

Bye bye Big Bird?

Senators should keep funding public TV

The debate over federal funding of art projects through the National Endowment for the Arts has produced an unlikely offspring: the "Sesame Street" controversy.

Last week conservative senators brought up their concerns over funding of the Public Broadcasting System. Amazingly enough, one of the programs they targeted for complete removal of funding was the perennial childhood favorite "Sesame Street."

Apparently, income generated from products that feature the "Sesame Street" characters has led some senators to think the show's producing agency, The Children's Television Workshop, is overfunded.

Hardly. In fact, Ellen Morgenstern, a spokeswoman for Children's Television Workshop, said "Sesame Street" was near extinction from a lack of money 10 years ago. That led the workshop to allow the licensing of some characters for commercial products to keep the show alive.

Republican Leader Bob Dole of Kansas and Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., are leading the charge against PBS. The talk is likely to heat up this week, if debate begins on a bill to authorize the existence of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The corporation handles funding for PBS, National Public Radio and local public radio and television stations.

Along with criticizing "Sesame Street," the conservative senators last week brought up funding for "Tongues Untied," which was offered through PBS programming last year. The film drew criticism and praise for its portrayal of the lives of African-American gay men.

While "Tongues Untied" was offered to PBS affiliates nationwide, many local program directors, including the director in Lincoln, decided not to show the program because of its controversial nature. The film included some profanity and nudity.

But whether the senators agree with such programming is not the issue. Instead, the issue is simply the survival of public broadcasting as we know it.

While the senators said they did not want to destroy public broadcasting, they do want to examine its funding and, consequently, remove portions they deem unacceptable. That would mark a change from the hands-off relationship with government PBS now has.

Part of the success of public broadcasting is that it is not government-controlled. PBS receives 17 percent of its money from tax dollars, but that funding comes without restriction. Most of the rest of PBS money comes from private donations.

Its standards for programming are controlled locally, just as legal standards of obscenity are determined by local tastes. Yet PBS doesn't rely entirely on advertising or corporate sponsorship for programming, as do private networks.

For all intents and purposes, PBS is the most satisfactory of television worlds. It has the freedom to operate without commercial restraints yet does not rely on government control.

The overbearing NEA debate must remain within its own boundaries.

Instead of messing with a good system, senators should leave "Sesame Street" to the real children.

Resignation story one-sided

We are writing in response to the article regarding the resignation of women's swim coach Ray Huppert ("Controversy not only reason for resignation, NU coach says," DN, March 5). We feel the article was biased and failed to show both sides of the controversy by only interviewing one member of the swim team. We feel someone of Thomas Clouse's position (as senior editor) should know how to represent both sides of an argument and present a more balanced article. Michelle Butcher's comments do not reflect the views of the entire women's swim team. We, as members of the swim team, respect Ray's ability as a coach, and credit him for building such a strong pro-

gram over the past 17 years. It is now important that our team moves on and looks toward the future.

Kelly Christensen
sophomore
international business

Kristie Klein
freshman
undeclared

Julie Riegal
sophomore
business administration

Editor's note: The reporter attempted to contact other swimmers, but they were unavailable for comment.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Spring 1992 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Its members are: Jana Pedersen, editor; Alan Phelps, opinion page editor; Kara Wells, managing editor; Roger Price, wire editor; Wendy Navratil, copy desk chief; Brian Shellito, cartoonist; Jeremy Fitzpatrick, senior reporter.

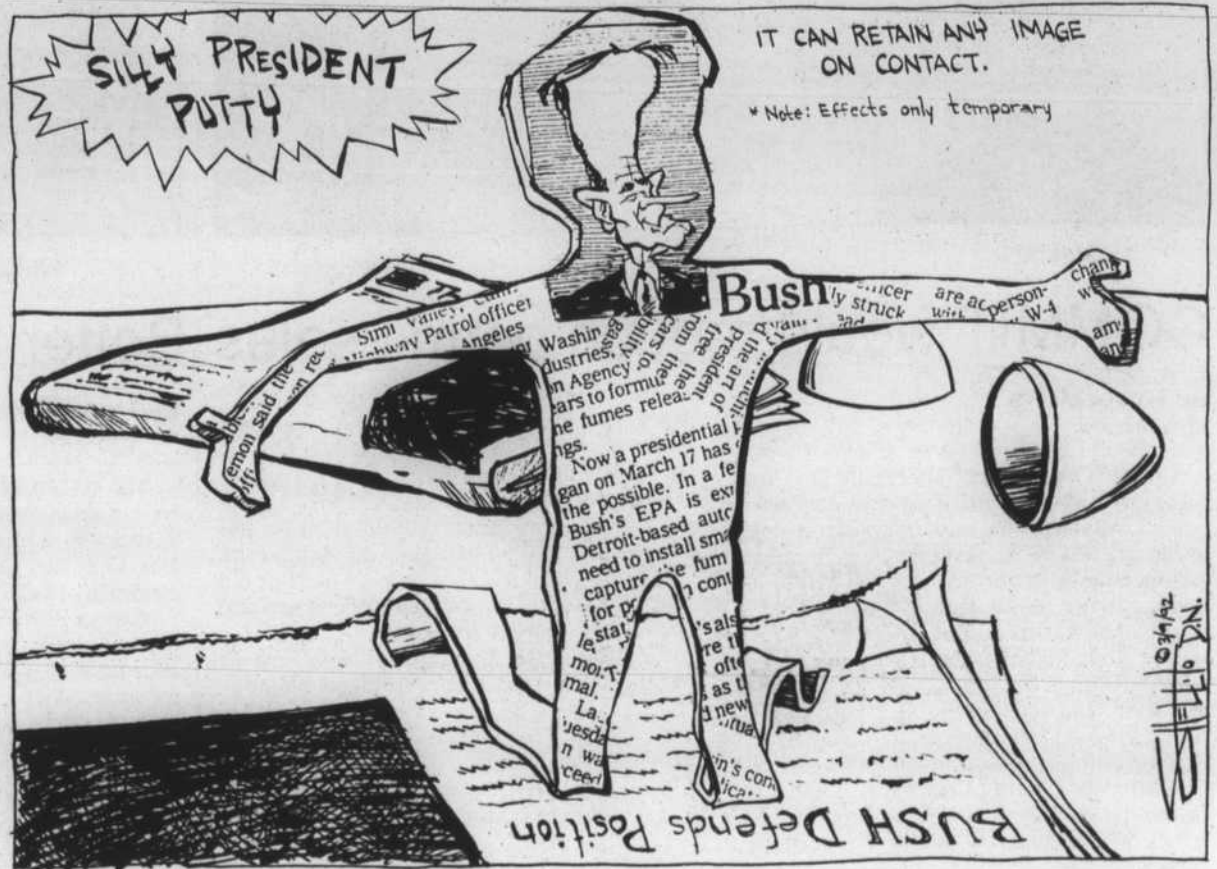
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According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.



