

Daily Nebraskan

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Spend money wisely

Bomber cash better spent on deficit

For two months, U.S. strategic nuclear forces have stood by uselessly as the conventional buildup has escalated in the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, the United States and the Soviet Union have embarked on an unprecedented partnership against an upstart aggressor, even going so far as to sign a joint condemnation of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Nonetheless, the stealth bomber — an aircraft designed specifically to deliver nuclear warheads into Soviet airspace guarded by radar — continues to garner support in Congress.

The Senate on Monday night rejected an amendment 50-44 that would have stopped the B-2 program at the current six bombers. President Bush wants 75 bombers, at a cost of \$865 million each.

Lawmakers could find a better place to use that money. The federal deficit, perhaps.

The billions going for the B-2 wouldn't even be a drop in the bucket that is the \$3 trillion national debt. Still, starting the deficit-reduction plan by cutting a useless weapon would make sense.

The B-2 is a plane without a mission. It is designed to penetrate Soviet airspace with its radar-evading technology, a task that was conceived while the Cold War still raged.

But as the Soviet Union continues to explore glasnost under President Mikhail Gorbachev, relations between the superpowers continue to thaw. And that makes penetration of Soviet airspace a less and less likely scenario.

Backers of the B-2 say the future of Soviet leadership is volatile and not firmly in Gorbachev's hands. What they fail to say is that no Soviet president could afford to engage in a continuing arms race with the United States, because the Soviet economy is even worse off than that of the United States.

Unless Congress and the president make wise budget choices, however, the U.S. economy soon could be in a similar shambles.

The House already has voted to cut the bomber. Because the Senate failed to follow suit, a conference committee is discussing the B-2's fate. Members of that committee should consider a future with a deteriorating economy before they look to the Cold War past when deciding whether to continue the program.

Then they might realize that the Cold War has been replaced by two new conflicts. And those opponents — Iraq and the deficit — won't be intimidated by the stealth bomber.

— Eric Pfanner
for the Daily Nebraskan

opinion READER

DN's criticism inconsistent

The Daily Nebraskan apparently has a thing or two to learn about cultural pluralism.

Lisa Donovan and the rest of the editorial board did well to decry a fraternity's distribution of a T-shirt that offended Mexican-Americans (Letter to the editor, DN, Oct. 9). The DN was also right to criticize Phi Kappa Psi last year for selling a T-shirt that was obviously racist.

Last April, however, the DN supported an administrative decision allowing Students For Choice to utilize university property in selling T-shirts that insulted Catholics. The T-shirts depicted "The Incredibly Shrinking Women's Right to Choose" and said in addition, "Rated PG, papal guidance suggested."

Last week, Students For Choice, Early Warning! and the Gay/Lesbian Student Association distributed a flier encouraging people to picket the appearance of Cardinal John O'Connor. Specifically, the poster asked people to "Picket the Pope's Mouth-piece."

Eldonna Rayburn, a coordinator of Students For Choice, said the fliers are fair game because they bring attention to Catholics' views about

abortion (DN, "Poster is creating unholy controversy, Oct. 12). If Rayburn and other pro-choice activists wish to criticize the Catholic Church for its stand on abortion, that is certainly their prerogative.

