

Lost time

U.S. senator should begin his campaign

Bob Kerrey is showing remarkable restraint. During a debate this weekend at the Nebraska State Fair, the Nebraska senator eschewed the opportunity to announce the start of his presidential campaign in favor of the issue at hand — his health-care reform plan.

He chose not to announce his candidacy despite the presence of two vital ingredients to get a campaign for the White House off to a rousing start: a down-home audience and the national media.

Perhaps Kerrey wanted a different setting for his announcement. Perhaps he wanted to stick to his earlier announcement that he would wait until the end of the month. Perhaps the danger of losing the Iowa Caucuses to Tom Harkin was making him sweat.

Despite his restraint, Kerrey obviously is burning to run.

"My interest in running for the presidency is based upon the belief that the possibility of a better future 20 years from now will be determined by our actions today," he said last week.

Kerrey portrays himself as a leader looking to the future. His health-care plan, although not unique, is one innovative idea that shows his forward-looking stance.

Unfortunately, however, by looking too far into the future, Kerrey may be damaging his political prospects in the present. And if he doesn't win the White House first, his plans for 2011 become unnecessary.

Unlike more prominent Democrats, he cannot afford to wait much longer. Bob Kerrey is a household name in Nebraska, but people in other states have a habit of saying "John" and leaving out the second "E" in his last name. Nebraska's Kerrey needs to let those people know that he is not a senator from Massachusetts.

Kerrey lost a political opportunity last week when another Eastern Democrat, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, said that, in theory, if push came to shove, all things considered, in the overall scheme of things, probably, possibly, maybe, he would support a Kerrey run for the White House.

A Kerrey announcement on the heels of Cuomo's hedging, veiled endorsement would have had considerable political value. Cuomo has been the darling of the Democratic establishment for a long time, the man who was supposed to put the ghosts of Michael Dukakis and Walter Mondale back in the closet where they belong.

Kerrey needs the mass support and attention — even in his home state — that perhaps only Cuomo can bring. An Omaha World-Herald poll published Monday indicated that 86 percent of Nebraskans approve of the job President Bush is doing. An earlier poll indicated that a majority of Nebraskans thought Kerrey would be better off not running.

Kerrey told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he was undaunted by Bush's popularity. What Nebraskans want in 1992, he said, is a choice.

Harkin, Paul Tsongas and Jerry Brown are not viable choices. Kerrey is. That leaves him with no choice of his own. He must announce soon, very soon, or give up speaking of the next 20 years for at least four more.

—E.F.P.

'Black' not descriptive

I do not care what Andy Frederick believes people of African descent should be called. The whole idea is based on something called self-determination.

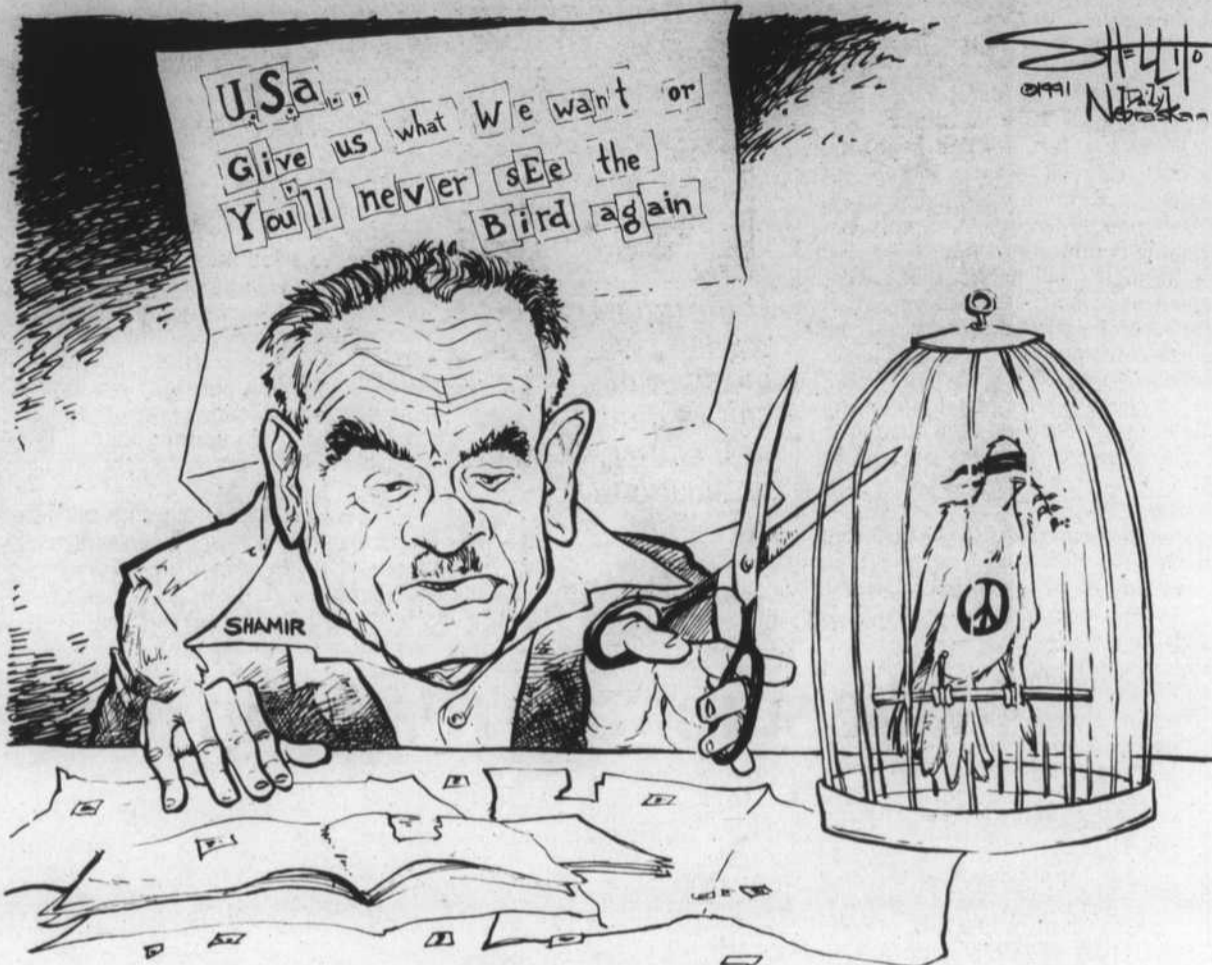
All the terms that have been used to describe people of African descent have been placed on us by other ethnic groups. None of them describe our continental origin. They all describe us in terms of skin color, hair color, hairstyle or according to genetic features.

