

# Step right up

*Budget crisis may be best show on earth*

I can only imagine what's been going on during the budget negotiations in Washington.

Newt glowers in a corner. He's still smarting from the snub of being forced to sit way at the back of Air Force One. He wants the budget done his way or no way. Compromise not only annoys him, it tends to diminish his status in the eyes of the freshman class of Republicans in the House of Representatives. Newt thinks they've been unusually restless lately, too aggressive and unable to concentrate. Perhaps his job would be easier if he put them all on Ritalin.

Bob Dole glowers in another corner. (Newt knows it's nothing personal. Dole always looks like that.) Dole certainly wants the balanced budget. His press releases have been telling him that for years. But he's also smitten with the idea of being called "Mr. President." This year's election may represent the last real chance he'll have to call the Oval Office his own. Budget agreements aside, he'd really like to best Clinton in this skirmish.

Clinton sits across the room, in a self-reflective mood. He's trying not to gaze out the window, trying not to think about his golf game, and trying not to imagine Dole and Gingrich both with shaved heads and black eyes. He fights them more out of habit than conviction. He also knows that he can well afford to annoy the congressional leaders at this point in the election year. An aide told him that the polls said the public liked him better than Congress anyway.

I am an equal-opportunity cynic when it comes to politics. By that I mean that all politicians, regardless of party affiliation or ideological stance, are equally subject to my suspicion and contempt. Theoretically, they also have an equal chance to earn my respect, but it doesn't seem likely.

Sometimes I think that the U.S. government is the greatest show on



**Jennifer Mapes**

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earth. And with the budget talks, it has been in rare form: lots of high drama, partisan bickering and election-year posturing.

The warring factions agree on a lot of things. Yes, the budget should be balanced. No, social programs like Medicare and Medicaid should not be gutted. But their disagreements have stolen the center ring in this circus. Should the budget be balanced in seven years or 10 years? And what exactly constitutes an unconscionable cut in our social safety net programs? And here's another bright idea. Because we need to bring in more money and spend less, let's cut taxes!

Sometimes I get the feeling that my country is governed by the world's oldest junior high kids.

Think about it. In the last few months, the president and congressional leaders have not been able to produce a budget at all, let alone a balanced one. Meanwhile, thousands

of government workers have gone without pay or work, because there's no money to keep the government going.

Incidentally, there is enough money to pay the president, the senators, and the House of Representatives (the Senate suggested that they and their colleagues should share the nation's pain by foregoing their own paychecks during the shutdown, but the House decided it was a bad idea.)

Balancing the budget is an admirable goal. But I'm beginning to wonder if it's such a good idea right now.

I'd like to see a few other things happen with government before the budget is balanced. First of all, I'd like to see Congress reform itself. The few attempts it has made at things like campaign finance reform haven't gone far enough to earn the trust of this voter. If we the people have to do without government money for mohair and beehives, then they the representatives should at least try to wean themselves off money from special-interest groups.

I'd also like to see the government bureaucracy trimmed. Cut some of the fat and waste out of the federal bureaucracy, and see how much it costs to run it then. I'm sure the legions of federal lint inspectors will be sorely missed, but if we pull together as a nation, I'm sure we can cope.

The question for me is not whether the budget should be balanced, but whether we should be letting this particular collection of buffoons do the job for us. Thus far, they've managed to exchange a lot of accusations and dirty looks, but not a lot of ideas about how to compromise or produce a budget. Any budget.

If they can't learn to play nice with each other, I think we should send them home.

Mapes is a senior advertising and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

# Wake up

*Your educational alarm clock is ringing*

Question: How does the academic structure of a university help define its students?

Answer: Whether it's personal identity, athletic achievement, social activity or some other reason, the primary benefit universities offer is an education in a specific discipline.

The Golden Carrot dangled in front of students, regardless of their program of choice, is the degree that proclaims to friends and family and the rest of the world that the last four or six or 10 years have not been a wasted effort on the part of the individual.

In short, the means do justify the ends.

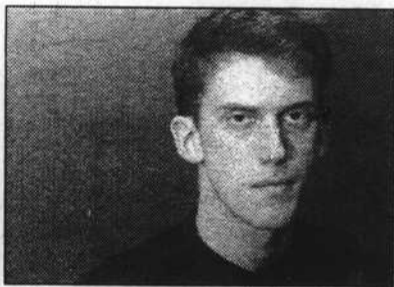
The means for students today are changing, to say the least.

Gone are the days when the G.I. home from the war could expect a fully-funded government education and a job waiting for this self-created niche out in the real world.

Gone, too, are the times when university students could put off deciding how their education should be managed from Day One.

Do not misunderstand me — college is a time for exploration and self-reflection. But four years of football games and prerequisite classes do not a well-conceived education make. The fact is, our society is dependent on competition as a growth factor, both here and abroad. The training for this competition ideally starts with both the student and the teacher, in the classroom.

I can hear it now. "Well, my field is (fill in the blank), and I won't have to worry about getting the job that goes with the carrot, so as long as I do X and Y and maybe some Z." That's the type of thinking that



**Fred Poyner**

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recently ruined the careers of six U.S. Naval Academy cadets caught using LSD. Rather than focusing on how the education of their choice could get them ahead, they assumed a misplaced "Untouchable" attitude because of their status as the military's elite-to-be. And they paid the price.