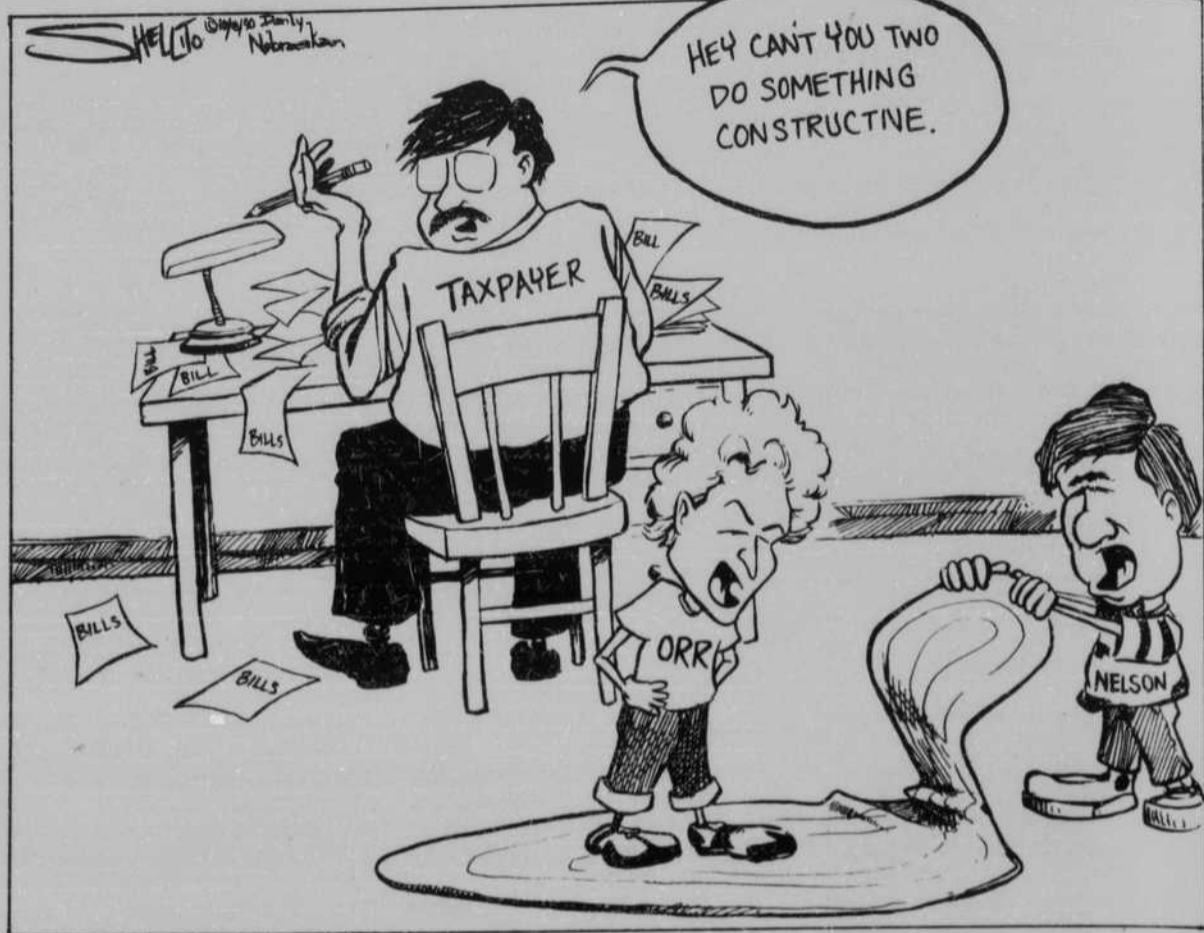
However, such criticism should refrain from mockingly and condescendingly portraying Catholics as nothing more than a bunch of unthinking puppets. The pro-choice T-shirts and fliers clearly cross the line between a fair criticism and an unfair attack on one's religion. Such insults amount to a cultural slur of equal magnitude to Farmhouse's unintentional mockery of the Mexican culture.

We have yet to see the DN criticize the flier, though.

From the DN's standpoint, a cultural slur's acceptability apparently depends on which particular culture is victimized. That's unfortunate.

If the DN is sincere in its hostility toward cultural bias, then its position should be consistent.

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Drinkin' with the Lincoln cops

Training program shows that impairment comes before legal limit

Bottles of vodka, rum, Seagram's 7 and amaretto lined a table. Mixers and ice were stacked up and ready to go. So were four volunteers who took the afternoon off. A bartender served up the drinks.

"OK, shoot 'em down, guys," he said.

No, this wasn't Duffy's on a Thursday night. Television cameras focused on two of the volunteers, community health educators for the state Department of Health. The only entertainment we had was a deck of cards and our drinks, which kept getting refilled.

Sip. We were spending the afternoon in a back room at Lincoln Police Department headquarters. The bartender doubled as Dave Anderson, an instructor for the National Law Enforcement Training Center.

The volunteers, Mike, Lisa, Shirley and I, were guinea pigs in part of a federal program to standardize sobriety tests for drunken driving. Kind of like Harris Labs with alcohol and no needles.

