

Pump up the battery

Electric car initiative should be supported

Automakers and used car salesmen often tout their products as running "clean and quiet." Those terms, however, are relative. The cars may be clean and quiet compared to older, less efficient vehicles. But another type of vehicle, the electric car, beats any car lot's offering.

Last week, President Bush endorsed a cooperative project between the federal government and a consortium of U.S. automakers to develop batteries for such cars. The government will help finance the venture with \$260 million.

It seems wrong, somehow, to drive a car that plugs into a power socket rather than a pump. Since the invention of automobiles about a century ago, they have been propelled by gasoline and other fossil fuels.

Imagine the benefits, however; no harmful emissions, reduced smog and a decreased dependence on foreign oil.

Bush's move came, in part, as a response to a new California law that will require 10 percent of all cars sold in the state by the year 2003 to be battery powered. The measure is part of a comprehensive plan to fight pollution. It requires the use of equipment on cars sold later this decade to make them run cleaner.

The most striking part of the plan, however, is its forced initiative to developing batteries that are more efficient. The governors of nine Eastern states and the mayor of Washington, D.C., Tuesday followed California's lead by agreeing to call for similar standards.

Together, these actions could force U.S. automakers to change their stance on pollution-control measures. Detroit has balked at proposals to require greater fuel efficiency in conventional cars.

That idea should not be rejected in favor of only developing battery-operated cars. Recent progress on battery technology shows that if the car manufacturers take a can-do attitude, technological improvements follow. In this case, federal money and the California mandate act as the carrot and the stick.

Some problems must still be overcome before the electric car is an option for today's buyer.

The major disadvantage is range. Current models need to be recharged daily, making them impractical for long trips. For commuters, though, current battery capabilities may be sufficient.

On Wednesday, U.S. automakers said the California plan could work in other states, but that it would mean less varied and more expensive vehicles. Similarly, they have said mandated higher gas mileage standards would cause great expense.

However, the long-term costs of continued 100-percent reliance on fossil fuels for transportation are much greater.

The electric car initiative is a solid first step away from 100-percent reliance. Electric car researchers must continue to receive support from the government and automakers. A first step won't solve our energy problems. But it may point toward other ways of weaning us from the pump.

-E.F.P.



PAUL DOMEIER History too harsh on some

History can be quite harsh. Right now, history has a number of targets for anger far beyond the merits of their actions.

And I feel sorry for them.

For example, Christopher Columbus. For goodness sakes, he wasn't a genocidal maniac. He was lost.

Certainly his importance has been overplayed to the schoolchildren of this nation. But landing on a few islands doesn't convict him of genocide and tyranny for the entire Western Hemisphere.

He and the other exploiting colonists brought terrible germs over, but they didn't know what germs were.

Perhaps our grade-school misinformation on Columbus was just a test of our underdeveloped reasoning skills. Had we been smart, we would have known something was wrong when the teacher said, "He called the natives Indians because he thought he was in India."

Or it was a test of our future revisionist furor, to see whether we would get mad that the continents were named after Amerigo Vespucci.

I feel sorry for Blythe and Hoffman, the duo that converted styrene into polystyrene in 1845.

Polystyrene foam is Styrofoam. When Blythe and Hoffman came up with polystyrene, they must have been overjoyed at making this wonderful advancement in plastics.

Because of Styrofoam, we have had cheap picnicware, insulated food and thousands of protective peanuts for packaging.

How were Blythe and Hoffman supposed to know that making this plastic would eat away at the ozone layer?

Now Michael Stipe of R.E.M. and other well-meaning, mouth-foaming environmentalists are telling us that Styrofoam is Satan on earth.

I agree that Styrofoam needs to be phased out, but I would feel guilty undercutting the people who have made their livings from Styrofoam unaware of the ecological consequences.

The same goes for other traditional pollutants and the people who have depended on their production.



Perhaps our grade-school misinformation on Columbus was just a test of our underdeveloped reasoning skills. Had we been smart, we would have known something was wrong when the teacher said, "He called the natives Indians because he thought he was in India."

Detroit is bad enough now; imagine what will happen to that city when no one will buy an internal-combustion automobile.

I feel sorry for Stipe, too, but not because of any great error he's made. It's just pity for an idiot.

I also feel sorry for fans of the Atlanta Braves.

The fans inherited this name. The Atlanta National League baseball franchise has existed since the league was formed in 1876. The franchise has moved from Boston to Milwaukee and from Milwaukee to Atlanta, carrying the Braves tag along with it.

I don't buy the argument that "Red Stockings," the name of the other Boston team when the franchise was formed, is better for a baseball team than "Braves." Boston teams also have been nick-named the "Bostons" or

the "Beaneaters." I'll take "Braves" anyway.

If it's really that big a deal, change the name. I offer "Krauts" or "Huns" or some other tough-sounding German slur. This guy with German heritage won't care.

However, I'd like these sensitive groups to bring their complaints up before the team in question gets to the World Series or before the fans do some offensive chant. If the names are so unjust, they also should be unjust when the team is in last place and attendance is nil.

Braves fans, like Columbus, can't even claim to be originals. They've been condemned for doing a chant they copied from Florida State.

I feel sorry for Dan Quayle.

He's not as bright as we would expect a vice president to be, but he's done his job just fine. He's smart enough to be vice president.

The true complaint Americans have about him sounds quite silly: "I don't like Dan Quayle because I don't think he's smart enough to be president."

Most people aren't smart enough to be president, but no one else is criticized for it. Only Quayle gets abused.

It's President Bush's fault. If you're a Republican senator and the Republican nominee for president asks you to be his running mate, you don't say, "Well, sir, I would, but I don't think I'm intelligent enough." You say, "Yes, sir."

Quayle may be dumb compared to other politicians, but he was elected senator. No matter what, this means he's not dumb compared to the general public. He's probably smarter than four-fifths of the comedians who tell Dan Quayle jokes.

On the other hand, if Quayle gets cocky and decides to run for president someday, he'll lose my sympathy. A man has to know his limitations.

To err is human. To forgive apparently is not.

I'm going to look the other way on these offenses, though. These people need a friend.

Domeier is a senior news-editorial journalism major, the Daily Nebraskan copy desk chief and a columnist.

University should engage in self-examination on race

Joyce Ann Joyce's letter ("UNL basking in mediocrity," DN, Oct. 30) cannot and must not be dismissed as hysterical effluvia from an emotional, highly charged woman prone to delusions.

Despite the justifiable irateness evident in the tone of the letter, it should be an occasion for self-examination on the part of the officials of the various administrative units of the university, including the chancellor. Despite pronouncements about the university's commitment to providing a hospitable and supportive climate for its minority members, and despite such gestures as the Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Minorities, the experience Joyce wrote about indicates a persistent lack of sensitivity to the subtle forms racism can and does take, or worse, tolerance of or condonation of them. After all,

such commissions can be put to the sort of use to which recent presidents have put the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Joyce's experience is not isolated, and other minority faculty members have been subjected to even worse indignity and persecution. The actions of the grade appeals committees, in the English department and in the College of Arts and Sciences, are a regrettable and objectionable exercise of power: regrettable because they set a bad precedent and objectionable because I suspect that Joyce is correct in contending that few white full professors (perhaps even white associate professors) would receive the same sort of treatment from their supposedly collegial colleagues.

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Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit all material submitted.

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