

J.J.
HARDER

Have book, will read

Return education to the mantle of states

Last week President Clinton unveiled 10 principles of education in his State of the Union address, challenging schools and parents alike to increase our nation's

standing in the world in regard to educational standards.

His speech called for better-paid teachers, technologically advanced classrooms,

parental choice in schooling and tax credits for college tuition, among other proposals. It was surprisingly bipartisan, and I was even encouraged to think that our nation could make some progressive strides towards international contention in terms of academics.

However, there was one main idea the president announced that did not sit too well in my mind.

Clinton's "America Reads" initiative is a contradiction in and of itself. This program calls for college students across the nation to volunteer to read to young children in a work-study program to increase the literacy rate among our school-age children who are having troubles reading.

It initially sounds like a good plan, but think about it in a fundamental sense: **paid volunteers!**

These theoretical individuals



MATT HANEY/DN

would be receiving wages for a service, and yet would still be referred to as volunteers?

Sure, I want every 8-year-old in America (not counting illegal immigrants) to be able to read, but do we really need to pay people to do it? Can we continue to call them volunteers under the circumstances? And should the federal government be financing this pathetic attempt at increasing literacy? I don't think so.

How about if we return educational control to the states? Then we might be able to fund these programs on a localized and specified basis.

It is obvious that our country needs to do something to help everyone learn to read, but let's not

try to kid ourselves by paying desperate college kids to do a service each community could do itself on a true volunteer scale.

I remember going to the public library as a little kid, sitting cross-legged on the floor listening to the senior citizen in front of me read me an excellent selection of "Dr. Seuss" or "Sweet Pickles" as a volunteer trying to encourage me to read.

Aside from the old lady's frequent trips to the bathroom to change her Depends, the experience was very enjoyable. A member of the community took time out of her busy schedule to get me excited about reading, and her ploy definitely worked. I learned to read before preschool, and actually continue

reading today.

Situations resembling my childhood library experience can be put into practice still today. Even though it seems our 1990s fast-paced lifestyles and busy schedules do not allow for any volunteering, I am sure that many community members can squeeze in an occasional tutoring session, and I imagine that elementary education majors in college could use a volunteering stint with illiterate children just as much as they could a paid position.

It will not be easy to increase literacy without having government funding, but with that extra individual effort, children can also see the value of hard work in conjunction with community involvement.

So then it does take a village to raise a child? Oh no, definitely not, but it does take a community to help the kids who are lagging behind.

Families are where the raising should occur. Parents can read to their sons and daughters every night, and teachers can use their instruction to advance the children during the day.

As for the college students who would be out of an easy buck — sorry kids.

Harder is a sophomore broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Kasey
KERBER

No regrets

Saying 'no' to sex takes serious strength

I'm a virgin.

Tell me what you thought when I said that. Were you shocked? Did you find it humorous?

Or maybe you didn't even give it a second thought.

But I doubt it.

To be a virgin in today's society is to not be a part of today's society. Unlike sex, you don't talk about

it with friends, brag about it to strangers or wear it around like a badge of honor.

You hide it.

And the time has come for us to ask why.

For me, the answers aren't hard to find. Sex is common in our environment. It was in high school, it is now in college and it will be beyond.

If you aren't having sex, you've had sex. If you haven't had sex — you're telling others you have.

And if the "virgins" do pop up, you either feel sorry for them or make them feel out of place.

Look inside and tell me I'm wrong. It might be harder than you think.

But before you judge those who have taken a different stance on sex, evaluate your own views for a moment.

For a moment I want you to answer a few questions.

To whom did you lose your

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To whom did you lose your virginity? Are you still with them? And if you had it to do all over again — would you have done it?”

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There are those out there who will have no regret in their hearts or uncertainty on their lips. But then there are those who aren't so sure.

They lost their virginity in a dark, loud room or the backseat of a car. Everything happened like a blur and before they had a chance to sort it out — it was over.

And the innocence was lost before the car door opened or the lights were turned on.

And somewhere out there are pregnant girls, scared and alone in a world where contraceptives and a lover's words could not protect them the "first time."

And somewhere out there are the guys who hit and ran, spurred off by the girl who thought there was something between them and sex would only "help."

And somewhere out there are the AIDS victims — no longer virgins — but infected bodies with time drifting past them like an icy wind.

Somewhere out there is you — maybe not pregnant, maybe not

scared off, maybe not infected.

But someday you'll meet the one person who will change your world forever. You'll fall in love, look into his or her eyes and at some intimate moment — have to ask:

"Am I safe with you?"

You may never know the true answer. But it is my hope that everyone — virgins or not, will find the love in life they deserve.

But it is also my hope that if you have patience and a hope for a life without uncertainty — you'll wait.

Now maybe there are virgins out there wavering between their beliefs and the special someone in their lives.

If you're one of them, ask your significant other this important question: If you love me, can you not wait until we are married?

If the answer is anything but yes, reconsider your love. It might not be all of what you thought it was.

And if you've already had sex — it's true that you've given up your virginity and nothing can get it back.

But you can still decide whether to live your life by previous beliefs

or those sculpted from the moment you opened the car door or turned on the light.

It's never too late to make a change in your life, relationship or both. All it takes is strength from inside and courage to let the words carry it to the outside.

And all of this brings me back to the beginning of this column — where we find the virgins hiding, branded or mocked.

Just consider one thing — it takes far less strength to mock a virgin than it does to live your entire life "saving yourself" for the one special person to come along.

Respect a virgin's decision not to have sex just like you want someone to respect your decision to have sex.

Too often after virgins open up this part of their lives, they receive ridicule. All they want to receive is understanding.

Personally, I've had to open my own life up to write this column. My girlfriend and I had a serious discussion, and I wanted to make sure she was OK with the idea — mainly because I opened not only my life up to ridicule, but hers as well.

But when I asked her if it was OK, she smiled at me and said simply: "I understand ..."

If only virginity was as easy to understand as how much she loves me ...

... and why we're going to wait.

Kerber is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