ALAN PHELPS

Mutation no answer for crime

On Friday, a judge in Houston approved a child molester's request to be surgically castrated to avoid a prison sentence on the charge of raping a 13-year-old girl last year.

What at first seems like a simple use of the ancient eye-for-an-eye punishment sets up many moral questions about our responsibilities to the criminally insane.

While it is true that the American justice system should reform criminals rather than simply incarcerate them, whether we should mutilate them in the process is another matter.

State District Judge Mike McSpadden approved the unusual request from Steven Allen Butler, 28, who brought up the topic after reading about McSpadden's support of castration for some sex offenders.

Apparently, the arrangement also will spare the girl from testifying against Butler at a trial.

Butler will be on probation for 10 years after the operation. If he doesn't get into any trouble during that time, the charges against him will be dropped.

McSpadden said the procedure must be surgical rather than chemical, so it will be irreversible.

"I would insist upon surgical . . . because (with) the chemical, after the 10 years on probation, I would have no control on him and I could not guarantee that the injections would be given after that time," McSpadden said.

Butler will undergo an orchiectomy, or the removal of both testicles, which produce the male hormone testosterone. While castration does not necessarily eliminate a man's ability to have an erection, it does greatly diminish the sexual drive.

The decision immediately was called barbaric by critics. Philip Reilly, who has written a book on the history of involuntary sterilization of the United States, brought up an obvious point:

"Would you allow an 18-year-old boy who stole a car three times to say, 'Cut my hands off so I won't do it again?'"

Reilly is not considering, however, that the boy's hands did not cause him to steal cars but only helped him to break the law. In Butler's case, his sexual overdrive might have caused him to rape a girl.

But whether surgery will help Butler is debatable. It could be argued that a powerful sex drive doesn't necessarily cause a person to rape little girls. There are a lot of guys out there with



The crux of this question is how far our government should be allowed to go in rehabilitating those members of society who have stepped beyond the rules we have set.

mighty powerful sex drives.

In all probability, part of what makes Butler a criminal in our society is in his head. Rape is not sex, it is violence. Cutting off an the offensive body part of a criminal does not seem like the work of an advanced culture.

The fact is, we don't know for sure that this procedure will really help Butler at all, aside from getting him out of jail.

It is doubtful that the judge is an expert of what makes Steven Butler tick. Before Butler is permanently altered, he should be studied by qualified psychologists. Perhaps what Butler and those like him really need is a mix of psychological and chemical treatment.

However, in dealing with moral questions, it is necessary to think about the extremes, even if they seem a bit outlandish.

When thinking of extreme examples, it is difficult to rule out surgery as a device to reform criminals entirely. If a man had, say, a tumor in his head that caused him to become insane and fire a gun into a crowd of people, it could be argued that he should be forced to undergo the surgery that would cure him, if doctors were convinced of the procedure's rehabilitating effects.

However, this is a very scary power to give to the government — the forced lobotomies on some mental patients of the 1950s come to mind,

for instance.

Forced drug injections by the authorities don't seem a whole lot better than forced surgery. While some would argue that drugs are, at least, reversible, that is not the case if the government doesn't allow a person to discontinue treatment.

The crux of this question is how far our government should be allowed to go in rehabilitating those members of society who have stepped beyond the rules we have set. Although examples exist in history and today of both chemical and surgical treatments imposed on members of society against their will, is it morally right?

Some criminals are born criminals because they have something physically wrong with them, such as chemical imbalances. Our bodies are incredibly sensitive to minute changes in the chemicals that flow through our veins. To make some criminals "normal," it is necessary to physically change them, either through drugs or surgery.

It would obviously be a great mistake to let society define what is normal and then allow it to remake those who don't fall into its guidelines. But as we learn more and more about the human body, as we realize what we can do through various treatments, we must face many difficult questions.

The case of Steven Butler is not so difficult in itself. The justice system has gone too far. Butler's testicles were not the only reason he did what he did, and condoning this type of revenge will not help him or anyone.

The decision is repugnant and should not stand. A person who is demonstrably insane should not be allowed to cut off parts of his body to avoid other punishment.

The message that this case sends to the rest of the nation is that rapists are rapists solely because of their testicles. And that is simply wrong.

The other, more fundamental questions the case asks when law and medicine mix are almost impossible to answer. While there are extreme arguments for both sides, medical treatment could be an option for dealing with some cases.

But judges shouldn't make these decisions lightly, and certainly not without hearing testimony from qualified experts. A man volunteering to be castrated is not a shining example of American justice at work.

Phelps is a sophomore news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan opinion page editor and a columnist.