

Outside eye

Spanier's cuts should be unbiased

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln committee last week passed the bucks — \$157,000 of them, to be exact — to new Chancellor Graham Spanier.

That's how much money Spanier must come up with to comply with this year's portion of the Nebraska Legislature's required budget cut for UNL.

The committee was charged with recommending cuts in the budget to meet a 2 percent reduction this year. Instead, it recommended cuts that total about 1.88 percent, leaving the rest to Spanier's discretion.

The committee spared two academic departments that had been threatened in the budget deliberation. While the speech communications and classics departments now can breathe a little easier, there is no guarantee that the chancellor or the NU regents won't decide to reinstate those cuts.

If Spanier or the regents make that choice, they will become the bad guys. Thus, the Academic Planning Committee members, who are scheduled to send final recommendations to the chancellor by next week, may have voted to spare their own heads as well as the two departments.

But in falling short of 2 percent, the committee's work is incomplete. While that may be an inefficient, irresponsible way to handle the



process, the results may be advantageous.

Spanier is a newcomer to UNL. He obviously doesn't know as much about the intricacies of the university as the committee's collective membership, but he should be able to oversee the process with a clear, unbiased eye.

When businesses seek to increase efficiency, they often hire outside analysts to study the operation and recommend improvements. The UNL budget reductions must be seen in the same light. Spanier now becomes the outside auditor.

We hope he rejects some of the flawed thinking that has led to the current budget stalemate.

Throughout the process, administrators, committee members and other interested parties have cited cost-efficiency ratios and other supposed measures of a program's value, as if academic excellence can be charted on a graph.

Such thinking is inevitable when programs and jobs are under fire. But it is not conducive to an intellectual climate.

The committee chose to duck the fire by leaving Spanier with a portion of the cuts. Apparently, the university could not come up with cuts from within. Now it remains for the new chancellor — still a virtual outsider to the politics of UNL — to finish the first stage of the process.

—E.F.P.

Professor inspiring to women

I'd like to comment on your front-page article on Professor Kathy Keeler ("Professor at home on the range," DN, Nov. 25). Although your article is a nice tribute to Keeler, I think you may need a new bloodhound on staff. Did you know that just last week, Keeler was appointed to full professor in the School of Biological Sciences. She is the first female full professor for a school that was founded 13 years ago. She is a groundbreaker in a system, science academia, that lags behind society's progressiveness. The time has come that we address

the deficiency of women in science academia. Women in research and teaching of hard sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics not only have a significant contribution to make but should be welcomed into these departments both across the country and at UNL. Thank you, Dr. Keeler, for being an inspiration to women who love and pursue the teaching of science in higher education.

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JAMES ZANK

Christmas drowning in greed

Christmas stinks. Every year the season creeps up on me. I'm always lulled into a sort of seasonal complacency. I see Thanksgiving coming for weeks but fail to see the approach of the most hypocritical holiday of the year.

Some people are horrified by my hatred of Christmas, but they fail to understand why I've developed this opinion.

There are many reasons, but none so evident as the sickening level of greed this holiday brings out in people.

I used to be just as prone to this as anyone else. After all, I grew up with the white, middle-class, euphoric vision of Christmas bombarding me from all directions.

Christmas has become a holiday for moving merchandise. This has led many people in our society to become berserk consumers of goods from the day after Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve.

Children are taught to think about Christmas in materialistic ways. They write Santa to tell him what they want him to bring, or construct a list so that Grandma knows what to buy.

It all seems to be about how much loot we can get. I grow tired of endless television ads for credit cards, flashing countless numbers of expensive gifts across the screen.

Hundreds of no-name actors and actresses pose with lead-crystal goblets, pouring innumerable glasses of overly expensive champagne to celebrate the holidays.

I struggled to write a Christmas list for my sister a couple of weeks ago, and it was one of the most difficult things for me to write.

Of the things I want, most can't be bought and wrapped in gaudy paper and jammed under a dying evergreen tree. My list became filled with many items that would just be OK to have, but nothing essential to my existence or happiness.

America's addiction to material wealth has caused many of the problems that we have to face the other 364 days of the year. As more and more Americans are faced with economic hardship, it becomes harder to justify people's wastefulness.

What is the point of Christmas? Its meaning, if it ever had one, has been ignored for so long that it has become



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habitual to celebrate it.

If we are going to continue to celebrate this, let's come up with a new holiday and just have one day when we can celebrate our greed properly. Let's call it Federal Deficit Day. We can all spend the day trying to gain as much material wealth as possible.

Instead of writing letters to Santa, children could write to Ronald Reagan. We'd still have the same customary problem of whether children have figured out whether he's real. Why should children be any different from their parents?

Some people undoubtedly still claim to understand the "true" meaning of Christmas.

What that really means, I'm not sure. Christmas, of course, is not the actual date on which Jesus Christ was born, but rather, the most convenient pagan holiday that early Christians could find to assign to this celebration.

The underlying theme of Christmas — "Peace on Earth, goodwill toward man" — is not a bad notion, but unfortunately it is an ideal that humanity seems incapable of achieving.

Looking back on the last couple of Christmases, peace on earth has been the last thing on most people's minds.

Christmas 1989 brought the crisis in Panama and the U.S. involvement there. I remember vividly all the news coverage including interviews with mothers of service people who were upset that this invasion had to happen during the Christmas holiday. It was hard for American families to be separated by military action.

I somehow think it may have been a bit worse for the Panamanians, who had to deal with thousands of civilian casualties.

Of course, last year we had the warm-up for the Persian Gulf war. Since the Bush administration came into office, it would seem that watching the president in his macho war-mongering posture is a part of every red-blooded American's holiday celebration.

Bush seems to be very traditional. Tradition is what families and warfare are all about. As we enter the holiday season, Bush has been making his list and checking it twice. As he shops for another war for the holidays, he's finding out who has been naughty or nice. He certainly has a wide selection of potential wars to choose from.

There are any number of ways to exploit the powder keg of the Middle East, Libya being a country we haven't waged war with in a while. Then, of course, there is North Korea. Everybody seems to be nearing nuclear capacity these days.

In these lean economic times, though, Bush probably sees the need to cut back on the frills this Christmas. Wars are very expensive, and this year money is really tight. Besides, the cost of another war might include losing the next election.

Perhaps I'm a bit too harsh on Christmas. It really does have some redeeming qualities. It is a time for people to come together with loved ones. This Christmas, I hope, people can pause to reflect on what they are celebrating and take some time to examine just how far from these ideals our country and our species are.

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