

## Pump politics

### Maryland law to ease foreign oil need

One small state is taking big steps to reduce its demand for foreign oil.

Teeny-tiny Maryland recently enacted a law that places an extra tax on low-gas-mileage cars and offers tax credit on cars that get good gas mileage.

The law requires owners of cars getting less than 27 miles per gallon to pay an additional \$100 in titling tax. Cars that stretch more than 34 miles out of each gallon earn their owners a \$50 tax break.

Maryland is believed to be the first state to take such action. By penalizing cars that use more gasoline, supporters of the gas-guzzler tax said the law not only would reduce American dependence on foreign oil, but also would clean the environment.

Another section of the law raises the state's gasoline tax by a nickel a gallon to finance transportation projects. The tax could raise as much as \$20 million a year for mass transportation.

Seeing a state take active steps toward reducing oil consumption is encouraging, but the Maryland plan does have some sticky points.

Owners of large, gas-guzzling cars say they should not have to give them up. More fuel-efficient cars are not as safe, they say, because they generally are smaller.

The plan also could wind up hurting poorer citizens of Maryland who cannot afford higher gasoline prices and smaller, newer cars. These people may have no choice but to drive an old gas-guzzler.

Raising the cost of gasoline would pinch the poor more than the wealthy, but it also would encourage the use of mass transit, which benefits society as a whole.

And the \$100 tax only applies when the car is sold, which encourages people buying cars, both new and used, to look for ones with good gas mileage. The tax does not affect people who already own gas-guzzlers.

This change in demand could force the hand of manufacturers who have been reluctant to increase their gas-mileage standards. If demand for fuel-efficient cars increases, car makers would have no choice but to respond to that demand.

While it may be just one small step toward reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil, the Maryland plan at least is a step in the right direction.



LISA PYTLIK

## Convocation misdirects praise

Call me Judas. For I have betrayed my peers.

Call me Peter. For I have denied the truth.

Call me Thomas. For I will doubt hope for the future until I see it fully realized.

Last week, I betrayed a significant part of the UNL population by participating in UNL's all-university Honors Convocation. I hadn't planned to take part in it. In fact, I felt an ambiguous ambivalence about the whole idea of being honored. But after visiting my parents the Calm Sunday before convocation and finding that they wanted to go, I agreed to go as well.

So I dutifully contacted the appropriate UNL officials and arranged to take part in their elaborate scheme for convocation. In exchange, they promised to pay me in honors and recognition.

My first task, the officials informed me, was to make a Mandatory Thursday journey to the bookstore and pick up the required attire for the event: a cap and gown. At the bookstore I received the first of my honorary rewards: a waiver of the gown rental fee and a free cap and tassel to keep. I was also told that if I was planning to graduate in May, I could keep the gown until then.

"Why would I get to use a gown free while others have to pay?" I wondered briefly — but only briefly. I found that I felt less uneasy about the whole honor and privilege ordeal when I simply did not think about it.

Eventually, however, I had to think about it. The convocation took place on the afternoon of the 10th, ruining a perfectly Good Friday.

I went, as I had been instructed, to join my parents and colleagues for a Last Snack before the convocation. As I stood there breaking cookies and drinking fruit beverages with them, I again felt an uneasy gnawing at my conscience.

"I'm doing it for my family," I rationalized. But the uneasiness did not go away. It remained with me right up until I performed my contracted task.

My duty was to approach a certain man and single him out from the rest of the people with whom he stood and greet him with a handshake. It hardly seemed like an evil thing to do, and it certainly was not illegal.

So I did it. I extended my hand in greeting. He did not resist but extended his own arm, clothed in a



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purple robe, and gripped my hand firmly. At the same time, he placed my reward in my other hand.

It was a certificate of honor enclosed in a folder the color of blood. It was at that moment that I understood the source of the ambivalence I had been feeling and saw myself for what I really was: a traitor.

I hadn't betrayed the man whose hand I shook, but I did betray countless UNL students by accepting an unjust reward and aiding in the propagation of false values.

