

OPINION

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Daily
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EDITORIAL

Wish list

School prayer undermines freedom

With the inception of the GOP Congress in January, school prayer will appear toward the top of Newt Gingrich's New Year's resolution list.

Members of the "religious right" have deemed the nation's lack of Christianity one of the country's biggest flaws. They propose to make the country think more like themselves by adding an amendment to the Constitution that would permit voluntary school prayer.

Don't let the proposal fool you. Everyone has the right to practice his or her own faith in this country. Columnist Mike Royko of the Chicago Tribune parodied the attempt by Conservatives to pervert this notion in a column last month.

In his column, Royko prayed in a taxicab, a bar and a restaurant without any problems. School children can pray in school as well — without an amendment for permission.

The real purpose of the amendment, then, is a push toward mandatory school prayer, which is an entirely different subject.

Things such as teacher-led prayer and moments of silence in public schools are thinly-veiled attempts at enforcing a state religion. Teachers would be forced to answer students' questions about what and who they were praying to, and children of non-Christian religions would be made to feel like deviants for not participating.

One cartoon from the Dayton Daily News recently illustrated this best. The cartoonist drew a classroom being led in prayer by a teacher who prefacing the "worship" with: "... Now we'll all bow our heads, except for this Godless little heathen, Bobby, who doesn't believe in a just and merciful God."

It is exactly because spirituality, and the individual's right to express that spirituality, is so important in the United States that prayer codes are a bad idea.

This country was founded on principles of religious freedom and a separation of church and state that ensures such freedom.

Even religious leaders (including United Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Evangelical Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventists and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations) warned a while ago that such an amendment would undermine the people's right to worship according to their own beliefs and would secularize and trivialize prayer.

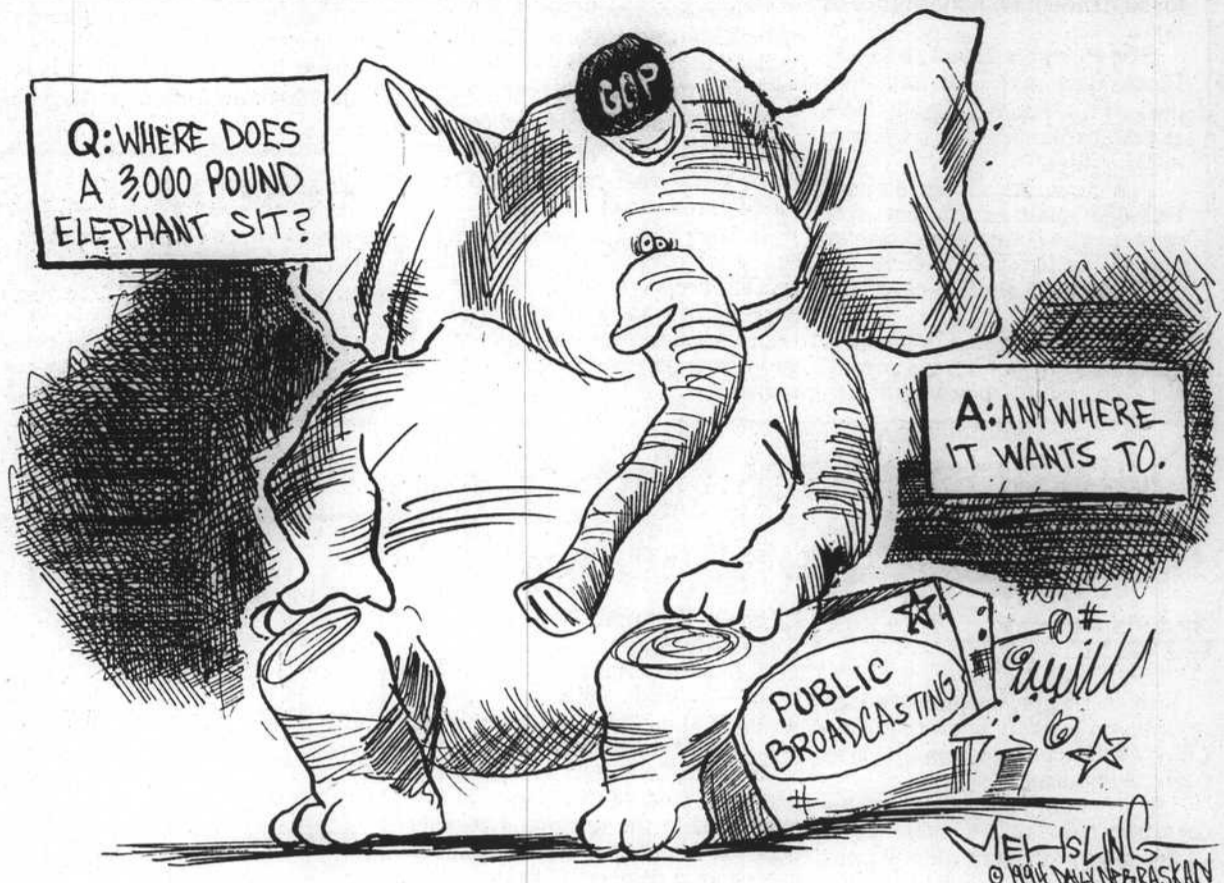
If Republicans want to improve education and make it more tolerant, accepting and learning conducive — in effect, more spiritual — they ought to see that time is not spent taking away their religious freedom. Instead, it should be spent teaching the contributions of all members of this society and instilling notions of freedom.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Fall 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.

