

# They're only human

## Partisan voters deny independents significance



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The most recent scandal involving our president has caused me to wonder: What hasn't he been accused of? Has he made any pacts with the Prince of Darkness? Has he ever copulated with an animal? Has he ever cheated on his taxes?

I'm beginning to think that our president has no regard for generally accepted beliefs about what's right and wrong, but I don't care. He hasn't been such a bad president. He may not be the reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln or FDR, but he hasn't really screwed up the country, yet.

Sure, it's possible (even likely) that he's engaged in extramarital sexual activity, but is that really such a

bad thing for a president (or any other elected official) to do? Absolutely not.

Adultery is a perfectly acceptable practice these days. If a person decides his or her marriage is unsatisfactory, that person should feel free to pursue other relationships. I'm not married, but if I ever do enter into that relationship, I want to have an open marriage. The practice of lifelong monogamy by married couples is hopelessly old-fashioned. Why should our public servants be expected to maintain this archaic standard?

Furthermore, politicians work hard for the American people. Their jobs are stress-filled and demoralizing. They may, on occasion, need a passionate affair with a luscious young woman or man for rejuvenation and relaxation.

Adultery may be perfectly OK, but what about less-than-honorable business practices? Should a politician's history of shady business dealings be held against him or her? I don't think so.

Hey, somebody has to make money. Giving other people the shaft to make a buck is what the American dream is all about. In this world, only two types of people exist: exploiters and victims. You must choose which

one you will be.

I don't mind being a victim, but some elected officials would rather exploit the weak. That's fine with me. If you love money, you should amass it any way you can.

Speaking of money, how do you feel about campaign finance reform? I don't like it.

Why should we care about the origins of politicians' campaign funds? Running a political campaign depletes candidates' coffers rapidly. I'd hate to have my fund-raising hands tied by a bunch of bureaucratic campaign finance laws.

Some people support these laws using the logic that candidates could be bribed into voting a certain way if they received a large donation from a given group. This may be true, but I doubt most politicians would allow themselves to be so easily manipulated. I know I wouldn't.

For example, if I were a senatorial candidate and the National Rifle Association was foolish enough to send me a donation, the gun-toters wouldn't be buying my vote. I'd still vote in favor of gun-control legislation. I have complete faith in the leaders of this country to vote as their consciences dictate. We don't need campaign-finance regulations.

Some people become upset when politicians fail to make good on their campaign promises. Some people believe that politicians have a tendency to make promises in order to win votes, even if they have no intention of attempting to fulfill these promises.

While I can understand voters' frustration, I don't think they should become too upset. I'm sure our elected officials try to do what they've promised to do. They'd never make a promise during a campaign just to win votes.

For example, it seems like almost every candidate promises to try to cut taxes, but tax rates continue to increase. Some see this as a failure on the politicians' part, but is that really a fair view? Certainly not. I'm sure our politicians labor night and day combating tax increases. It's just that we voters keep demanding more and more of our government.

Since government-funded programs aren't free, our taxes go up. High taxes are our fault; they don't represent a failure on the part of our elected officials.

I guess I have only one bone to pick with some of the fine people we've elected to public office: Why do they feel the need to present them-

selves as such moral supermen? They're just human beings, so why do they insist on trying to look like demigods?

Just once, I'd like to hear a politician make a speech like this: "Sure, I cheat on my spouse. Who doesn't? And yes, I smoked a little dope in college, but who didn't? I've made my money ruthlessly, and I'm not ashamed of it. Family values ... what the hell are those?"

"In conclusion, I'd like to say that I'll vote the way I promise to vote, but don't expect any miracles. I'm not the Messiah. I'm just an imperfect human being, but I'll do the best job I can."

I'd much rather hear one speech like this one than 10,000 of the sanctimonious, professional speech writer-written, b.s.-filled monologues we hear from politicians now. I just wish our politicians could feel free to be honest about their personal lives. Why should we let our outdated moral principles prevent us from electing qualified people to public office?

I'll be glad when our leaders can be free to philander and exploit if they so desire.

Because, hey, we all know that character doesn't matter. It's the issues that count, right?

# Three's a crowd

## Independents are denied significance of partisan voters



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A small but revealing miracle went all but unnoticed about a week and a half ago right here in Lincoln.

It went almost unnoticed by the media, receiving only a couple of paragraphs in the Daily Nebraskan. There were no group discussions or radio call-in shows devoted to exploring this nearly unprecedented event. Life continued as normal.

But the significance of this miracle should not be overlooked. For the first time in recent memory, a bill passed through a domestic legislative body with little argument from representatives of either political party.

There were no heated debates.

Few senators wasted time wrestling with possible outcomes or consequences should the bill be embraced or rejected.

In fact, there was almost a total consensus across the board.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. George Coordsen of Hebron, would have allowed registered independent voters the option of casting partisan ballots in Nebraska's primary elections.

