

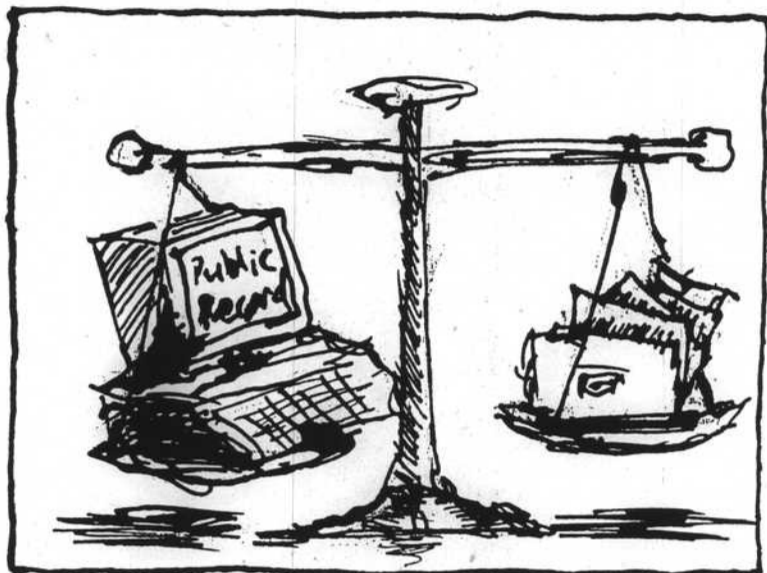
OPINION

Wednesday, April 10, 1996

Page 4

Daily
Nebraskan
Editorial Board
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

J. Christopher Hain Editor, 472-1766
Doug Kouma Managing Editor
Doug Peters Opinion Page Editor
Sarah Scalet Associate News Editor
Matt Waite Associate News Editor
Michelle Garner Wire Editor
Jennifer Mapes Columnist



Bret Gottschall/DN

Using technology

Public records should enter computer era

Increasingly, information is exchanged using bits, bytes and bauds. The explosion of information technology has allowed us to use disks and modems in place of reams and reams of paper.

Technology also has given all citizens an increased ability to keep watch over their government agencies and officials. Computers allow detailed analysis of public records that wasn't possible before.

For years, open public records have allowed citizens the ability to examine the workings of government agencies. Amid the increased use of computers for storing and managing government records, it is important that free, open access of computer records be protected.

State legislators Tuesday moved closer to asserting their control over computer records. Senators sent to the final round of consideration a bill that would cancel a contract between the Library Commission and a private company that provides on-line public records and other information. The bill also would call for a task force to recommend legislative policy on electronic access to public records.

Current state law declares that public records "include all records and documents regardless of physical form ... data which is [sic] a public record in its original form shall remain a public record when maintained in computer files."

To maintain freedom of information in the computer age, state legislators must do three things.

First, public records should remain public records as computer files, as the law now states. All agencies that hold public records on computer should be required to make them available electronically.

Second, computer records should be free of charge to obtain. Putting a price on public records allows access only to individuals and groups with adequate financial resources. There should be no financial requirement for freedom of information.

Third, state agencies should be required to declare the existence of computer records and the means for obtaining them. A government agency that hides behind its computer equipment is not a trustworthy agency.

If these three measures are put into law by legislators, then, and only then, will we have a trustworthy government in the computer age.

Editorial policy

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Spring 1996 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: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St. Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Drug war' unwinnable

I would like to thank Jennifer Mapes for speaking out on our failed Drug policy. The lack of communication on this subject shows that our country is in a dysfunctional state. A communication breakdown is the main mechanism by which chemical dependence effects the whole family. It affects the country in much the same way.

People need to think critically about the effects of abating drug use with cops and jails. Right now we have the highest per capita incarceration rate of any industrialized nation. We have more people in jail on drug charges than the total prison population of 25 years ago. Nonviolent drug offenders receive an average 60 months jail time, five times the average 12-month sentence for manslaughter convicts. "Build more jails," people say. Every dollar spent on corrections comes from roads, health care or education. Many states have already had to cut funds allocated for schools to build more prisons.

Other countries have used social workers and doctors to abate drug use instead of cops and jails and you know what? They have less substance abuse than us. No violent black market like us. Lastly, it hasn't resulted in crack stores next to liquor stores or heroin vending machines.

