

Don't beat around PC bush

There's a dark cloud hanging over North America. Years of sensitivity training have honed our injustice sensors to a razor-sharp finish. In the past few decades, most notably in the past 10 years or so, we have changed the way we act and the way we think. More than anything else, however, we have changed the way we talk.

Linguistically speaking, we're turning into a bunch of wimps.

Political correctness, for all of its good intentions, has begun to destroy the English language. For years we have edited ourselves in the name of "kinder, gentler" and less offensive discourse. All we have accomplished, sadly, is oversensitivity and muddled communication.

It used to be that the goal of communication was to share ideas clearly and efficiently. "Say what you mean," people used to say. Nowadays, the catchword is not "say what you mean," but "say something as close to what you mean as possible while eliminating any chance that someone might be offended by it." The result is confusion, hesitance and self-censorship; it does much to hinder communication and almost nothing to improve it.

Think about it: "mankind" is off-limits. So is "janitor" (it's now sanitation engineer). I don't say "talk about the pot calling the kettle black" anymore, because I'm afraid I'll be misunderstood and wind up in court. It's tough to make it through an average day without stopping in mid-sentence and censoring myself — not because I find what I want to say offensive, but because someone else might. In short, we are gagging ourselves.

Every so often, the war over



Doug Peters

words advances to another level, and each subsequent step becomes a little more preposterous. A few years ago, the battleground was "fighting words" policies on university campuses. Now it seems that the debate has moved to new, more ridiculous levels.

The March issue of Details magazine describes a pamphlet published by the North York Women Teachers' Association, which is based near Toronto. The pamphlet, titled "Nonviolent Language," suggests alternatives to today's violence-glorifying idioms.

According to the pamphlet, "seemingly inoffensive expressions may evoke violence." It continues, "If we were to stop and visualize the literal meaning of clichés, colloquialisms and common phrases, would we use them?"

Some of the offending phrases may surprise you.

Rather than "hitting" the return key on your computer, the pamphlet urges readers to "tap" the key. Instead of "killing two birds with one stone" we are implored to "get two for the price of one." Substituting "in serious trouble" for "dead meat" and "go uninvited" for "crash the party" is another way to keep verbal testosterone levels down, according to the pamphlet.

The list goes on. To allow our language to be

diluted in order to remove any references to acts of even remote violence would be another giant step down the path to cultural oblivion. The language of America has already lost altogether too much of its flavor. As a culture, we have already managed to put together a sizable list of "red-flag" words and phrases. It doesn't need to get any longer.

If the ladies of the North York Women Teachers' Association want to do something to decrease violence in our society, they should be looking somewhere other than our language. Because, after all, there are different ways to solve a problem, or, for the verbally unenlightened, "there's more than one way to skin a cat."

I think I've made my opinions pretty clear, and I don't want to "beat a dead horse," but if the language police get ahold of this nonviolence thing, they'll be "getting away with murder." Fortunately, it seems as if instituting these changes will be an "uphill battle."

But stop to think about the dangers these kinds of movements pose, and when you speak, say what you mean — don't "beat around the bush." In the meantime, I'll stop "rattling my saber" and let you "kick the idea around" for a while.

In closing, if any of you have taken one too many "I'm O.K., you're O.K." seminars and are truly offended or disturbed by these terms, my advice is to "bite the bullet."

I hope I presented this issue in a clear and understandable manner. If I didn't, I apologize.

At least I took a stab at it.

Peters is a graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

'Converted' senator Democrat at heart

The "conversion" of Colorado Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell from Democrat to Republican is not good news for the GOP.

While it widens the numerical majority in the Republican Senate to 54 votes, Campbell's presence in the Republican Party further obscures what Republicans stand for.

As many of his former party colleagues have said, Campbell votes with Democrats on most issues of substance. As a Democrat, Campbell supported President Clinton's 1994 budget, which included the biggest tax increase in recent history. He is "pro-choice" on abortion and voted to lift the longstanding ban on federal funding to pay for most abortions for poor women. He supported the president on gays in the military by voting not to enshrine the gay ban into law.

Add to this his strong support of organized labor and his vote to ban "assault weapons," and you have a Democrat that has merely changed his label, not his mind. That there is room for him in the rapidly expanding GOP "big tent" says something about the dilution of Republican ideology and the apparent unimportance of ideas to those in the party who are embracing this defector.

The same day that Campbell announced his switch, Indiana Republican Sen. Richard Lugar said he was going to run for president and broke with his party's orthodox line favoring tax cuts. Following the defeat of the balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution, Lugar said "to cut taxes in the face of that situation is simply to increase the pain down the road."

Campbell's Colorado colleague, Republican Sen. Hank Brown, said Campbell's switch would change the GOP image. "The Republican Party has become the working party," he said. What does that mean? The Republican "image" was good enough last November to win the House and Senate for the first time in four decades. What's to change? This sounds like the class warfare game Democrats play when they claim their party represents "working people," implying that Republicans don't work, or that people who make more than a certain amount of money haven't legitimately earned it.

The Republican Party, so close to winning it all in next year's election, could blow it all unless it sticks to a clear iden-



Cal Thomas

tity. What does it stand for? Who is a Republican? Should the party have certain principles, the violation of which means one is not a Republican? Or, has the tent grown so large that anyone can seek admission without demonstrating commitment to anything but a label?

This is not the party that was founded in 1854 by people who took a principled position against the extension of slavery. No big tent there. No compromise. Compromise was what the Whigs did. The Whigs thought they could build a "big tent" in their day. By fudging on a matter of principle, the Whigs sealed their doom.

