

Daily  
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EDITORIAL

## Shoestring Schools

### Budget cuts plague public education

A few weeks ago, public school officials were contemplating putting telephones and computers in classrooms. Many who probably have phones in their offices and cars questioned the necessity of phones in the classroom.

This week, the phones are probably out, along with a few salaries, teaching supplies, textbooks, the summer school programs, tutors for at-risk students and some special education. The Lincoln School Board faces an \$8 million decrease in their proposed 1994-95 budget.

News of the LPS tight-money situation came on the heels of an increase in revenue for the city of Lincoln, which has contemplated building an aquatic park. At least an aquatic park would provide entertainment for all of the public school students who no longer have the option of going to summer school.

Most everyone in the public discourse seems to agree that LPS should bite bullet and take their cuts, just as the city and state governments have had to do. However, there's just one small element absent from these public discussions.

Students.

How will Lincoln's public school students be affected if their educational opportunities are dictated by politics? Does anyone remotely care if the students feel they can continue to learn in more crowded classroom? If they have to, can they continue to learn in buildings that need repaired? How many feel they couldn't keep up without summer school or tutors?

They're just kids, right? How could they possibly understand a complicated budget system where millions of dollars are involved?

Kids would probably just see tax dollars as one giant slush fund of money that should just go where it's needed. After all, most tax money shares the characteristic of coming from middle-income citizens.

Actually, tax dollars are a giant slush fund of money sucked into a vast bureaucracy where they may or may not be accounted for. One branch of the bureaucracy doesn't always help another, even if the quality of public education is at stake.

When the city government tightened its belt two years ago, 30 positions were eliminated. It was a hardship for city departments that translated into reduced services in some areas, including Public Works and Parks and Recreation.

Bringing the budget ax down on public schools is another matter. Education can affect, and sometimes determine, the economic conditions of a person's life. Perhaps LPS doesn't require the 10.7 percent increase it originally requested, but public education deserves further scrutiny before budget cuts are finalized.

Saving money by not filling potholes shouldn't be compared to saving money by not filling minds.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Summer 1994 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

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BRIAN SHARP

## July 4th more than fireworks

The land of the free. The home of the brave.

Parades, cookouts and flag-waivin' festivals. Beer, burgers and firework. No Fourth of July would be complete without them. For one day, everyone is patriotic.

God bless America.

That's how I always saw the Fourth. Until I met Doug.

It was last year, when I was working on a story about a soup kitchen. One year ago this Independence Day, to be exact.

People were lined up outside the door when I got there. Fathers were there with their children, trying to make it until payday the next week. Old people. Young people. Mentally-handicapped people. Forgotten people.

Doug was sitting alone, finishing off his soup, bread and crackers when I asked if I could bother him for a few questions and a seat.

I started talking to him about the meal, the Fourth, etc., and he told me more than I bargained for.

"I'm homeless," he said. "I have no place to go, no place to eat. I eat once a day and it's right here."

Doug told me about his life. About the cops hassling him, trying to keep him and others out of the public eye—O Street was off limits. He talked endlessly about books, and recommended authors I should check out. He talked about the government, and the politics that surround the issue of homelessness in America.

Doug told me about the Nebraska winters. How, one night when the temperature dropped well below freezing, he had broken into an old storage building to find some warmth. He got arrested, charged and would probably be going off to jail soon.

Problem solved: food and shelter.

I had gone there planning on getting the story, then going on to a friend's house, watching the fireworks display at Holmes Lake that night and shooting off some more fireworks at



**This year's Holmes Lake fireworks jamboree will burn \$22,000 in 22 minutes. A shelter like the People's City Mission receives \$30,000 in city funds for an entire year of operation.**

home.

I left wondering what it was I should be celebrating. Watching the fireworks explode that night, I thought about Doug, and everyone else who would wake up the next morning on a park bench, or in a shelter somewhere.

I watched all that money that could have been put to other uses, better uses, turn the dark sky overhead into a smoky haze. And I listened as a choir sang "America the Beautiful" over the radio.

A lot of people blindly hold the belief that the homeless are lazy folks who would rather complain and go hungry than find a job. Any Joe can get a job at the corner Burger-Mart, they say.

Sure. Unless Joe's homeless.

There was a man who applied at a fast food place where I used to work. He sat out in the dining area for what seemed like forever, filling out a one-page application. I saw it after he turned it in to the manager; his writing resembled that of a third grader. His home was the Mission.

"Did you see his clothes? He smelled! Probably hadn't had a bath for weeks."

That's all the manager said. Equal Opportunity was out the window, and his application found the circular file.

I realize that I am one of the lucky ones. I have a home, food, an education, a job, a car—paradise for someone who has nothing.

But who's to say it couldn't have gone differently.

Given different circumstances, it

could have been anyone sitting there in Doug's place. It could have been me.

Now it's one year later, but things haven't gotten any better. This year's Holmes Lake fireworks jamboree will burn \$22,000 in 22 minutes. A shelter like the People's City Mission receives \$30,000 in city funds for an entire year of operation.

Somewhere our priorities have gone wrong. This isn't the way it's supposed to be.

"All men are created equal."

"They are endowed with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness ... And for support of this Declaration ... we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred honor."

The Declaration of Independence, dated July 4, 1776.

The New World was supposed to be a second chance. A place to correct everything that had gone wrong back home.

Some things have gone as planned. It's been called the finest country that was ever stolen—but that's another story.

A lot has gone wrong.

Maybe, this year, to honor our independence, we should spend the holiday celebrating our people, instead of our luxury.

God bless America.

God bless Doug.

Sharp is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.