

Promises, promises

Environment bill yet another election ploy

In yet another timely act, the Bush administration has endorsed a bill that would support the development of energy alternatives to ease America's dependence on foreign oil.

The so-called "made-in-America" bill would, among other things, make it easier for companies to build nuclear power plants and natural gas pipelines.

Surprisingly, the bill lacks an element Bush has lobbied heavily for: the lifting of restrictions on oil drilling in an Alaskan wildlife refuge.

In spite of the missing element, Energy Secretary James Watkins said, "This is a tremendously powerful bill."

Well, we wouldn't go that far.

In fact, one of the most "powerful" sections of the bill could signal a compromise in safety standards at nuclear power plants.

The licensing process for atomic power plants would be streamlined by eliminating the need to obtain both a construction and an operating permit. Nuclear watchdog groups have said the move would compromise safety. Of course, the nuclear industry and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission disagree.

But the bill does have some sound sections. One would require more energy-efficient light bulbs. Another would call for 4 million more alternative fuel vehicles by 2000.

Environmentalists say the bill is shaky, at best. It still depends too much on fossil fuels and nuclear energy, while making modest gains in energy efficiency.

From Bush's standpoint, the "made-in-America" bill is made to order. It's a plan that everyone can live with. The Senate passed the bill 94-4. The House of Representatives should pass a similar bill without much trouble.

In a year in which Bush is sure to draw fire for backing down on election-year environmental plans of the past, he should support all kinds of ecologically minded bills. But his lobbying against wildlife protection proves he won't support just any environmental plan.

It also proves that Bush's support of this bill should be taken at face value. It is nothing more than another timely ploy in his bid for re-election.

'Daytime home' idea misguided

I am writing this letter to give readers an idea of an "average" resident's view of the proposal to give commuter students a daytime home ("UNL to offer commuters daytime home," DN, Feb. 18). This is an opinion that I share with most of the fellow-residents to whom I have spoken.

My major problem with the new proposal is that Vice Chancellor Griesen did not attempt to get input from residents. Through my research I learned that he passed the idea by the Residence Hall Association and told it of his plan. I also learned that RHA is adamantly opposed to the idea. I think further research could have been done by Vice Chancellor Griesen to get an idea of how residents would feel about such a proposal. This is just another case of an administrator ignoring student input and deciding what is best for students.

The article mentions that Griesen "met with residence hall directors, complex directors and student assistants" to decide if the plan was worth a try. Through my discussion with some student assistants I learned that Dr. Griesen simply informed them of the plan. Contrary to the article, there was no discussion as to whether the plan should be implemented. Dr. Griesen already had made that decision. He was met with opposition, but that didn't change anything.

Dr. Griesen thinks this plan will promote unity between residents and commuters. Quite the contrary, these students will be strangers on the floors. Their major time spent in the building will be during the daytime hours. Most of the friendships on a floor are built late at night. Since the com-

muter students won't be on the floor at this time, they will remain outsiders on the floor. The presence of strangers will damage the openness and community atmosphere on the floor. With the enactment of this proposal, the residence halls will cease to be a home and become no more than a motel or a locker room. I do not want to live in a locker room.

For just \$480 a semester these students are going to reap the same benefits for which I have to pay, at minimum, over \$1,300 a semester. They will have 24-hour access, a desk, a shower, five meals per week (I get 13), and numerous other conveniences that make the residence halls special and worth \$1,300 a semester. While they are not supposed to sleep here, removing the beds from the rooms will not stop them from doing so. What this plan boils down to is that they will be getting a very cheap residence hall room.

This plan must sound great to those commuter students interested. It should, they are getting so much for so little. For what they are saving by paying so little for a room, they will lose by incurring the wrath of those residents who are paying their fair share. Simply put, they will be unwelcome strangers in our community.

Vice Chancellor Griesen asked the opinion of everyone BUT the residents before acting on his proposal. I believe he will find this is a major mistake. There are better ways to raise revenues than inviting unwelcome guests into our home.

Heath Kramer
sophomore
broadcasting

LETTER POLICY

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MARK FAHLESON

Postal Service incompetent

Proud sponsors of the 1992 Olympic Games.

Such is the label carried by the likes of Coca-Cola, Visa, United Airlines, McDonald's and M&M Mars.

All are leaders in their respective industries, epitomizing the American ideals of diligence, hard work and success in the free market. All have contributed to the Olympic effort to express their yearning for good, old-fashioned, bare-knuckle competition. But, like the famed Sesame Street game, one of these sponsors is not like the others.

The United States Postal Service. Believe it or not, our Postal Service, that bloated bureaucratic behemoth, is attempting to cast itself as just another free-market competitor gleaming in Olympic pride.

In an unprecedented move, the Postal Service became the first governmental agency to throw its hat into the Olympic ring as an official sponsor. For a mere \$122 million, the Postal Service is going for the gold, displaying the famed rings on postal trucks, stamps, mailboxes and uniforms.

