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A surprised party

Opposed bill shows poor communication

Lack of communication has once again stalled progress in the Nebraska Legislature. What's odd though is that in a non-partisan unicameral one party has ganged up against Gov. Kay Orr.

And oddly enough, it's Orr's own party. Orr, whose recent tax-cut proposal has been under fire, was met with opposition after Republican senators made a group effort to forestall the issue. Orr's tax-cut bill failed to advance from the Revenue Committee on Friday.

More than a dozen Republican senators met Friday morning to discuss their views on Orr's tax-cut bill. Some agreed not to cooperate with the Republican governor on the issue until she sat down to talk with them, several senators said in interviews with the Omaha World-Herald.

"There are some senators who aren't happy with the tax package the governor offered without saying anything to any of us," said one Republican member who asked not to be identified.

Orr's LB1238 would provide \$8.8 million in income tax relief for non-itemizing elderly and lower- and middle-income taxpayers by increasing the standard deductions for 1988. The tax-cut would be offset by

a 2-cent increase in the cigarette tax and an increase in the pickle-card tax from 3 percent to 10 percent of gross sales.

The committee declined to move the bill to the floor after a public hearing Friday.

Sen. Lorraine Langford of Kearney said some Revenue Committee members at the morning meeting had apparently already decided they weren't going to support the bill.

"They were bothered that they had to do it because it was the governor's bill, but they weren't consulted and they didn't like it," she said.

The bill had come as a surprise to some senators last week and there was some opposition to the tax increases, Langford said.

But as Sen. Rod Johnson of Sutton said, "I think there are just some bruised egos right now."

It's understandable that some senators feel the governor has neglected her obligation to keep them informed of her stand on issues. It's possible they feel that if she had consulted them, the tax-cut bill would be better written.

It is unlike Orr to demonstrate a maverick attitude, but in order to have a more well-informed Legislature and perhaps one that is more smoothly run, communication is a must.



Playing on public's emotions

Environmental issue on waste site spurs Nebraska group

Environmental issues have often been at the forefront in drumming up emotional support from the public. Many people view environmentalists as patriots because they often resemble the underdog David in his fight with Goliath. Goliath, of course, is played by either the big bad corporation or the insensitive governmental agency.

With this framework in mind, some environmentalists are stirring the emotions of Nebraskans by attacking the placement of low-level nuclear waste in this state.

For those who have missed all the media attention to the issue, Nebraskans will receive and store low-level nuclear waste from a five-state region. Nebraska was selected through a process set up by a compact agreed to by the five states. Congress set up the compact to deal with this issue on a regional basis.

Some environmentalists have claimed Nebraskans should have the right to vote on whether to accept the low-level waste. A group, the Nebraskans for the Right to Vote, has organized to put the issue on the ballot and planned to actively campaign against the state's membership in the compact.

As stated before, environmental issues can stir up a great deal of emotion in the public, particularly nuclear issues. One would be hard pressed to find anyone who does not want a safe environment and even harder to find someone who has no fear of nuclear waste.

Since there is such a common concern for the environment, Nebraskans for the Right to Vote has found it particularly easy to play on the emotions of people who may not understand the issue very well.

However, there are many reasons to suspect the motives and sincerity of this group.

First, its approach has flaws. With a name like Nebraskans for the Right to Vote, there may be a perception that people can essentially vote away the problem. It is the "Not you, not me, but the guy behind the tree" philosophy.

A vote to pull out from the compact would require Nebraska to store its own waste anyway. Of the five states, Nebraska produced the most low-level waste from 1979 to 1986. Nebraska also would have to pay more to store since the funds would be lost with the compact.

A vote to pull out from the com-

compact would also upset a carefully crafted regional scheme set up by a publicly elected Congress. It would also fly in the face of the publicly elected Nebraska Legislature which voted overwhelmingly to join the compact.

Further, Nebraska might not be able to refuse to take other states' waste, including those outside the five-state compact, if the compact structure was altered. U.S. Sen. J.J. Exon cautioned, the U.S. Constitution's interstate commerce clause may not allow Nebraska to refuse waste from other states.

Second, some of the rhetoric espoused by Nebraskans for the Right to Vote has not given them a lot of credibility. Instead of talking about responsible solutions and alternatives to the problem, the group has spent much of its time bashing industry and governmental agencies.