Learning is a two-way street. Along with the realization that the student must be increasingly

accountable for the outcome of the curriculum is the need for professors to be accountable to their students and the instruction methods utilized. If you are a professor and you need to conduct outside research, fine. I have no problem with faculty development leave. But if it interferes with the initial commitment to the student, then it becomes a problem for the entire university.

In addition, bureaucracy, for all its necessity, can and does interfere with the learning process. Two examples of this that come to mind are the availability of some research facilities here on UNL's campus and the current protests under way at Yale University concerning the treatment of graduate teaching assistants by the Yale administration. In the latter case, the Yale grads want union recognition for the work they undertake on behalf of the university, rather than submit to what many consider the 20th century's answer for indentured servitude.

Of course, the bottom line may be that our society will have those people who attend college only to end up drifting to whatever fate has in store for them. Like Kierkegaard's ship without a helm, their course is left to the winds of chance, and the mercy of the automated course registration system.

One week into the second semester, if you have a stake in the educational policies of a university, how they are applied, and what you expect from them, this is your wake-up call.

Poyner is a museum studies graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

# Our Special Guest



**Congress' big rip-off: land for sale — cheap**

**Byron Adams**

*"In essence, the proposed legislation says that if land is not called wilderness by this bill, it can never be wilderness again — wording unprecedented in the history of wilderness legislation."*

An unprecedented assault on our land is now under way in Congress. Right now, there are bills pending in Congress that threaten millions of acres of national parks, forests, grasslands and coastlines that are owned by you and me.

● One bill would establish political committees to identify national forests and parks to be closed or sold. If you ever wanted your own national monument, this could be your chance.

● Another bill would transfer millions of acres of public land to the states, which could then sell them to profit-motivated interests and restrict public access.

● Instead of getting fair, market rates for grazing rights and range protection on our property, a Senate bill now proposes to make grazing the dominant use of federal range, to prevent the public from influencing range policy and to exempt grazing from environmental impact laws.

● There is no substantial effort to reform the Mining Law of 1872, which allows huge mining companies to claim public land for as little as \$2.50 an acre, extract billions of dollars worth of ore and not pay taxpayers a single penny in royalties. In fact, just last month, the New York-based mining company Asarco bought 2.9 billion dollars' worth of mining rights for \$1,745, allowing for open-pit mining on 347 acres of Arizona's Coronado National Forest.

A quick look at those opposing these bills suggests that it is not only placard-waving tree spikers who feel as if they are getting ripped off by the government. Virtually every group that uses public land for recreation, from hunting-rights advocates and mountain bikers to scientists and the tourism industry, has had something to say about how lousy these bills are. Still, it appears that special-interest groups have the ears of our legislators, especially those of the west who have the most to gain by grabbing up public land and putting it on the chopping block. Nowhere, however, is the fiscally irresponsible, anti-environmental penchant of this Congress more blatant than in the so-called "Utah Wilderness Bill."

The 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act charged our government to find places that offered outstanding opportunities for solitude and protect them; places "untrammelled by man, where he himself is a visitor who does not remain." (Apparently it was mostly men back then who did all the "trammeling.")

Unfortunately, the Utah Wilderness Bill has a different interpretation, one that defines the value of wilderness in terms of coal, oil, timber and other commodities.

The bill before Congress would set aside a meager 1.8 million acres, of 22 million acres of public land in Utah, as "protected" wilderness. Amazingly, this "protection" includes the building of dams, power lines, communication towers, roads and pipelines. Also unique to this "wilderness bill" is the fact that the remaining 20 million acres of public land in Utah never could be designated as wilderness in the future — it would be managed for use by livestock interests and mining companies.

In essence, the proposed legislation says that if land is not called wilderness by this bill, it can never be wilderness again — wording unprecedented in the history of wilderness legislation.

This land belongs to all of us — not just to the people of Utah. It seems to me that what this bill really is trying to protect is the right of individuals (foreign or domestic) to trash our property without our consent.

Last November, I visited the Washington offices of my representatives in congress, Bob Kerrey, Jim Exon and Doug Bereuter, to discuss this issue. While our representatives are hesitant to take a leadership role on this issue, you can be proud of their refusal to support such a wrongheaded bill as this one. Even so, this lousy bill passed in its December markup hearing. Although it came out somewhat revised, it is still fatally flawed in every fundamental aspect. Remind your representatives in Congress of this when you thank them for their opposition to this bill (S 884 for senators, HR 1745 for representatives).

As an undergraduate at a university in Utah, the lure of majestic, awe-inspiring canyons and mesas was a powerful draw on my time and attention. This lure continues today. Although my studies may have suffered for it, I have come to cherish the time spent in big, wild places.

Surely the value of this wilderness extends beyond the realm of short-term economic booms and busts.

Let's prevent local greed from trashing our national heritage.

Adams is a graduate student in plant pathology.

### BE OUR GUEST

The Daily Nebraskan will present a guest columnist each week. Writers from the university and community are welcome.

Must have strong writing skills and something to say. Contact Doug Peters c/o the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588, or e-mail at letters@unlinfo.unl.edu. Or by phone at (402)-472-1782.