The point of the drinking session was not just to have a good time on hump day. It was to give 23 officers of the Lincoln and University of Nebraska-Lincoln police departments and the Lancaster County Sheriff's Department some field training in recognizing drunken drivers under the standardized system.

But that's not to say it wasn't a good time.

Swallow. At first, all four subjects were a little bit tentative. It's not every day that you get to drink in front of the cops. When they're mixing the drinks for you, it makes the situation that much more absurd.

None of us were told how much we were drinking. But it's not too hard to guess when your second 7 and 7-up is twice as strong as the first.

"The experienced drinkers, I give them doubles; the others I mix singles for," Anderson said.

Gulp. Lisa must have been getting doubles.

An officer asked her to count backwards from 100 to 88.

"100, 99, 98, 97, 96, 95, 94, 93, 92, 91, 90 — 99, 98."

She lost track somewhere. Mike and I didn't. We bobbed our heads as she counted. Then we analyzed our head-bobbing. We were philosophical drinkers. No bar-room brawls here.

I was the lightweight of the group,

putting down "only" eight 7 and 7's in a little more than an hour. Lisa had 9 1/2 drinks, Shirley 10 1/2. Mike was the heavyweight — 14 ounces of alcohol in about an hour and a half.

Chug. It was time to do some sobriety checks.

First Anderson repeated the control tests that had been performed earlier while I was sober. My depth perception, reaction time and blood alcohol content were measured.



Eric
Pfanner

The depth perception test lined up three little Jeeps in a viewfinder. I had to pick out which one was closest and which was the farthest away. They sure bounced around a lot more the second time . . .

Next came reaction time.

I sat facing the simulated gas pedal and brake. I pushed down hard on the gas. The red light flashed on. I jerked my right foot off the gas. My left foot went down hard on the clutch.

Oops. These simulators were automatics. So much for reaction time.

After the imaginary crash, I stumbled over to the blood alcohol testing machine.

.067.

The legal intoxication limit in Nebraska is .100 percent. I was .033 under the legal limit. But I didn't feel like I could have driven safely — on a simulator or on the road.

But that decision was up to the authorities. The 23 officers divided into teams of five. They put each of us through the series of standardized tests, then guessed our BAC and whether they would arrest us under similar conditions on the road.

Anderson said the technique is not 100 percent effective. But it's pretty close.

The standardized rules don't take the place of observation, or of a breath test. An officer still has to have a good reason to pull someone over on suspicion of drunken driving, and still has to make an arrest before making a breath test.

Instead of random tests, the new system gives the officers a step-by-step procedure to follow.

The first group started by taking my pulse. I was bored so I started

thinking about possible headlines for my column. How about "Fuzzy navels with the fuzz," or "Drinkin' DeKuiper's wid de cops." Try "Lincoln's finest . . . 80 proof." Enough.

Next came a series of eye tests. I followed a small flashlight up and down up and down left right left right and down again now up. Stop. Circle around and around and around and around now I'm going to touch your nose touch your nose your nose don't be surprised. Try not to cross your eyes — this is the convergence test.

The eye tests, called nystagmus, are the major difference between the new technique and traditional sobriety tests. Supposedly, they are fool-proof.

Anderson said that's because nystagmus measures involuntary jerking of the eyes that can't be controlled by the subject. Experienced drinkers can outwit some traditional tests, which focus on body movement, but the nystagmus test will give them away.

Could have fooled me. Any of the tests would have shown that I had been drinking. The question was how much.

All four groups guessed right — my BAC was below the legal limit. The other group members were not so fortunate. In fact, they were sloshed. Their BAC's ranged from .118 to .160.

And the nystagmus test proved to be accurate. All but one of the groups guessed right on every one of the subjects.

Officers had to decide whether they would have arrested us. None would have hauled me in. But my drinking buddies — all three would have been standing across from a judge pretty soon. All but one group would have arrested all three. The five groups guessed right then, on 19 of 20 tries. That's 95 percent accuracy.

And that's the point of the program: To test more effectively, to reduce the number of drunken drivers on the street and ultimately, to cut down on the number of traffic fatalities.

What the program also shows, though, is that you can be seriously impaired even when you are under the .10 BAC.

"Most volunteers are surprised they can drink as much as they did and not be over the legal limit," Anderson said.

I'll drink to that.

Pfanner is a senior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan editor in chief.