For the first time, many "blacks" are beginning to realize and appreciate their connection to the African continent just as Asians, Italians and other ethnic groups have done for years. I believe it is this pride in Mother Africa that has many people afraid. Imagine what would happen to the "black" race if we suddenly started recognizing that we have a rich history, that we are capable of ruling empires, discovering medical

philosophy — in case you doubt this, check your local library under the name "Imhotep" — and building pyramids that leave historians astounded to this day.

Your comparison of someone changing their name from "Barbara" to "Bunny" to an entire nation of people changing their name from black to African-American is a complete and utter insult. Furthermore, your statement about there being too many types of Americans shows your complete intolerance for diversity. Wake up. If you plan to live in this country over the next 10 years, you will find yourself surrounded and outnumbered by all types of Americans. As my grandmother would say, "Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

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GARY LONGSINE

Money not education solution

Education 2000 indeed. Our education president leads the cheer, as though the salvation of our country required only that we get psyched about public schools.

President Bush gets up before us, with his pale white legs sticking out from a pleated, two-color miniskirt and cheers, "Reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

Critics shout back from the stand, "So where does the money come from?"

That's a typical American response. The assumptions behind it show little understanding of the problem and a lack of visionary solutions: Public education is OK; if we simply do more of it our problems will be solved. Not.

The most blatant assumption is that public education, as organized today, is basically a good thing, that nothing is wrong with our schools that can't be fixed with an enema of tax dollars and a little tinkering.

Proposals for revamping public education are a cornucopia of the mundane. "Let's pay teachers more so they're motivated to teach better." Will a 5 percent raise result in 5 percent more literacy, 5 percent less crime, 5 percent fewer teen pregnancies? If we double teacher pay, will these problems disappear?

Higher pay won't attract better teachers. A rocket scientist chooses against teaching because classrooms have 25 kids and no rockets, not because of higher pay in rocket labs.

In any case, we shouldn't expect schools to solve all of our society's problems directly.

If we give teachers one mission, to teach people how to think rationally and critically, other benefits will follow. But if we simply add to the list of dogmatic values that they must impose, their job will be increasingly difficult, and new problems will spring up to replace the old ones.

Other proposals include a longer school day and abolishing summer vacation. I shudder at the thought.

If I had been forced into a longer school day and an endless school year, I might have committed suicide. Or worse, I might have been hammered into a blissfully ignorant average voter.



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I wouldn't have had enough time to educate myself in the variety of subjects and thoughts never touched on in school. I would not have been prepared for college. I would not have been prepared for life.

What will happen with the renewed interest in education? Marginal changes made to the education inputs will result, at best, in marginal changes in the education outputs. A little more money might mean a few fewer kids who can't read, a few fewer gun-wielding students and slightly higher SAT scores.

But would a great deal more money yield dramatic results? An end to illiteracy? Less crime and poverty? Greater social awareness?

Not on your life. The problem with education has little to do with how much money we spend per child.

Public education stifles the imagination. It discourages critical analysis. It abhors independent rational thought. It smothers artistic creativity. Education manufactures industrial zombies out of children.

Not all education, to be sure. Colleges exist to sweep up the waste

from the first educational process and turn it into something useful.

How does education produce negative cultural effects? In school, at the tender age of five, you and your peers were segregated. Not from the opposite sex, not from other races, mostly, and not from other religions, mostly. You were separated from adults.

For thousands of years children learned how to get along in their society by being with adults — parents, relatives and others. They learned how to communicate, how to behave and how to survive by hunting and gathering, farming, shepherding and cooperating.

Children today have very little interaction with adults. They don't learn how to interact with young adults, with middle-aged people or with senior citizens. The lack of experience with people outside their peer group means that young people come out of school with very little understanding of life as a process. They don't quite realize that someday they will be the old people whom young people make fun of and don't have time for.

At its core, school is primarily a baby-sitter. It is unnatural for children to get up in the morning, go into a building, sit for an hour, move for five minutes and sit for another hour all day long.

No wonder Americans are not in prime physical condition. We spend billions of dollars teaching children not to run, jump, play and, above all, not to explore the world around them. Then we have to spend more to teach them physical fitness of an industrial sort. Here's an hour, kid, now run, jump and get in shape.

What did we learn in kindergarten through 12th grade? We learned that we were not artists. We learned that we couldn't sing. We learned that math was hard. We learned that we could never make a living as writers.

What can we do? Public education probably will not change much, so do what you can to minimize its impact on you and your children. Fight for your summer vacation and educate yourself.

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