

Editorial

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Bad precedent

Surcharge sends dangerous message

The University of Nebraska may set a disturbing precedent next month if the Board of Regents approve a tuition surcharge for UNL engineering students.

The 20 percent surcharge would be used to update existing lab equipment in the College of Engineering and Technology. If the regents approve the surcharge, many similar requests are bound to follow.

Ultimately, any college on campus could come up with a "vital" project and seek a surcharge to support it. The regents would then be obligated to pass the surcharge based on its previous decision with the Engineering College.

At least one regent said a surcharge would cause problems. The Omaha World-Herald reported that Regent James Moylan of Omaha said the university could be "treading on thin ice" by approving the proposal. He said the university would expect "many more requests" if the surcharge was passed.

It also opens the lid on the Engineering College. A one-time surcharge may not be enough a year or two from now, and the college could tack on another if it wished.

Besides, UNL students already are paying much more tuition than they were four years ago. They also pay an additional lab fee for classes that require extra costs or use of equipment. Tack on book costs and the extra surcharge, and a student could be looking at a \$900 price tag for one semester of education.

The proposed charge apparently is a last resort for the college, which needs the updated equipment to gain re-accreditation in November.

But the proposal has another significance. It shows to what extremes UNL has to go to support its colleges. The university desperately needs money—and if only Gov. Kay Orr and the Legislature would listen.

The surcharge sends a dangerous message to the Legislature. Senators will think students' tuition will make up the difference every time the Legislature doesn't appropriate enough money.

Meanwhile, Orr has said that UNL needs to expand and improve its research. But it's hard for professors and students in the Engineering College to improve research when they're working with inferior equipment.

Organs desperately needed to save lives

Ethics under fire

Medical ethics are again under criticism, this time for treating brain-dead babies like organ banks.

While the critics' caution is understandable, other babies desperately need these organs to stay alive. The brain-dead babies will not have a life.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 babies are born each year with a condition called anencephaly. They virtually have no brain. Yet because they do have a rudimentary brain stem that allows them to breathe on their own, they can't be classified as brain-dead.

Babies born with this condition were ordinarily allowed to die naturally. But as their status worsens, the lack of oxygen makes their organs unusable.

George Annas, professor of public health at Boston University, doesn't think the babies should be kept "alive" to enable a transplant.

"The question is," he said, "is this a baby or not? At its stark-

est, these children are not being treated as human beings but as organ banks."

Others are concerned that if these babies are declared brain-dead, babies with other kinds of handicaps will also be used for organ transplants.

A line must be drawn. In deciding where the line should be, doctors need to consider the length of time the baby might live on its own and how much suffering it would endure.

Anencephalic babies tend to live only a few days at most. They are born dying, one doctor said.

Some parents insist on donating vital organs to give the baby's short life some meaning.

Organ donation is a touchy issue for those who believe life is sacred, no matter what. But what is so sacred about being born only to die, in vain. If their organs are donated, at least some value can be placed on their lives.

of Regents.

The Daily Nebraskan's publishers are the regents, who established the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper.

According to policy set by the regents.



Society insults injured women

Victims of sexual abuse too often revictimized by the courts

A Washington judge recently awarded a wife-battering husband 25 percent of the proceeds from a book his ex-wife wrote about her experiences in a violent marriage.

Ironically, he upheld the traditional sexist beliefs regarding violence against women during Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

This ruling should certainly make us all aware of the inequities that still prevail.

John M. Fedders resigned from a top post at the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1985 after wife-beating charges against him were widely publicized.

Fedders openly admits that he beat his wife, but claims it was her fault. She denied him emotional support during his bouts of depression, he said. The judge ruled that both partners were equally responsible for the breakup.

Charlotte Fedders received \$750 a month in alimony—which the judge lowered to \$500—and \$750 a month in child support. She supplements her income with a part-time job in a flower shop. She is raising five children.

And now her husband will share in her publisher's advance and royalties.

Historically, violence against women has not been thought of as a crime. The law, years ago, did not prohibit a man from beating his wife. In fact, it defined how it should be done. The "rule of thumb" said the beating stick could be no wider than the man's thumb.

Apparently some remnants of this line of thought still exist. If John Fedders had beaten a woman who was not his wife, he probably would be serving a prison sentence.

Our criminal justice system has been very slow to recognize the seriousness of domestic violence.

It occurs in one out of 10 households in the United States.

The cyclical pattern of domestic violence is hard to stop. After an outburst of violence, the couple usually goes into the "honeymoon" stage. The batterer becomes remorseful, is very loving and promises it will never happen again. This stage could last months, days or hours. Then pressure and tension build up to another explosion of battery.

Both the victim and the criminal

justice system are caught in this cycle.

A woman who stays in a violent relationship is often stuck economically, or she may believe she can change her partner. Frequently she is "disciplined" into thinking she deserves the punishment and it is all her fault.

The criminal justice system has traditionally sought to stay out of the privacy of marriage. A recent case in Somerville, Mass., illustrates this point.

Judge Paul P. Heffernan berated a battered wife for wasting the court's time when she sought police protection.

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The judge told the husband, "You want to gnaw on her and she on you, fine, but let's not do it at the taxpayer's expense."

Five months later, in August 1986, Pamela Dunn was found in the town garbage dump, severely beaten, strangled and shot in the abdomen.

Her husband is now awaiting trial for murder and the judge is under investigation.

Even if the criminal justice system wanted to help battered women, it is often difficult, as well as frustrating. After a woman has been beaten her state of mind often leads her to press charges. But later, fearing the ramifications of her actions, she will drop the charges.

The socialization and attitudes of the courts obviously play a big role in whether women will press charges. If cases like Pamela Dunn's are at all common, many women won't bother to go through the court hassles. If women think they won't receive any help from the courts, they won't risk the embarrassment or the wrath of their husbands.

While I can understand the frustration inherent in the vicious cycle of violence, the courts have no excuse for excusing domestic violence with these attitudes.

Rape has also been condoned, in a way, by our criminal justice system. In the recent past, women who reported rapes were often treated as if they were

the criminal. They were questioned about their behavior: Why were you out alone after dark? Why were you wearing such seductive clothing? What did you expect?

This is changing, but ever so slowly.

Often, unless the woman had been beaten, she would not be believed. This is especially common in date rape. Police would frequently pass her off as a woman who had changed her mind—too late.

In rape cases that did make it to court, few convictions were made. A 1982 Justice Department report said one in 150 suspects was convicted of rape. Women's pasts were frequently dragged out for public inspection. If the victim had ever had a date, she was considered to have "loose morals."

The court system is changing in this regard. But, while I was working on a story this summer, a rape-victim counselor told me victims are still sometimes asked the old sexist questions. Victims have asked her, she said, why the criminal justice system is revictimizing them, as if they hadn't been through enough.

Our society seems to condone violence in general and violence against women in particular. This is evident in television shows, advertising, popular music and some pornography. Men are seldom portrayed as victims in these media and, unlike women in the same context, never appear to like pain or brutalization.

As with many social problems, I think our socialization process is to blame. I read of one study which said that by the time a child reaches high school, he or she will have witnessed more than 13,000 violent crimes on television. This exposure has to have some negative effect, even if it only desensitizes.

If the media only portrays women as victims, then that is an idea, subconscious or otherwise, that many men and women grow up believing.

Some people simply have violent tendencies. The criminal justice system can't do much to prevent their behavior. But if they send out the message that this behavior won't be tolerated, things might change.

Awareness is the only answer. Awareness will help women realize they don't have to be a victim. Awareness will help change the criminal justice system. And maybe awareness will make people realize they can't get away with this any longer.

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