Joel Carlson

Sam Welsch, the head of the group, has accused public officials of placing efficiency ahead of safety considerations. Welsch said members of a five-state commission supervising the program "are going to want to site a facility as cheaply as they can, regardless of the health and safety risk of Nebraska citizens."

It is one thing to disagree with the methods of storing low-level waste, but it is quite another to suggest public officials will forget their responsibility to the public by consciously cutting corners on the project.

Welsch should realize that many of the public officials he accuses have strong environmental track records. Some were professed environmental activists in the late 1960s and most have been in environmental planning for many years. They have proven environmentalists can make a difference by working inside the system rather than outside of it.

Welsch may be motivated by other desires. Welsch was noted in a national report by an anti-nuclear group as a Nebraska contact. The report was entitled, "Shutdown Strategies: Citizen Efforts to Close

Nuclear Power Plants."

An environmental colleague, Dr. David Hoelting of Pender, said Welsch told him numerous times that "his goal was to shut down the nuclear power plants and that he would never accept any storage site in this state if he could help it."

Nebraska Public Power District officials said a compact withdrawal could result in the premature closing of power plants that supply 30 percent of Nebraska's electricity.

Third, this group seems to act as if the placement of low-level waste in Nebraska is somehow unique. This radioactive waste is low-level as opposed to high-level. High-level is fuel produced by nuclear power plants, while low-level waste refers to such items as clothing and tools that have been used in those plants. Nebraska has already been storing low-level waste for years.

Further, a recent study indicates a "major failure" in a low-level disposal facility would expose the public to about as much radiation as a person would receive from a gastrointestinal examination once a year.

Larry Grimm, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln radiation safety officer, said a farmer living next to a waste site and receiving a maximum lawful dose of radiation for 60 years might reduce his life expectancy for 15 days. He said a farmer reduces his life expectancy by about nine months because of the threat of accidents, chemical poisoning and other farming risks.

Jim Neal, Department of Environmental Control public information officer, said Nebraska's 300-plus open dumps are a far more serious harm than the storage of low-level waste. Such low-level waste would be stored in an above-ground, double-containment structure. The waste site would not be placed over any aquifer regions even if an unlikely leakage would occur.

Thus, Nebraskans have every reason to be skeptical of this group. Its rhetoric and motives are suspect, and its urging of a compact withdrawal would present more problems than it would prevent.

Environmentalists usually do the public a service by playing the role of David against Goliath, but unfortunately this group appears to be nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Carlson is a third-year law student.

Letter

Responses lack critical thinking

I'm not surprised that my friend and colleague, Dave Reiter, has stirred up a hornet's nest with his letter (Daily Nebraskan, Feb. 17) concerning proposed state-provided condom dispensers in the residence halls. What doesn't surprise me is the prevalence of knee-jerk reactions to that letter that are nearly devoid of any critical thinking on the parts of their authors. It really seems as though Dave's commentators have either failed to read the letter or have read too much into it.

Consider: One response raises Dave's question whether there are students who are incapable (physically, psychologically or socially) of not having sex — an interesting question, surely rhetorical and undoubtedly meant to emphasize just how visible an option abstinence really is. How does the commentator respond, with an answer to the question? No. With a re-evaluation of the situation under discussion? No. The commentator calls Dave names — self-righteous, naive and what-not.

This being such a profound method of refutation, a second commentator calls Dave immature.

That's funny; the guy who advocates self-restraint over state-catered condom dispensers is the immature one? Hmmmm... What's funnier is that Dave is so labeled because he allegedly uses the phrase "action x" as a euphemism for the expression "having sex." Call us silly, but we philosophers prefer to operate on principle rather than on whims. Dave was suggesting by his use of "action x" that having sex is but one action that must not fall outside the scope of our general principles of proper action. "Action x" is a generalization, not a euphemism. (If this explanation is insufficient, take note that Dave uses the word "sex" about five times in his letter.)

So be reminded, folks. Dave did little more than ask some provocative questions and forward some plausible principles an acceptable solution must adhere to. Respond as it suits you, but remember: Critical thinkers will attack Dave's reasoning. Those who fall short will attack Dave.

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