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. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted. Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Under the law

I was at work Sunday night, and, as usual, an officer of the law entered the store. I am paid to be agreeable with the law while on the clock, despite my hatred for them and what they stand for. I offer a few reasons:

He entered on his routine "positive police contact," as he called it. Deputy Dan, as I'll call him, started a conversation and then asked if I had heard about the indictments in the Renteria case.

Sure enough, as he spoke it, I read it in the DN. Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady was to be brought up on "official misconduct" charges, and his two officers, Schellpeper and Wilke, were to be charged with third-degree assault. For killing a man?

I dismissed his babble and changed the subject to "what exactly can I get away with" questions. We got on the subject of assaults. After some chatter, he told me if a man were to spit in my face, there was nothing I could do legally. Striking the man would put me at fault.

"Wow!" I thought, and then proposed the situation of spitting in an officer's face. His response was: "I'm sure we could find something ... say, 'tempting an officer.'"

I wondered if I could tempt him with a doughnut.

This is the rub of the whole thing: When I questioned him about assault cases that could hypothetically happen, the issue of accidental death came up. Deputy Dan defined this as manslaughter — the careless, unintentional taking of another's life.

He stated that in cases in which manslaughter, a felony, is present, a person is likely to serve seven or eight years. I looked at the front page of the DN the next day and saw third-degree assault. In this day, third-degree assault is a misdemeanor, which could be punishable by community service. Something is rotten.



Bret Gottshall/DN

Why is it police get more lenient treatment in relation to the general public? Is it because they have badges? Does having a badge and a gun get you more privileges than the American Express card? Police are flesh, just like the rest of us. They must be treated equal to us savages, no?

By the bloody fires in hell, they had better be charged the same as the rest of us would be.

Aaron Sandlin
sophomore
undeclared

End of silence

The Nebraska Women's Political Network commends the Daily Nebraskan's assessment of the recent climate at the College of Business Administration. We second your public call for openness.

As stated in the editorial "Code of silence" (DN, Nov. 11, 1994), the Network became involved in the situation at CBA at the request of women on campus who found internal access

to due process blocked. Our involvement was to speak with and for those who felt silenced.

We have found that putting a microphone to what is whispered not only promotes more productive discussion but challenges those in power to show their best face.

The Nebraska Women's Political Network is relatively new and may need an introduction. The Network is a statewide organization formed to be a force for legislation and public policy that honors and, where necessary, protects the work and the potential and the rights of all women at home, in the workplace and in the courts. We have no governmental, political or business ties. While independence of the Network makes organization and funding difficult, it is also the basis for our strength.

Independence is essential because, in initiating change and responding to issues that affect women, the Network can and does take risks that are impossible or impolitic for individual women or organizations to undertake alone. We have found that an independent network of women willing to take risk publicly can effectively challenge those who operate either from ignorance or from isolated personal power bases.

Members of a university community ought also to have this independence. Ideally, the university community, which cherishes academic freedom, would also be expected to demonstrate leadership in securing the building blocks of every claim to freedom — due process, yes; equity, yes; and, more basically, fairness and common courtesy. A simple but tall order.

Generally, the University of Nebraska is equal to these expectations. When it or any other state body falters, either in stated policy or repeated practice, we will notice. Publicly.

Sue Ellen Wall
Nebraska Women's Political
Network

P.S. Write Back

The Daily Nebraskan wants to hear from you. If you want to voice your opinion about an article just write a brief letter to the editor and sign it (don't forget your student ID number) and mail it to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R Street, Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, or stop by the office in the basement of the Nebraska Union and visit with us.