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Our
VIEW

Execution decision

Proposed death penalty change more humane

A bill proposed in the Nebraska Legislature would change the manner in which the state executes citizens it has deemed most dangerous.

LB1308, a bill proposed by Omaha Sen. Kermit Brashear, would allow people on death row to choose to be executed either by lethal injection or by electrocution.

“*LB1308 may be a way to make this practice as painless as possible.*”

While the bill is certain to spark debate on the very necessity of the death penalty in Nebraska, the simple fact remains that a lethal injection is much more humane than the electric chair ever could be. Even the National Humane Society has

banned electrocution as a method for killing animals.

But Nebraska, in the company of such esteemed states as Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee, continues this backward manner of killing. LB1308 may be a way to make this practice as painless as possible.

The option to have a fatal, virtually painless substance injected into your body certainly would be more humane than thousands of volts of electric current burning your insides.

And because it seems the Legislature will not eliminate state-supported capital punishment, it should at least carry out the deaths in the most humane way.

Still, even though using lethal injections is more “civilized” than electrocution, this option should not make executions more frequent or acceptable.

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers warned this bill would “sanitize” the execution process, making it easier for the state to kill its own citizens, however undesirable they may be. The Nebraskans for Peace, Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty and Amnesty International also have denounced the bill, saying it is an attempt to paint a pretty picture of death.

Ultimately, many of these groups fear this calmer, quieter method of execution would lead to more executions. For example, Texas, which currently uses the injection method, by June 1997 had executed 127 inmates since 1976.

That’s a far cry from the three executed in Nebraska in the last two decades.

LB1308 should pass, but it should not be an excuse for the zealous supporters of the death penalty – those that party outside the Nebraska state penitentiary on execution days – to kill more people.

Death is the ultimate penalty anyone can receive, and though many argue whether it should be administered by the state, with the laws as they stand, lethal injection is the best option.

Haney's
VIEW



Jumping the gun

The rush for fighting in Iraq should be reconsidered



JOSHUA GILLIN is a senior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan opinion editor.

As I sit, safe in my office, safe from the cruelty of the world, a friend of mine may be preparing to die.

He is a private first class in the Marine Corps. He is soon to be promoted to lance corporal. He is a tank commander for an armored division. He is stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C., as I write this, receiving secondary armored training.

And he may be sent to fight in Iraq, unless Saddam Hussein backs off and allows the United States to have its way.

Tuesday morning, when Bill Clinton announced that “Iraq must agree, and soon, to free, full and unfettered access to (weapons) sites anywhere in the country,” my immediate reaction was, “Why?”

Why must the leader of a sovereign nation turn over access of his country to every and any industrial power on the block?

Why does Iraq feel the need to allow U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in “with an open mind and free will,” while barring all U.S. inspectors?

Why do the would-be warlords of the U.S. armed forces want to mobilize thousands of troops and billions of dollars in equipment to flex their political muscles and military might for the rest of the world?

Why should we, as citizens, support any of these actions?

And why should my friend be sent to his possible death?

This isn’t Desert Storm we’re talking about, now. We aren’t going to play with our toys in the sand in an attempt to keep gas prices down. This would potentially turn into a drag-out fight against a barely industrialized Third World nation that has the confidence-

inspiring factor of being the underdog.

The possibility of little U.N. support coupled with the threat of involvement by other major nations, such as a huge, near-viable economic power just to the north (this time *formerly* communist), a lack of popularity among U.S. citizens, an obscure set of goals and a fighting force not motivated to really accomplish anything is a sure recipe for disaster.

Ask Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, a Vietnam vet or anyone alive between 1965 and 1975 about that one.

I’m not knocking the military, and I’m surely not taking anything away from the accomplishments of those who fought while I was in junior high or before, but this is not yet a situation to go to war over. The stern words and harsh threats by the presidential administration, the conservative military and a public whose opinions are clouded by societal propaganda and a warlike historical account are not enough to justify a full-scale assault on the Middle East.

I know this has been said before, but people die in wars. People like Pfc. Juan Alvarez of the United States Marine Corps. Like Lt. Adam Lincicum of the U.S. Army. Like Lt. Judith Gillin of the U.S. Air Force – my mother. Like Seaman Kevin Gillin of the U.S. Navy – my brother.

None of these people are dead. All of my relatives are now retired from the service, but they could have been in a war, as my father was. The other two are friends of mine, and by the end of the day, they could be in another war.

But now, since our society has become so enraptured in its own myth of superiority, now that we see military involvement as the end-all, be-all of diplomatic relations, now that our nation’s soldiers are simply numbers in a war machine’s calculator, it is OK to send our brothers and sisters to fight and die on foreign soil for ... for what?

Peace?
Solidarity?
The security of the world community?

Or is it something more sinister? Perhaps the Department of Defense wants to justify its budget to a nation with crumbling schools and overburdened welfare doles. Or we have a president attempting to draw fire away from personal controversies. Or we have a Congress tiring of its failed and

futile attempts to discard a president with a high approval rating and a “D” behind his name on the ballot.

Our country’s standing armed forces are arguably the most highly trained and well-equipped the world has ever seen. Our soldiers and officers are more educated, more skilled and more prepared for emergencies than at any other time in our country’s short history.

But I hear nary a word of a soldier chomping at the bit to lay waste to the cradle of civilization.

Maybe that should be telling us something. It’s been more than 50 years since the country was united in a war against a common foe. Hitler’s Germany and Hirohito’s Japan provided unmistakable enemies for our hate to be directed at. Both fallen empires were the epitome of evil, the very scourge that our nation spit out of its collective soul.

Or so we thought.

The wars – skirmishes, really, in the grand scheme of things – that followed proved a sorrowful legacy to the fighting men and women who died in Europe and the Pacific. Places like Pusan, Khe San, Hue and Kuwait City replaced Tarawa, Peleliu, Verdun and Berlin. There is no Pearl Harbor, only the Persian Gulf. There is no real threat here.

Except, perhaps, from ourselves. If more than just one-third of our leaders had military experience, if more than just 6 percent of our nation’s youth joined the service, if more than petty tyrants and political dealings forced us to throw down the gauntlet, our country would remember what it is like to have friends and relatives fight and die.

I can only speak for myself. I plan to give up three or so years of my life to the military, to relinquish my individuality and become a part of something much larger than myself. I plan to subscribe to the myth of American ingenuity and excellence, if only to find out for myself that it is no longer true. No one can truly teach me otherwise.

And when I hear of these attempts at nobility, I do get frightened. I don’t want to die thousands of miles from home for a cause I don’t believe in. However, as long as our leaders don’t know any better, it will continue to happen.

But I hope not today.

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