

Bring it on home

Update the Husker state with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll for all



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Lincoln is the most boring place I have ever lived.

Most people don't even know this city or the state of Nebraska exists (well, other than during football season, of course, but even then most people couldn't point out Nebraska on a map if their lives depended on it).

Still, I have had good times here. The people have treated me well and I haven't been shot at in more than six months. This column is my way of saying thanks to the city of Lincoln, the state of Nebraska and its people. I have come up with a few ways to put them on the map and to make the Cornhusker state the pride and joy of this nation (well, I am guessing more joy than pride).

First of all, I propose to make Nebraska the Amsterdam of the United States. The state should legalize marijuana and lower the drinking age to 14. This would attract all underage spring-breakers to Lincoln and create the revenue that would make up for the loss of federal assistance for roads and other programs.

Sure, the national government would hang us out to dry (literally), but we'd have a hell of a time doing it. Have you ever listened to people talking about Amsterdam as if it were some magical place, a mystic city where hash clouds can be cut with a knife?

Or how people marvel at the low drinking age of Germany? Their eyes light up, and they get this enchanted look of longing for booze. This would be the result of such legislation.

People would talk about Nebraska as if we were the entertainment Mecca of the country. Screw New York or Los Angeles, the action would be right here in the Bible Belt.

There would never be any talk about a brain drain, nobody would ever want to leave the state, and people from all over the country would want to enroll at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Recruiting for the Athletic Department also would be a breeze because we would have something no other school could offer.

And here is the craziest part: People would actually want to live in western Nebraska. I know, it sounds silly

now, but just wait. Farmers would have to make minor adjustments, like growing cannabis plants instead of corn, and eventually our athletic teams would be known as the Hemphuskers, but what is so bad about that?

The loss of all federal funds would only be a temporary setback. Eventually, I expect more than 50 percent of the population to live in Nebraska; then we would have a majority in both houses of Congress.

While the Legislature is at it also would waive such stupid laws as a speed limit or any restrictions on gambling other than certain card tricks.

One problem is the geographical monotony. Nobody is ever going to come here if we don't have beaches and mountains. Still, it is nothing to really worry about. We could find every unemployed person in the state and have them dig a huge hole next to Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island, creating the Osborne Ocean.

All the dirt could be piled up somewhere and just like that, we have created the North Platte Ski Resort. Good old Franklin D. Roosevelt did something similar in the 1930s, and I admit I have copied this part of my master plan.