According to the bill, these voters would have been given a voice in the selection of Democratic or Republican Party candidates for the county, state and national elections.

Coordsen said in a Jan. 22 DN article that LB905 was an attempt to "rejuvenate interest in politics" and encourage "more of the state's large number of independent voters to vote."

But surprise, surprise! You guessed it, dear reader; the proposal was resoundingly rejected by members from both parties, sent back in exile to the nether region to rest in peace with the rest of the ludicrous, failed proposals.

In the same article, Beth Smith, executive director for the Nebraska Republican Party, and Ken Haar, executive director for the Nebraska Democratic Party, BOTH AGREED (a miracle!) that the bill, if passed, would reduce their parties' political influence.

Well, we can't have that, can we? After all, the political system of the United States may cease to exist as we know it, and what a tragedy that would be!

Smith and Haar, and every other political representative associated with the country's two ruling parties, are probably justified in feeling somewhat threatened by the possibility of those not indoctrinated contaminating the political balance by having a voice in the Republican and Democratic primary processes.

And after all, as Smith said in the article, independent voters are free to align themselves with either political party if they wish to vote in the primary elections.

In other words, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Besides, "like us," she said, "they have the ultimate vote in November."

But while I can't help but be amazed at an actual agreement across the partisan board, I am also not surprised that both parties agreed to keep their talons firmly embedded in the political pie.

According to figures from the office of the secretary of state for Nebraska, there were more than 127,000 registered independent voters in the state as of Feb. 27, 1997. While that figure may not seem like much when compared to the 502,030 registered Republicans or the 384,667 registered Democrats (not including military or absentee voters), independent voters still make up a consequential

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minority of voters.

No small wonder, then, that Nebraska senators agreed to refuse the growing numbers of disenfranchised independent voters equal footing with partisan voters.

There's no compelling reason, many say, to allow independent voters into the inner sanctum of the primary process of a party they don't belong to.

After all, they can vote in the national elections and for candidates of any party they choose, right?

The Republican and Democratic parties aren't the only ones on the ballot, correct?

Ah, but that is not entirely an accurate statement. It's true factually, but let's be honest — what chance do third party and independent candidates truly have to gain power in the current political system?

Michael Parenti is a social and political scientist who received his doctorate in 1962 from Yale University. He has been described as a major voice for the political progressives in the United States and has taught at Howard University and California State University in Northridge.

Parenti points out in his 1995 book, "Democracy for the Few," that the rules in place for independent and third-party candidates are restrictive. What's more, these regulations were made by representatives and officials from both of the ruling parties.

These political leaders claim to be looking after our collective interest by keeping the "kooks" and frivolous candidates out of the election process.

But according to Parenti's book, Iowa and New Hampshire, states

which require only 1,000 signatures and allow ample time for independent and third-party candidates to gain access to the ballot, have not been overrun with radical Nazi candidates from hell.

Still, it comes as no shock that most states have laws which often discourage third-party candidates access to the ballot. In fact, many states, including California, Missouri and Oklahoma, require tens of thousands of signatures to even allow the voting public to consider choosing them for office.

In Nebraska, registered voters who sign a petition for an independent or third-party candidate are banned from voting in the primaries — whether they are a registered Republican or Democrat or not.

And in national elections, Parenti said, third-party candidates must have 750,000 signatures to get placed on the ballot in all 50 states, whereas Republican and Democratic candidates only have to get 25,000 signatures.

According to the Federal Election Campaign Act, millions of public dollars are awarded for Republican and Democratic national conventions, primaries and presidential elections.

In contrast, third parties only receive funding after an election, and then only if they garnish 5 percent of the national vote.

There seems to be a paradox, here, being perpetrated by the ruling parties. Without funding — and the subsequent, extremely expensive advertising and campaigning — no candidate is likely to receive significant voting shares. And without voting shares, no public funds are forthcoming.

In addition, the abysmal voting

percentages in this country (one of the lowest in the industrialized world) only serve to keep the status quo firmly in place, with no real reform to the selection process on the horizon.

Reagan's "overwhelming victories" in the national elections of 1980 and 1984, for example, were made possible by receiving only 30 percent of the vote from the eligible voting public — almost 50 percent of those eligible to vote stayed home.

Parenti's book referred to several surveys regarding voter apathy, including one that found many voters were angry and frustrated about the choices available. And another survey found that most of the nation's eighth graders believed third parties in the political system were actually illegal!

Perhaps it's the constant "battle of the powers that be" — hurling allegations of stealing ideas, digging through personal garbage and name calling — that serves to keep the public distracted from the real matters at hand.

It's like some kind of soap opera, only this one has a multi-billion dollar budget and is being paid by each and every taxpayer.

In this era of selling candidates like a bar of soap, it's a small wonder then that many voters take no more interest in participating in the electoral process than they do in their decision on which brand of shampoo to use.

And the last thing either of the major parties need or want is another political group gaining a foothold and shaking things up. They can agree on that.

Will miracles never cease?