

**JON BRUNING**

# Voters face congressional choice

**O**n Nov. 3 voters in Nebraska's 1st Congressional District will choose between 14-year incumbent Doug Bereuter and his challenger, Lincoln businessman Gerry Finnegan.

The 1st District contest gives voters at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln a clear choice. One candidate is a well-financed seven-term career politician. The other is a down-to-earth person leading a grass-roots campaign for Nebraskans.

The two candidates' financial statements as of June 30 provide an interesting comparison. Bereuter, who accepts money from numerous banking political action committees, reported nearly \$88,000 in his war chest. In contrast, Finnegan reported \$6,272.

Finnegan, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate and former Navy pilot, has an uphill battle ahead of him. Statistics show incumbents are re-elected 96 percent of the time. Even in an election year dominated by calls for change, Bereuter has a massive advantage.

Finnegan's name recognition among 1st District voters cannot begin to match Bereuter's. I'd venture to say this might be the first time many of you have heard of him.

Finnegan represents voters who are ready to end congressional gridlock.

Like many Nebraskan voters, he is disenchanted with inept government. Bereuter's 14 years in office, on the other hand, have seen the national debt spiral out of control.

While I won't place that burden entirely on the congressman's shoulders, I do fault him for several of his activities while in office.

Bereuter's most flagrant abuse of the system involves the use of his franking privileges.

A recent National Taxpayers Union

study showed that Bereuter ranked 52nd among the 435 members of the House of Representatives in 1991 mailing costs. During that time Bereuter sent 1,232,872 pieces of unsolicited mail to his constituents in the 1st District.

The tab, which the taxpayers picked up, amounted to more than \$157,000. Bereuter has continued to spend taxpayer dollars in 1992.

According to the Taxpayers Union, he spent more than \$32,000 on about 250,000 more unsolicited mailings.

It's important to remember these figures don't include legitimate correspondence to constituents. When a Nebraskan calls to voice an opinion, the reply received is not considered unsolicited.

Unfortunately, Bereuter used only one-seventh of his total mailing costs (about \$32,000 in 1991 and the first quarter of 1992) to respond to constituents.

Bereuter's disregard for taxpayers does not end there. He bounced 39 checks with the now-defunct House of Representatives Bank, while he was a member of the House Banking Committee.

If that strikes you as a strange contrast, I agree.

An average college student has probably bounced a check or two.

It's doubtful many have bounced 39.

Students who have floated that number probably have spent a few days in jail.

I'll admit the House bank scandal probably isn't earth shattering. It does, however, point out a certain arrogance on the part of Bereuter and other legislators toward Americans.

Bereuter has also indulged in his share of free foreign trips. It may have been standard practice for congressmen in the past, but voters are fed up with such abuses of the system.

Finnegan's attitude toward taxpayer dollars is much more protective.

He favors a constitutional amendment to balance the budget, similar to that used in Nebraska. He knows the debt needs to be reduced, and he's willing to do what it takes to accomplish that goal.

A letter Finnegan recently sent to Sens. Rudman and Tsongas illustrates this goal.

The two have endorsed a recently formed group called "Lead or Leave." The group asks incumbents and challengers alike to sign a pledge promising to halve the budget deficit in four years.

If the goal is not met, those who have signed the pledge will not run for re-election.

Finnegan strongly believes in the goal of "Lead or Leave." He plans to sign the pledge as soon as he receives it from Rudman or Tsongas.

Balancing the budget is not a partisan goal.

Both Democrats and Republicans are at fault for the situation. Congressman Bereuter, however, has had 14 years to bring about change.

It's time for him to step down and let someone with fresh ideas and a new perspective take over.

Gerry Finnegan is that person.

Doug Bereuter may be likable, but unfortunately he has become increasingly arrogant and careless when it comes to taxpayer dollars.

As a public official, his personal and business dealings are subject to increased scrutiny. Clearly, they have not always passed muster.

Gerry Finnegan wants change.

He is not interested in perks, and he won't abuse the franking privilege. He will work hard to represent Nebraskans and bring new ideas to Congress. He will help cut the federal deficit in half, or he won't run for re-election in four years.

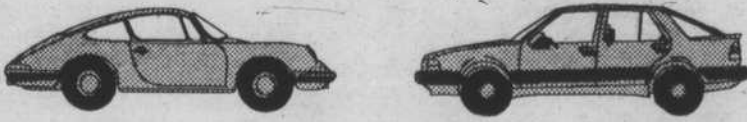
If you're hungry for governmental change, consider Gerry Finnegan for Congress on Nov. 3.

Bruning is a second-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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