

Death penalty

Senators must avoid moral arguments

Twenty-five Nebraska legislators have co-sponsored a bill to abolish the death penalty in Nebraska.

That's enough state senators for a majority, enough to send the bill to Gov. Ben Nelson, who has not indicated whether he would sign it. If there is a struggle over the death penalty during this legislative session, it is likely to come when supporters try for the 30 votes needed to override a veto.

Some will quote the Bible; others, Hammurabi's Code.

Before senators pluck out each others' eyes, they should lay aside the moral arguments. This is not abortion. The rights of the unborn can be debated, but not those of the dead.

Unfortunately, arguments for and against the penalty never cease to be emotional and sensational. A typical case for the death penalty goes something like this:

We can all rest more peacefully knowing that a killer won't kill anymore. Killers are the cretins of society. They don't deserve to live. Society ought to kill killers for killing. Make the punishment fit the crime. Furthermore, the death penalty deters future killing by scaring potential killers into thinking about it for a while.

The first argument is the easiest to shoot down. Locking murderers up for life keeps them off the streets as surely as killing them. The bill introduced in the Legislature last week contains no provision for parole. In previous years, bills would have allowed parole after 30 years.

From a humanist perspective, no one is a cretin. But that doesn't mean we are all OK, either. Some people, especially when under emotional or mental duress, do things that are inherently anti-social. They should be punished.

But in those cases, the swiftness and surety of punishment is essential, both to give the punishment relevancy to the crime and to deter other anti-social acts.

Punishment in death-row cases is neither swift nor sure. Some trials, appeals, stays and pardons drag on for years or decades. Sensational crimes, such as murders, generate lots of publicity and bloodlust for a short time. Then the lynch-mob mentality dies down, and the retaliation becomes cold-blooded.

Twelve men currently are on Nebraska's death row, yet there has been no execution in the state since 1959.

Nebraska's next execution was scheduled for Feb. 8. But the Nebraska Supreme Court on Thursday granted Michael Ryan a stay of execution. His case will continue to drag on.

Before a 13th and more Nebraskans join Ryan on death row, the Legislature needs to send the bill to the governor. Even if the governor makes a moral decision in favor of the death penalty, there are plenty of practical reasons why he should sign the bill into law.

— E.F.P.

U.S. destabilized Middle East

Is anyone at all disturbed by our president and his Third Reich terminology? Is no one struck by hearing the words "New World Order" come from the former head of our secret police (the CIA)? Those crystal blue eyes, that strong Aryan jaw, the cruel mouth and those petulant, wire-thin lips we've been reading for so many months. While the U.S. condones the occupation of Palestine and plays shoot-em-up in Panama, our "paterfamilias" has the audacity to call Iraq's takeover of Kuwait "naked aggression." The "democracy" we are defending is a monarchic, caste-ridden society that treats half its population (the women) as cattle and still stones people to death for adultery. Is this so much more a sovereign state than is a country run by a drug lord with connections to the CIA? Call the incidents in Panama a "kinder, gentler" form of aggression.

By launching an attack on Iraq, the United States has thoroughly destabilized the situation in the Middle East. A holy war against the western world seems not only inevitable, but almost justified. Sure, the United States has participated in plenty of slap-and-

tickle around the globe, but never anything so sweeping as this. Is it necessary? The U.S. military presence in the gulf seemed to effectively balance Hussein's force and discipline him from further aggression. Protection of Saudi Arabia was, after all, our first intention. The Pentagon should have liked it. It took them out of their post-Cold War slump straight into spending a billion dollars a month. The oil still flowed. So, what happened? Why must Bush's New World Order be one of world domination?

I've seen people nearly electric with enthusiasm over the affair. They wish they could feel the desert heat and hear the desert wind as they watch the cataclysm from a safe remove. It's almost fetishistic. Where did we go wrong? Was it too much violence on television? Not enough attention as children? Too many drugs? Are we really so without grace, so benighted, so in love with death that we will allow this war?