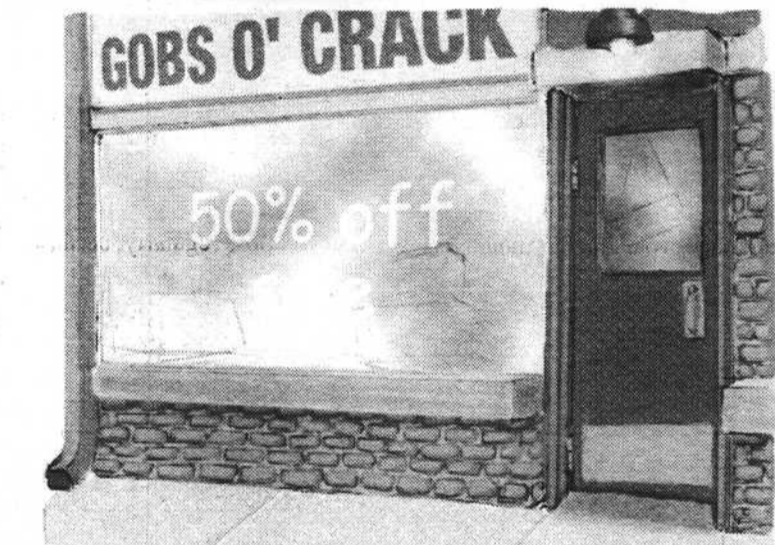
Eric Mechalke
graduate student
chemistry

Science, ethics don't mix

I agreed with Kristi Kohl about slavery and abortion being two entirely different issues, at least that was until she wrote her "pro-choice" column.

If a "human under 16 weeks old" is repeatedly called a "tapeworm," I would call that being degraded. If a human has its head popped off or is sucked out with a straw and a vacuum, it would be safe to say that they just had the beating of their life. And since any actions that defend the rights of these unborn are met with resistance, there would be a good argument that the unborn are being oppressed.

I'm sure that Ms. Kohl's BIOLOGICAL model can be empirically proven and is relevant in ITS



Aaron Steckelberg/DN

context, not for social issues. If her biological model and her "Thrive or Survive" theory were applied to society, it would be ethical for the oppression of women and minorities (i.e. slavery), rape, murder and genocide (Hitler wasn't a monster; he was just really into biology). Science and ethics are rarely compatible.

Jason Bousquet
senior
international affairs

Stop abortion (columns)

In 1989, I started college at the University of Maine. At least once a month there would be a small skirmish in the editorial pages of the school paper about abortion.

Now, seven years later the same skirmish continues. Oddly, the arguments I read seven years ago are the same ones being bantered around today. Seems as if not much progress is being made.

I could be mistaken, but it would seem that it is time to stop trying to wage this war on the editorial page, as it is going nowhere.

For you pro-choicers out there, you need to sit back and relax. You have a Supreme Court decision on your side. Unless your opponents band together and create a powerful strategy, they will just keep on writing editorials that have no impact at all.

For you pro-lifers, you need to create a cohesive voting block. A small minority that has 100 percent voter turnout can beat the majority. Also don't forget to raise as much

money as you can and donate it to the politicians who support your cause. You will be surprised at how many politicians will support your cause when you write large checks for their re-election fund.

But whatever either side does, please stop writing editorials that accomplish nothing but ticking off members on the other side of the issue. If you don't, I have the odd feeling that 30 years from now my children will be in college reading the same arguments.

Troy Johnson
second-year
law

Abortion

"To compare slavery with abortion is ignorant and minimizes the actual damage done to African Americans at the time" ("The other side", April 9). To me, ignorance is not seeing the connection between abortion and slavery. Both are gross infringements on a person's freedom and intrinsic rights as a human being. How can the deliberate killing of an innocent human being not be comparable to slavery? Imagine the "actual damage" being done to the aborted babies.

As for the comparison of a human fetus to a tapeworm, I too am a student of biology and realize that they are intricate and complex creatures. But to compare the destructive symbiosis of parasites to a human fetus is overlooking one major fact. Will tapeworms ever have the ability to think and to reason and to love and to cry?

John Rutledge
freshman
biology