The new Republican Party lost its first presidential election in 1856, but because it stood on principle, Republicans emerged from the Civil War with enormous political strength, allowing the party to control the national government for 72 years, with the exception of 16 years during which Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson were in the White House.

A great social force was behind the creation of the Republican Party, and it was greater than party loyalty. That social force reshaped American politics. Republicans rode that force to victory after victory because they stood for what was right, not what was expedient.

Now the party of Lincoln is faced with a similar challenge. It must not allow anyone to wear the Republican label. It must articulate certain fundamental principles in which it believes.

It is not enough to be against President Clinton. Republicans must be FOR something. If they fail to set forth certain fundamental principles, they run the risk of going the way of the Whigs. But that wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing. A new party could emerge that would be built, not in a big tent, but on a solid rock.

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College life is high-stress job

The front cover of a recent Newsweek magazine talked about stress and how different people these days are dealing with it and those who are finding themselves exhausted by their workloads.

The listing of these particular jobs is rather interesting, too, because there are the usual ones that everybody expects to be there, like air-traffic controllers, doctors and lawyers. But some of the others on the list are also interesting professions.

Jobs as inner-city teachers, journalists, coaches, interns and nurses also are listed as high-stress. Then there is also the one that everybody will probably agree on being the highest-stress job, but also the most fulfilling — the working mom.

All of these listings are fine and dandy, and I'm sure that a considerable amount of time and government money was wasted in the last 40 years to come up with these findings, but I don't think they are complete.

I would like to add to these ranks the profession of the college student.

I'm not sure that this is a full-blown profession, even though I do know many individuals who have been in college since Reagan's first term in office. But how can those individuals who tabulated this list overlook the sorry plight of these individuals?

Granted, those professions listed earlier do present their own cases for being the worst, but the case for the collegians should be looked at closely.

The very essence of the case is the sad reality that most college kids need to have a secondary job to help pay their way through



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school. They don't have the luxury of realizing that after a particularly tough week on the job, they can look forward to a hefty paycheck.

So after fretting all week over books to prepare for tests and papers, they're expected to go out and be part of the work force, earning somewhere near five bucks an hour, and feel good about knowing that their current job probably serves no purpose toward their hopeful future profession.

Sheer numbers alone should be enough to make a point for the stress level of the student. If you take the basic equation of adding the number of hours of course work, plus adding two hours of homework per week for each credit hour, an individual taking fifteen hours is working a 45-hour job.

When we add in the suggested amount of work time to be no more than 20 hours at their SECOND job, meaning besides school, then that's 65 hours already a week. And then there's the truthful reality that many students are working to the upwards of 30 to 40 hours a week, yet still maintaining above-average grades.

When some individuals work 70 to 80 hours a week, do they really need to be told how easy life is in college and how stress-free the environment is?

Since the amount of time that college students put into their average work week has been established, let's look at what they are doing.

The one thing that is most interesting about all of the professions that I listed above was the fact that they were in fact professions, meaning those people had earned those jobs already. But college students are still working toward those dreams.

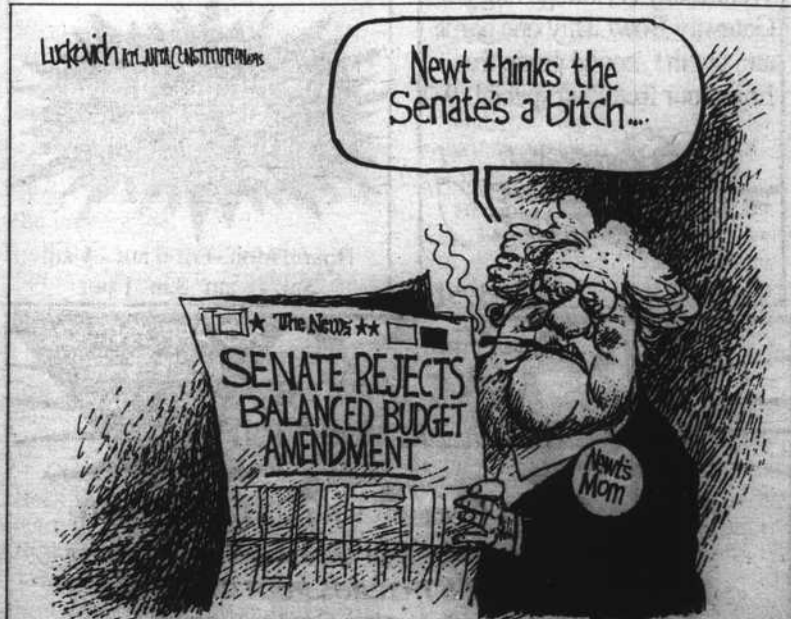
Isn't it a fact that most people feel more secure about themselves if they know they have a job? Yet as students, we don't have that luxury, because we're still working toward our chosen careers. One mistake or bad test in a particular class could possibly eliminate an individual's hopes and dreams about becoming a doctor, lawyer or teacher.

The point that needs to be made here is that too many people are viewing college students through the panels of bar windows. Sure, college life is fun and a good time, but a lot of stress is heaped on students these days to succeed. Then students must figure out how to pay for that success.

College life is full of great memories, and it is usually only those memories that people tend to recall, because the reality of cramming for four comprehensive finals over three days is too painful a thought.

So the next time somebody says that college students have easy lives, sit down with that individual and explore the differences in their perception and basic reality.

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Mike Luckovich