The purpose of the honor I received seemed to be to recognize and reward hard work and excellent scholarship. In reality, however, they were rewarding me for genetics, luck and obsessive-compulsiveness.

"Was it easy for you?" an official had asked me as we waited for the proceedings to begin. Like a modern-day Peter, I denied that it was.

"No," I said. "No. Not really."

But school WAS much easier for me than for many people. I happen to be fortunate enough not to have any genetic or accidental disabilities. Some of my neighbors, however, cannot grasp a pencil to take notes in class, see to read their assignments or talk to ask the professor questions as they arise.

If a school wants to honor and recognize hard work, it should honor these people. They must work at least three times as hard as I do to accomplish equal goals.

I also was born with a society-

approved skin color and brain structure. Because I am white, I am not distracted from my studies very often by either overt or covert prejudiced attacks from others, and I am sure my grades reflect this.

I also have been fortunate enough to have a brain that can understand things such as mathematics fairly easily. It is interesting that I have received far more honors for this little genetic novelty of my brain than for all the work I've put into my major fields of interest — art and psychology.

If a school wants to recognize excellent scholarship, it should be honoring people like the mothers who have learned the value of their children and decide to accept lower grades in order to create more time for them. These mothers are much better scholars than people who neglect everything around themselves except for the schoolwork with which they are obsessed.

Basing an honors convocation on grades may seem practical, but it neglects the majority of UNL's finest students and purports twisted values. It falsely creates the illusion that grade points are more important than ethics or healthy balance in life.

Like the biblical disciple Thomas, I doubt that injustices such as these will be remedied in the near future. I do not expect to see an honors convocation that recognizes the merits or ethical achievements of people with seemingly mediocre grades any more than I expect to see people honored at the rec center for developing and maintaining a healthy layer of fat that, as is usually the case, does not equal society's idea of the ideal.

If everyone were to stop and take a look at and name what they were really valuing by their actions, perhaps drastic changes would occur in society. For example, maybe people would start donating as much money to help the homeless and hungry as they donate to their local diet or exercise club.

But it will take longer than three days, years, decades or even centuries perhaps for our society to resurrect itself from the destruction caused by such illusory values. Until then, we need to search for the actions that ignorantly promote injustice, call them by their true names and change them.

Pytlík is a senior art and psychology major and a Daily Nebraskan staff artist and columnist.

## Rationale on athletics peculiar

On a number of occasions, I've read letters in the Daily Nebraskan questioning financial outlays connected with the Athletic Department only to find an editorial footnote at the end of the letter assuring readers that the Athletic Department finances these expenditures through ticket sales, etc., and they do not impact the program budgets of the university at large.

It was with some interest that I noted in a summation of regent action taken last weekend and reported in Monday's Daily Nebraskan that a bid in excess of \$800,000 had been approved for turf replacement at Memorial Stadium and another approaching \$125,000 had been approved for roof work at the Devaney Center. These approvals followed another that raised the University Program and Facilities Fees almost \$10 for UNL students. Hmmm.

A weekend article in the Lincoln Journal-Star summarized the lamentable state of deferred maintenance in other university facilities and one continually finds such things as as-

bestos removal from academic buildings or greenhouse renovation being delayed or pushed farther and farther down various lists of priorities.

While I'm obviously far from clued-in insofar as budget mysteries are concerned, I do find it curious that a football team can be flown to Japan or that a retiring athletic director will be kept on a consultancy fee exceeding \$90,000 annually. I'm also aware that the Athletic Department laments its \$1.8 million deficit but seems to be subject to no administrative, regent or legislative checks. Ticket prices (along with the aforementioned fees) are going up and student attendance is going down.

Would that action on the improvement of academic facilities, (yet another) peer group and other items of business seemingly more central to UNL's role and mission be taken with the same dispatch!

James Hejdkuk  
associate professor  
music

## LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others.

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

Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. Whether material should run as a letter or guest opinion is left to the editor's discretion.

## 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.

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