As Assistant Postmaster General Deborah Bowker put it, the service hopes its sponsorship will "change the way people think of us."

Sorry, but it will take something more than a fancy Olympic public relations campaign and syrupy rhetorical glib to overcome the Postal Service's abysmal record of service and inefficiency.

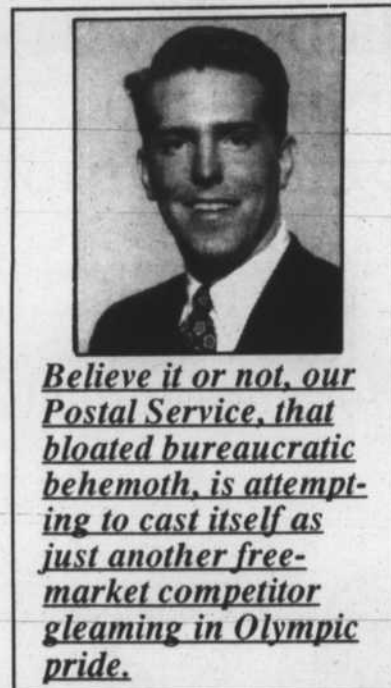
The Postal Service is the quintessential example of governmental incompetence and bureaucratic bungling. Created in 1971 to replace the now-defunct U.S. Post Office Department, the service was established as a quasi-private enterprise to unite the country through universal service and uniform postal rates.

To accomplish this lofty goal, the Postal Service was granted monopoly power over all first-class mail service via federal law.

Although the service is shielded from free-market forces in first-class mail delivery, this governmental agency operates in a world of make-believe competition, calling itself a private enterprise while refusing to sever its umbilical cord to the public womb.

Because no private sector alternatives to the Postal Service are available for first-class mail, consumers are forced to pay whatever this overweight monopoly charges, regardless of its inept service. And with each passing year, the prices go up as the quality of service goes down.

The average first-class letter now



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takes 22 percent longer to reach its destination than it did in 1969, according to James Bovard, a policy analyst for the Cato Institute.

In 1764, the goal of delivery between Philadelphia and New York was two days. Today it often takes the same amount of time for mail to go from one New York address to another.

Last month, USA Today, the newspaper of scholars, conducted a test of the Postal Service's efficiency. After mailing 1,000 letters in all 50 states, the newspaper found that one of every four letters arrived late.

Even worse, one-fifth of the late letters were severely late, often three days or more past the Postal Service's delivery guarantee. One month after the test was completed, 10 letters were still missing.

What used to be a motto of "neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night" will stop the mail, has given way to "We'll see."

Sometimes it takes nothing more than leaves to stop our once impervious postmen. The Washington Times reported that the post office in Altadena, Calif., informed one disabled woman that it would no longer deliver her mail until she picked up the leaves on the parkway outside of her home. Apparently postal officials feared that the leaves would make the road too slippery, thereby endangering postal carriers.

The Postal Service is not oblivious to its poor record. The Postal Rate Commission concluded that its productivity "peaked in 1978 . . . and generally has declined with some fluctuations since that time."

Productivity is so bad that the service even refused a \$10,000 challenge from economist Walter Williams that he could beat a letter mailed from Washington, D.C., to New York on his bicycle.

The Postal Service's inefficiency is not caused by lack of funding. As its service record has deteriorated, its prices have soared.

Since 1970, the price of a first-class stamp has jumped from six cents to 29 cents. Despite these rate hikes and more than \$1 billion in annual taxpayer subsidies, the service is in the red almost every year.

One of the reasons for Postal Service inefficiency is its inextricable ties to unionized labor.

The Postal Service is the largest civilian employer in the country, with most of its employees belonging to the powerful American Postal Workers Union. Thanks to the bargaining power of the union, the average postal worker earns more than \$40,000 annually. Recent attempts to cut costs by contracting out remedial tasks have been scuttled by the union.

Don't expect politicians to challenge the union's power anytime soon. The postal union contributes more than \$1 million annually to congressional campaigns.

Another explanation for Postal Service inefficiency is the archaic policy of charging the same rate no matter what the destination is. Regardless of whether I am sending a letter across the street or across the country, the rate is the same. This can lead to absurd results.

The Washington Post reported that an Alaskan freight company recently found it cheaper to mail 10,000 concrete blocks and bags of cement from Anchorage to Wainwright, Alaska, some 700 miles away, than to haul them itself.

The freight company paid only \$34,000 in postage. It cost the Postal Service \$232,000 to deliver. And we citizens of the lower 48 states picked up the difference through overpriced postage.

The federal government has only one way to resurrect the Postal Service's reputation as a lazy, inefficient sloth.

Sell it. Certainly an entity such as United Parcel Service or Federal Express could make first-class mail efficient and dependable. If you doubt this, ask yourself when was the last time you saw a Postal Service employee running around to deliver packages like a typical Type-A personality employed by UPS.

Fahleson is a third year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.