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Initialed editorials represent official policy of the spring 1991 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the editorial board.

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ERIC ASPENGREN

A peace hero is needed, not Bush

We finally did it. We are at war, and it looks like there will be no stopping it until Iraq gives up Kuwait. I regret that I did not do more to stop it before it happened.

Everyone in the public eye claims to have regrets. President Bush regrets having to send troops to kill and die to preserve freedom. U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar regrets that his peace missions failed. Some men and women regret joining the military.

Apparently, the war is going well. We have achieved the proverbial "air superiority." We have taken very few losses, and Saddam Hussein seems unable to respond to our air attacks. His only responses seem to be desperate attempts to terrorize Saudi Arabia and to draw Israel into the war.

We have many war heroes in the making. The press corps is enjoying itself, too. Heroes have been born in Baghdad. The story is reminiscent of Edward R. Murrow's reports from London during the blitz.

What is important and likely forgotten is that we missed our opportunity to see a new kind of hero emerge from this, a "peace hero," if you will.

During the weeks of talks and peace initiatives, someone with vision and strength could have stood up for peace, and, in a sense, forced the powers that be into peace.

We don't know it couldn't have happened. The only arguments against this idea are the words, "you can't deal with a madman," or "you can't appease another Hitler." But these are not arguments against peace initiatives. They are empty rhetoric. War is only inevitable to those with a severe lack of vision.

Our leaders claimed that they were running out of time and had only a few options open to them. The military option is said to be a last resort. But we do not know what a last resort is when we don't have clearly defined rules.

Although analogies between war and sports abound, the two are not similar. In a football game, a team knows how much time it has left and what kinds of plays it needs to win.

If a team is five points behind and



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has the ball on the other team's 40-yard line with 10 seconds left, it throws a Hail Mary pass into the end zone.

But in the world of politics, the rules and procedures are not clearly defined, especially in the area of keeping the peace.

The only time limit — the Jan. 15 deadline — was arbitrary. There was no reason, in terms of peace initiatives, to set this date. Some analysts have said the deadline was set to make it easier for a war to be won. It is frightening that we may have allowed military considerations to limit peacekeeping options. Bush's priorities were obviously not peace.

But the deadline was not the only problem. Bush's techniques were foolish and hypocritical. Just look at his rhetoric, "we will strike a blow for the ideal that might does not make

right." That is not the statement of a man who has peace on his mind.

As peace talks intensified, Bush claimed there would be "no negotiations," further signs that he did not seek peace. He turned the word "negotiation" into an obscenity. Negotiating does not mean, as Bush seems to think, rewarding aggression.

When talks did take place, Bush's no-negotiations stance revealed its ineffectiveness. Bush was inflexible, saying flexibility implies weakness. His limited viewpoint kept him from believing he could get Saddam out of Kuwait with talk. He expected a fight and "stood strong" to get us ready for it.

Bush also sabotaged the legitimate peace talks that did take place with leaders of other nations and the United Nations.

Bush cannot pass the buck to the enemy and claim that Saddam was solely responsible for our entry into the war. Bush failed to gain a peaceful solution. He is signing the orders to send our troops to their deaths. He cannot escape some responsibility.

After all of Bush's mistakes, there still is hope. Again, it has not been proven that we had to go to war. The anti-war protests are continuing and seem to be gaining some momentum. Many people have learned from history.

We have to continue to call for an end to this war — but not a quick and decisive victory. We have to end the war. Explore the calls by Jordan's King Hussein for a cease-fire. This may seem futile to some, but history has to remember that not everyone supported going to war. We can inspire future generations to action.

Remember how your leadership stood when election time comes around again. Vote against our congressmen who voted for the war resolution, Reps. Doug Bereuter, Peter Hoagland and Bill Barrett.

And next time something like this happens — and unless our leadership changes, it will happen — maybe we can learn from this war and stop the next one before it starts.

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LETTER POLICY

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