

OPINION PACKAGES

Our VIEW

Call to action

Clinton's education priority highlights address

"... my number one priority for the next four years, is to ensure that all Americans have the best education in the world."

"Let's work together to meet these three goals: every 8-year old must be able to read, every 12-year-old must be able to log on to the Internet, every 18-year-old must be able to go to college, and every adult American must be able to keep on learning for a lifetime."

President Clinton's State of the Union address Tuesday before a joint session of Congress, innumerable dignitaries and the most important audience — we, the citizens — commenced by referring to the beginnings of the Cold War, as a call to arms for the government and citizens to defend against the "enemy of our time" — inaction.

And although he spoke about crime, welfare, a balanced budget and the role of the United States on the world stage — it was Clinton's remarks on education that should leave the greatest impact on the prosperity of America — now and in the future.

Clinton stressed education as "one of the critical national security issues for our future" and deemed it his No. 1 priority.

The budget he will be submitting to Congress next Thursday will allot \$51 billion to education alone — commendable in an era when the federal government is becoming more and more stringent with tax dollars and revenue. The highlights of his plan would involve setting standards for both students and teachers to meet, using volunteers to help teach reading and writing and developing character and citizenship in school.

To ease the burden of higher education on families, Clinton has vociferously advocated tax breaks worth up to \$10,000 to apply toward the cost of attending a university.

The President was not afraid to appeal to the Republican leadership. Perhaps there is hope in Washington.

But while all of these points are worthy of recognition, the question is whether Clinton — confronted by a Republican-controlled Congress — can actually make good on his 10 points on education.

Partisan politics will not work. It has not worked in the past, and it cannot hope to work in the future.

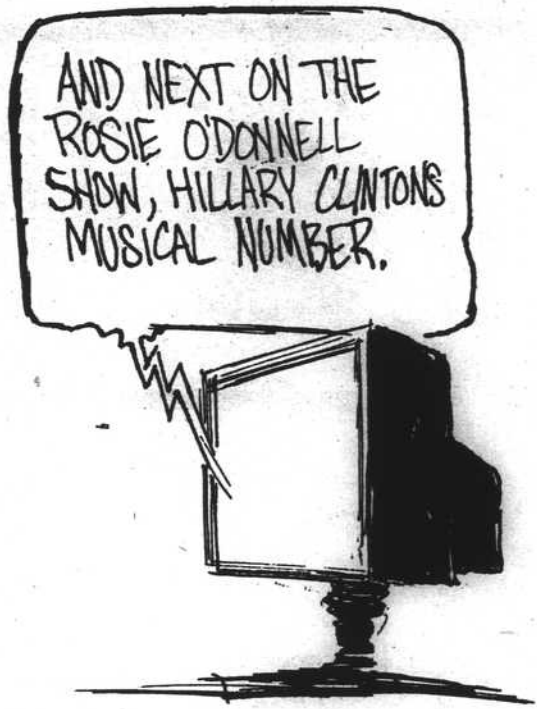
Congressional leaders must come together with Clinton and with each other focused on their collective goal. They must not lose sight of that goal throughout debate and discussion that, despite all this talk of bipartisanship, will likely be divided along party lines.

If politicians want to secure places for themselves in history — in the minds of 21st century Americans — that place will be determined by how well the 105th Congress and President Clinton can work together.

Congress needs to shed its partisan attitudes. Clinton needs to discharge his office with dignity and integrity — exercising leadership through actions, not mere words.

Good luck.

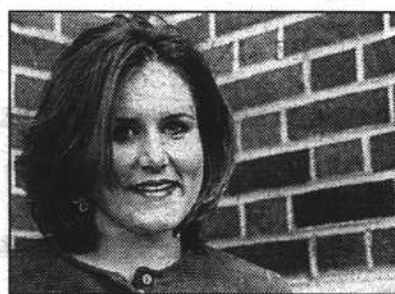
Mehsling's VIEW



JIM MEHSLING
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Anne HJERSMAN

A fast for the main discourse Shanks' stand for justice breaks university's silence



People who know Eric Shanks know that he has always been one to swim upstream.

When I met him almost five years ago, he was fighting an undercurrent of racial insensitivity at Nebraska Scholars Institute. He was on staff. I was a student.

I learned more from my one-on-one conversations with Shanks than I did from any of the "scholarly" activities the summer camp offered. He inspired me.

I saw the spark in him then. That's why when I heard last Thursday that Shanks, who is now a 38-year-old UNL graduate student, had vowed to go on a hunger strike, I wasn't terribly surprised.

In his own impassioned way, Shanks was giving us all some food for thought.

Unfortunately, I think it is going to take the people of this university a long time to digest everything that has gone down since members of Sigma Chi fraternity decided to "uphold tradition" and burn a cross in the presence of Civil War paraphernalia.

Shanks was among those who just couldn't stomach such an

empty-headed act. So he offered leaders of UNL's student organizations an ultimatum: Publicly denounce racism or watch me starve.

It was an admittedly simple, yet admirable, request — one that shouldn't have had to be made. It seems some people at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are still stuck on square one in the Civil Rights movement. In fact, they may have just gotten into the game.

It took four days for Shanks to get what he felt was a satisfactory response: phone calls from Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen and ASUN President Eric Marintzer promising that a formal statement would be drafted Monday evening denouncing racism and proposing future campus-wide discourse on the subject.

Shanks quickly washed down the good news with a celebratory peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

The statement was drafted. The "discourse" has begun.

The Association of the Students of the University of Nebraska is demanding that student organizations state in their constitutions that they do not discriminate "on the basis of a person's age, race, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, creed, handicap or place of residence." And some organizations have already "reaffirmed" their dedication to that end.

But it wasn't until Tuesday, when members of the Afrikan Peoples' Union met with university administrators and members of Sigma Chi

and the NAACP, that people on both sides of the cross-burning issue were able to sit across the table from one another to seriously discuss the implications of the incident.

Though nothing solid came out of that meeting, it was said to be the first step in paving the way to a resolution.

That all sounds very nice (and strangely familiar), but I've got a gut feeling that Shanks and the rest of us who were so disturbed by Sigma Chi's actions might be getting a political pacifier shoved down our throats.

If I'm wrong, I'd be more than happy to eat my words.

I just hope all of us aren't left starving for justice.

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AARON STECKELBERG/DN

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