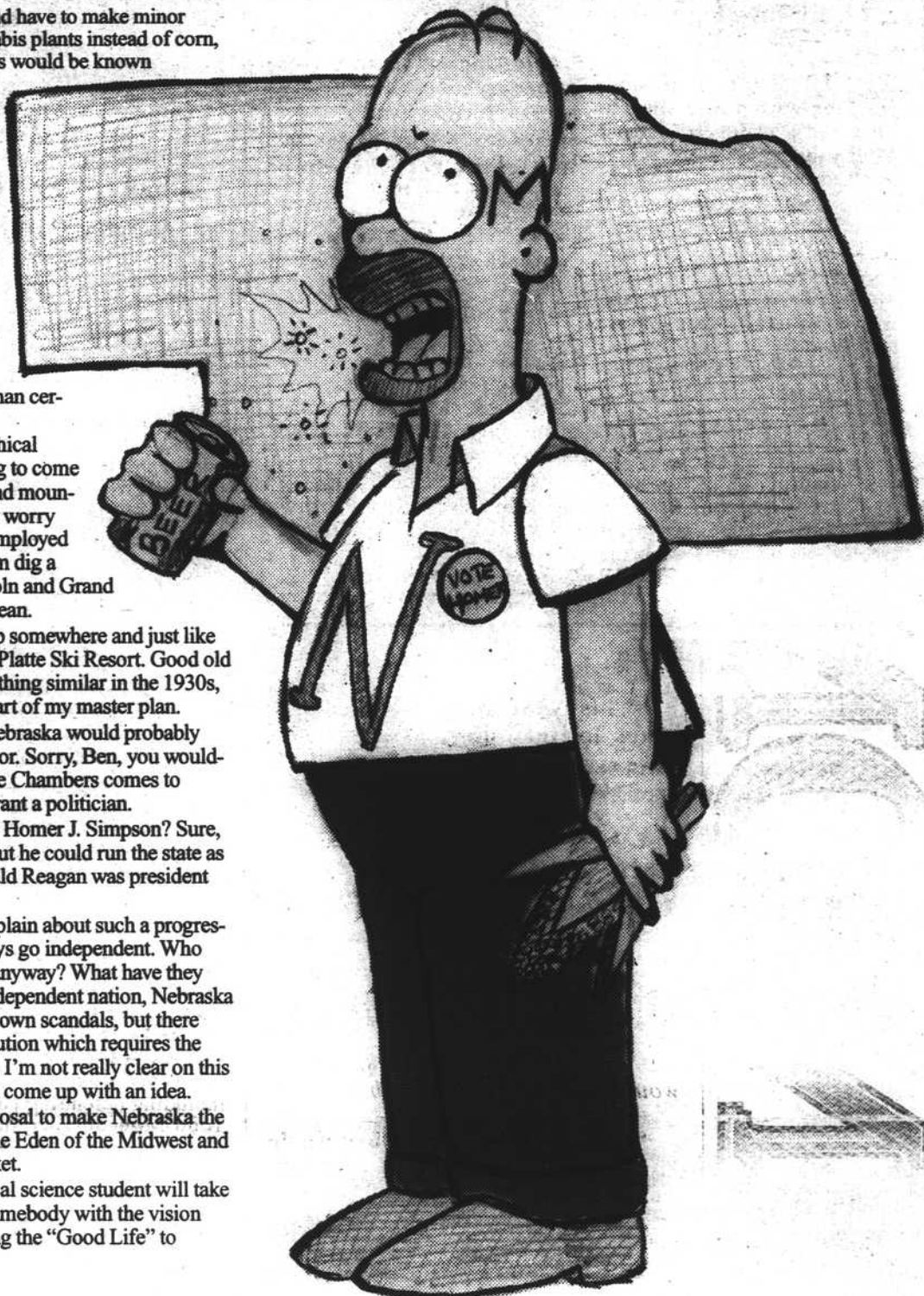
Talking about presidents, Nebraska would probably need a more flamboyant governor. Sorry, Ben, you wouldn't cut it as a Hemphusker. Ernie Chambers comes to mind, but maybe we wouldn't want a politician.

How about an actor, such as Homer J. Simpson? Sure, he is only a cartoon character, but he could run the state as well as anybody. After all, Ronald Reagan was president for eight years.

If anybody would ever complain about such a progressive state, Nebraska could always go independent. Who needs the federal government, anyway? What have they ever done for us? Sure, as an independent nation, Nebraska would have to come up with its own scandals, but there could be a clause in the Constitution which requires the legislators to sleep with interns. I'm not really clear on this part just yet, but somebody will come up with an idea.

Well, there you go, my proposal to make Nebraska the Valhalla of the United States, the Eden of the Midwest and the bong of the world's pot basket.

I'm sure some bright political science student will take it from here and run with it - somebody with the vision and determination to really bring the "Good Life" to Nebraska.



The grade escape

UNL's no-minus policy harms our academic reputation



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The Great American Job - you want it, I want it, and right now every graduating senior is trying to get it.

Career services, Internet listings, and connections with friends and family are our paths through the forest ending at mountain villages of cushy leather seats and electric pencil sharpeners. Let's face it, we would rid ourselves of our booze for the right job (OK, probably not; I used the booze thing to stress the point).

About two weeks ago I had a job interview with a chemical company in the Career Services office. During the interview, he asked the typical interviewer questions:

"Why did you decide on chemical engineering?"

"What made you interested in our company?"

"How can you see a damn thing with that fat-ass Portuguese nose of yours?"

However, that day he asked a very different question. He said, "Why does your transcript not have minus grades? Where are the B- or the C-?"

