

## Congressional perks

### Bad checks shed light on other abuses

If the U.S. House and Senate met in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Administration Building, UNL would have a parking garage overnight.

The garage would have special, oversized stalls for limousines. And free gas pumps. No meters. No parking tickets.

Centennial Mall would become a private airfield. Private shuttles would whisk members of Congress from the Administration Building to the field so that the trip home to their constituents would be quicker.

The Lee and Helene Sapp Recreation Facility would be divided into the Lee Sapp Recreation Facility for the Senate and the Helene Sapp Recreation Facility for the House. Or, perhaps an entirely new recreation center would be built to accommodate both chambers' needs.

Then again, there is a budget crisis. Members of Congress might have to pass a bill before construction could begin.

Not to worry. There was little debate when they approved legislation for a pay raise.

Congressional perks range from petty (cheap cigarettes) to practical (checking out books from the Library of Congress) to practically illegal (fixed parking tickets in Washington for

House members).

Members receive free medical care, prescription drugs and the services of a Navy ambulance. They collect lucrative pensions, to which taxpayers contribute 50 cents for every dollar a member pays. Senators and representatives use separate, private health clubs.

About the only thing they aren't supposed to be able to do

is write bad checks. But it took just that, a report that members bounced more than 8,000 checks last year, to focus attention and outrage on the myriad of benefits they receive merely for being elected.

The checks were bounced at Congress members' private bank. Now, that bank will be shut down. Problem solved, right?

No. The bad checks have become a metaphor for Congress' other failings. They provide fodder for the obvious rhetorical question: If members of Congress can't balance their check-books, how can they manage a budget?

Beyond the issues of bad form and hypocrisy, however, the check-writing scandal and the focus on congressional perks shed light on other abuses of the system.

Some of the perks help senators and representatives get re-elected. Members can mass-mail press releases to their constituents, free of charge. They can tape themselves in action and broadcast the shows through television and radio stations in their home states.

At a time when the movement to limit congressional terms gains credibility and momentum, the least that could be enacted is a ban on these name-recognition-boosting benefits, which all but mark most voters' ballots.

The worst offense that the bad checks display, however, is a remarkable arrogance. The perks are both a cause and a symptom of that attitude.

—E.F.P.



Robert Borzekowski/DN



MICHAEL STOCK

## Weapons cuts pose problem

Last week, President Bush invited the Soviets to come in from the cold. The Cold War, that is.

Bush offered to release unilaterally all U.S. strategic bombers and part of the intercontinental ballistic missile force from their 24-hour alert responsibilities. He also nixed further development of mobile versions of the MX Peacekeeper and Midgetman ICBMs. The eventual elimination of all land-based multiple-warhead missiles and ground-based tactical nuclear weapons may have figured strongly in Bush's plan.

So does a strong political agenda. Bush has heard the theory that for every action, there is an equal reaction. He is counting on it.

The president urged the Soviets to "go down this road with us." Bush's agenda prefigures a specific Soviet response — first, the assertion of central government control over all Soviet tactical nuclear weapons and second, the elimination of mobile ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States.

The last time there was a reduction in nuclear arms for either country was Aug. 29, 1949 — the day the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb.

The stockpile has grown considerably since then.

Currently, the United States and the Soviet Union share almost 23,000 strategic warheads — 12,081 for us, 10,841 for them.

Bush, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian President Boris Yeltsin face a large task.

However, the biggest question is not how or when either side is going to ratify the already-signed START treaty, which will mark the beginning of arms reduction. The question is much more important and difficult:

What are we going to do with all those warheads?

Here are a couple of possibilities:

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Anonymous submissions will not



**Limiting the explosion of nuclear arms to special occasions such as presidential inaugurations and the Fourth of July promises to gain some spare change for the government as well as a light show bright enough to enjoy from your home. Even if you don't have windows.**

Some people suggest that inmates on death row be given more responsibility. They could be given the right to be locked into a bunker 50 feet below the ground in a lot of concrete dismantling the weapons and forging fine jewelry from them for commercial use.

Some members of the opposition to "living wills" could issue a statement concerning the warheads, advocating "one in every home. Make little salt and pepper shakers out of 'em — that'll make 'em think twice about thinking of death when they're still livin' . . . make 'em like french fries and eggs a whole lot less, too."

Sun worshipers such as George Hamilton could tout more constructive uses: "Beaches. Beaches made real cheap with a lot of sun and no lizards. Fences will keep the cockroaches out. Talk about civil engineering. I never liked L.A. anyway."

Limiting the explosion of nuclear arms to special occasions such as presidential inaugurations and the Fourth of July promises to gain some spare change for the government as well as a light show bright enough to enjoy from your home. Even if you don't have windows.

Nebraskans could still drive to Missouri for fireworks — but sneaking the goods back across the border would be a different problem from what it once was.

Several motion picture companies already have made serious inquiries concerning the private purchase of such fireworks, which would make their special effects budgets much smaller.

In the meantime, storage of the warheads doesn't seem to be a problem. In Nebraska alone there is plenty of room.

Check out the faculty parking lots any day of the week, at any time. What about the Centrum?

There always seems to be a seat on the Supreme Court that the Republicans are having problems filling. That might be an option, too.

This game of arms control feels a lot like playing hot potato. The United States doesn't want them. The Soviets don't want them.

Give them to someone who does. Saddam Hussein wants them. Give them to him. With 23,000 of the little buggers floating around, we've got more than enough to go around. The Middle East could use a little "peacekeeping."

Stock is a senior English major, a Daily Nebraskan A&E senior reporter and a columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Cats better equipped than kids for survival outdoors

While I sympathize with Andy Frederick's concern for his neighborhood felines ("Little problems need attention," DN, Oct. 7), I find his suggestion that cats remain indoors ludicrous. A cat may be less intelligent than the average 3-year-old, but no toddler with whom I am acquainted is outfitted with four sets of razor-sharp claws, jaws capable of reducing small herbivores to hamburger, a fur coat, the ability to land on all four feet

with little or no injury, night vision, ultra-sonic hearing, a hunter's instinct and lightning-fast reflexes. Most cats with whom I am acquainted, however, are, and to suggest that the two may even remotely be similarly capable of prowling the borough for squirrels at sundown seems preposterous.

Paul Souders  
junior  
English and German

## EDITORIAL POLICY

Shellito, cartoonist; Jeremy Fitzpatrick, senior reporter.

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