

MICHAEL JUSTICE

Petty politics stops progress

Before I begin with the primary concern of this column, I would like to make a few observations.

First, my apologies and condolences to the family and friends of Francisco Renteria. His death truly is tragic and was completely preventable. Perhaps if the Lincoln Police Department and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln police would take responsibility for their actions and offer a simple "we're sorry," then we as a community could close this wound and allow the healing process to begin.

Secondly, please do not assume that I have the same views on various issues as the other columnists of this publication. No, I don't know Mr. Karl or Mr. Tucker. No, I don't agree with them or hang out with them. I don't know if they're kidding or if they're really as ... (oops, I can't print that). That is for you to decide.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to all those who responded to my last column. Obviously, this is a bigger epidemic than I had imagined, and I appreciate the time and risk you took to contact me. Thanks again, and hang in there.

Now let's get to the fun part. Congress.

As you may know, the 103rd session came to a close last week-end with little being resolved during the past six months or so — including by those people who can gripe and whine the most.

I would have to give that honor to the Democrats, but only because the Republicans were so busy throwing wrenches instead of insults. It amazes me how much can be unaccomplished when 535 grown men and women put their personal agendas ahead of those who elected them.

The problem here is, of course, that election time is near. Every candidate will try any method possible to get back into office, and usually that includes undermining his or her opponent. The fact that anything gets done at all is what



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surprises me, not the cheap tactics these scum — er, politicians — use on each other.

Every system has a pattern of operation, and Washington is no exception. Here's how it works: Once a new session begins, there is a sense of unity and purpose. Each representative is full of ambition and genuine interest in those he or she represents. This mood is infectious, even to the crusty lifetimers who have their fingers in special interests' pockets so deep they've forgotten which appendages are theirs.

So, in the beginning months of the session, actual accomplishments are made. For example, the 103rd passed a bill that guaranteed leave for workers with a family medical emergency — a bill that President Bush vetoed.

Also, Congress passed the much maligned crime bill, the North American Free Trade Agreement and a deficit reduction plan designed to cut red ink by nearly \$500 billion.

After Congress has operated like a well-oiled machine for a while, things change quickly. All the representatives have now established enough resumé fodder to spend the rest of the term going in circles without doing damage to their upcoming campaigns. Voters often hear, "Look what I've done for you, and look what my opponent didn't do."

This sort of strategy soon deteriorates into what we're more familiar with: the name-calling and reputation-bashing we've grown to

endure. When it's finally time to hit the polls, no one can remember who did what right — only what people did wrong.

Which leaves us where we are today: No universal health care, which we as a nation desperately need; no environmental reform that would put more stringent requirements on careless and irresponsible corporations; and no lobbying reform.

Basically, it comes down to petty politics. The Republiclowns are stopping any progress in order to make the Democrabs look bad. And because most people have no idea what truly goes on, they are forced to reduce a technicolor issue to black and white. "The majority Dems couldn't do it, so let's vote 'em out." It's not that easy, folks.

Let's consider one important thing: Sen. Bob Dole wants to be president in the worst way, and he'll do anything for it. He is single-handedly undermining President Clinton, who in my estimation is doing a decent job, considering the abuse he's been swallowing. He's making a concerted effort, which is more than I can say for our last leading man.

If lifetime politicians like Dole would take a few minutes to release their collective heads from their asses, this country may actually move forward instead of becoming the next member of the fallen empire club.

Justice is a news-editorial and broad-casting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHELLE PAULMAN

Back the troops: Ride a bike

Hold onto your hats, folks. Here we go again.

Just when you thought Desert Storm — also known by George Bush's administration as Operation I Am Not A Wimp — was over, that sly dog Saddam Hussein is up to his old tricks. And the United States is right there to defend Q-4-Quik, I mean, Kuwait.

For those of you who are lost up to this point, please turn to the wire page and read the story about Iraq. Then go back to your crossword puzzle.

What's a three-letter word for the lifeblood of our modern society? (Hint: "Beer" has too many letters.)

That's right. It's "oil" — that miracle liquid found in everything from your gas tank to your hair (some of us in smaller quantities than others).

If you remember the last time this Saddam Hussein stuff happened, you'll recall that gas prices shot up.

We were facing a shortage, the gas companies said. We all had to tighten our money belts to support our men — and women, of course — over there fighting for freedom and the American way.

Never mind that by the time the war started, tankers with plenty of black gold already were on their way here. But when we move so much as another frigate to the Persian Gulf, the oil companies see dollar signs in the deployments.

Now we are amassing our troops there again, and even though nothing may happen, filling your tank is probably going to empty your wallet. Don't say you weren't warned.

As for me, I've got my bicycle. Bikes are a popular form of transportation for college students for many reasons.

They're cheap ... well, some



We import most of our oil from other nations, and the cost — both in dollars and in human life — keeps going up. Most of the money that leaves our country never will come back. It is hoped that the opposite will be true of our troops.

bikes cost more than my car, but most are less than \$1,000.

They're convenient ... well, if you don't mind being sweaty when you reach your destination.

You don't have to hunt for a parking space for your bike ... oh, hell, that's not true either! The bike racks are even worse than the parking lots.

Riding a bike is literally a pain in the behind — especially if you're wearing a backpack.

Drivers try to run you over. Pedestrians on campus gripe when you run them over. Thieves will take the front tire, the rear tire, the seat, the playing card stuck between the spokes or even your whole bicycle if you don't have a lock made of Kryptonite.

The worst part, though, is not getting the respect you deserve.

I've plunked down \$40 for wheel reflectors, a front headlamp and a blinking rear light. With all this light radiating from my bike, you'd think drivers would be able to see me.

Apparently they don't. Just yesterday, some guy in a minivan cruised past me less than six inches away. This happens all the time. That's why I have learned all the proper hand signals — right turn, left turn and "Turn this!"

No matter how furiously I pump my legs, I can't keep up with the gas-powered traffic. But I don't

understand why drivers get mad when they wind up behind me. If I was ahead of them in a car, I'd probably take the parking space they wanted. Then they would have to know the proper hand signal.

Take all the bicycles you see on campus today, and imagine that they're cars. Do you know a four-letter word that many students would utter upon finding this parking pandemonium of Biblical proportions? (Hint: No, it's not "beer," you drunkards.)

Besides freeing up a parking space, a bicycle is one less car spewing exhaust into the air we breathe. And one less car on the road means that much oil is being saved.

Plus, the less we rely on foreign countries, the stronger we will be as a nation.

We import most of our oil from other nations, and the cost — both in dollars and in human life — keeps going up. Most of the money that leaves our country never will come back. It is hoped that the opposite will be true of our troops.

So support our men and women overseas. Buy war bonds. Stop the insanity. Ride your bicycles.

The parking space you save could be for the guy who almost ran you over.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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