I had no answer for him. For the first time in my life, my big fat mouth was involuntary shut. He continued about how his alma mater had minus grades and that our scale must be inflated compared to other universities.

I had no idea what to say, what to think, what to do. I was at a loss. After the interview, I decided to investigate.

Rummaging through the hollowed student government office for some information about grading scales, I compared our university's grading scale versus the rest of the nation's universities. I found that our grading scheme of A+, A, B+, B, etc. falls quite short; 54.7 percent of all universities have a five-point grading system of A, B, C, D and F, and 31.1 percent have a 13-point system of A+, A-, B+, B-, and so on.

The percentage of universities that use our grading system is 7.8 percent, with the remaining 6.4 percent having varying grade scales. I'm not saying we should change everything because very few universities use our grading system, but what deserves attention is why many universities contain minuses or don't contain pluses. The numerical values for the letter grades are also different. With the 13-point system, a B+ is 3.33, whereas a B- is 2.67. A grade of B in both five- and 13-point scales is 3.00.

The problem with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's scale is that it's skewed on the positive side; thus the scale is possibly inflated, which cheapens the value of our GPA in the national scope. For example, a friend of mine who is applying to law school used a national service to distribute his grade information to different law schools. This national service normalizes the GPAs of students across the nation. The service, taking into account UNL's reputation, approximately lowered his GPA 0.2 points in relation to other universities.

I'm not necessarily correlating our possibly inflated grade scale to the nation's view of our school, but I do believe our current scale belittles university attempts in developing academic respect. This is why I feel a change in our grading system also should accompany the chancellor's plans to increase the rigor of our classes.

While the actual grade inflation hinders this institution, for us graduating seniors, the mere belief that our grading scale causes grade inflation is actually the most damaging. With career placement, an employment recruiter looking at our transcripts and seeing only letter grades and letter grade pluses without any minuses will immediately be convinced that this college has inflated GPAs, even through this may not be true.

It is certainly possible that the simple ease of classes could be the cause of inflated GPAs, not necessari-

ly the grade scale, but an interviewer would never know from looking at a transcript that we have inflated grades from ease of classes. However, he or she would certainly assume grade inflation from the lack of minus grades in our transcripts.

Next in this journey of academic marksmanship is: Which academic scale should we adopt? The majority of universities use the five- or 13-point systems as I have mentioned earlier. Which scheme would help our university and students the most? I personally condone the five-point system of A, B, C, D and F.

First, I seriously question a professor's ability to make accurate distinctions of individual accomplishments in a class when a variety of choices exist. In the 13-point system, an 87 would be a "B+" and an 83 would be a "B-." Does a difference of four points justify a 0.67 difference in the class GPA for someone? A professor, or anyone for that matter, could not make a fair and honest decision with the 13-point system.

With the five-point system, a professor could locate clusters of students with similar grades at the end of the semester. The cluster of students with the highest grades would receive scores of 90 and above and thus receive an A, the second-highest group scoring 80 to 90 would receive a B and so on. With the five-point system, the possibility of error occurring when assigning grades is reduced to a minimum, and the possibly of

GPA inflation from the grading scale is nullified.

As a flip side to this academic coin, how would the five-point system benefit students? Since there is a difference of one GPA point between grades, this will invariably force students to rely on personal achievement rather than on a half-hearted push with the hope of lady luck for one-half of a GPA point.

Trust me, I am also condemning my collegiate lifestyle by stating this. I prefer to view this as swallowing the bitter academic medicine. At first it will taste like dorm food, but then taking everything into account, it is for the best. The extra effort outreaches our own personal academic standing, and our heightened work ethic increases the value of this university and therefore increases the value of our degrees.

The time has come for UNL to take a step in become a more mature campus. Personally, I do believe that the mean GPA of this campus will drop 0.2 to 0.3 points with the five-point system, but I would welcome this change. Instead of our alumni gloating about their college days saying, "I graduated with a 3.85!", they should say, "I graduated from the University of Nebraska!"

A grading scale change to the five-point system is a step in this direction and would rid us of our current scholastic wheelchair and eventually create a healthier student body and university.