caused.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about life in Lincoln is meeting people who want out of Nebraska but are forced to stay in the interim because

they aren't finished with school or haven't saved up enough money to move elsewhere.

"I'm tired of Big Red and clean streets and cornfields," they scream in disgust.

Eventually they realize that it is more constructive to get some use out of their social limbo and use it to sharpen their creative acumen.

The years between Midwestern discontent and urban success then can become a moratorium instead of an insistent cry of discomfort. Soon, the absurdities of home and the years of struggling will pass and the creative people can leave knowing where their alienation came from, what caused it and where it will take them in other cities, culture and sensibilities.

Today, it seems that outcasts are becoming trendy. First came cartoon-like bums and bag ladies of pop like Boy George and Cyndi Lauper. Now Hollywood seems to feel that outcasts are "in." Three of the fall's most popular films — "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Nobody's Fool" and "Something Wild" — feature iconoclastic, rebellious heroes and heroines that sport one-of-a-kind attitudes with aplomb. All of these characters are outsiders from small towns who move to the city and make their own conventions and rules.

In these times of tradition, a resurgence of old norms has eclipsed the "do-your-own-thing" virtues of the '60s and '70s. Perhaps the idealistic, individualistic fervor of our pop cultural icons is a refreshing indication that the fall of conformity and the establishment might occur sooner than we think.

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Ambitious Democrats try to make electoral mountain out of molehill

So then, what have we learned from the recent experience at the polls? Waal, said the wise man, reflecting on it all — nothing. That's right, nothing. Democracy, the late Max Eastman pointed out, is most valuable as a negative instrument, the opportunity for the voters to tell their governors to get out of town and send in a new set of people. No such thing was done last Tuesday. A shift of 10 percent in the Senate has melodramatic consequences in terms of Senate leadership, but none at all in terms of voters, who didn't go to the polls motivated by whom they wish to see organizing the Senate. They went to the polls to vote for this man or the other, and it happened that the sum total of votes for Democratic senators exceeded voters for Republican senators. Adding up to?

But here is what pundits will try (are

trying) to make of it. They very day after the election, Democratic front-runner Gary Hart had a piece ready for The New York Times. In a single paragraph he lists the complaints of the people, whom he tacitly identifies as backers

William F. Buckley Jr.



of the Democratic Party. "First, we must acknowledge the dark side of Reaganomics' legacy: California's Silicon and Pennsylvania's Monogahela valleys are both reeling from a quadrupled trade debt. Steel employment has been cut to half. Farm foreclosures

are at record levels. The march toward energy independence is in chaotic retreat, with net oil imports up 36 percent in one year. Bulging bank debts threaten Latin American democracies and U.S. financial institutions from the oil patch to the Farm Belt."

So there are problems. Our high-tech people are losing out in their competitive struggle with South Koreans and Japanese. Well, Reaganomics is as much to blame for that as Halley's comet. The problem of American competition is a problem of productivity. Productivity is hampered by overhead. Overhead is what happens when there is a substantial difference between the cost of hiring labor and the earnings that inure to labor. And the reason for that difference, which is called the wedge, is

See BUCKLEY on 6