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Our
VIEW

Voter confusion

Some decisions better left for legislators

As tools of popular power, ballot initiatives can have positive effects.

They can give everyday people a chance to go over the heads of their legislators and to enact legitimate, much-needed change.

But when the initiatives deal with complicated issues and offer uncertain results, they also can remind citizens of why they elect government representatives to interpret bills and enact laws in the first place.

This year, Nebraskans are faced with two such ballot initiatives, 413 and 414.

Proponents of 414 claim it will lower telephone access charges, and, therefore, lower Nebraskans' long distance bills; opponents say it will raise Nebraskans' monthly bills for basic phone service.

The amount of money being pumped into both campaigns from corporate sponsors has left many wondering just who is really going to profit from the initiative.

AT&T has contributed more than \$2 million to the Committee to Vote Yes for Lower Phone Bills, the group that funded the petition drive to get Initiative 414 on the ballot. Local phone companies, including Aliant Communications and US West in Omaha, have given money to Nebraskans to Protect Our Phone Services, the group opposing 414 that has been able to raise about \$800,000.

Both groups are spending their money on advertisements that have not clarified the issue, and voters are still guessing about the real effects of its possible passage.

Muddying the election waters even more is Initiative 413, the proposed constitutional amendment to limit state revenue and spending. Proponents of the initiative say it will lower property taxes. Opponents say education will sustain a hit — one totaling more than \$20 million for the University of Nebraska. Many opponents have said if the initiative passes, they will contest its constitutionality, because it will make more than one change to the Constitution with one ballot initiative.

Meanwhile, the countdown to election continues. Voters are running out of time to gain an understanding of exactly what each initiative will do, and campaign advertising on television is not going to provide answers.

Many votes may be cast in confusion, and that's dangerous.

If both initiatives were presented as bills to the Legislature during its regular session, legislators could conduct more in-depth investigations of the measures, amendments could be made, and — just maybe — the initiatives' passage could be justified.

This would take the decisions out of the voters hands, directly, but it also would take away the burden of thousands of voters trying to make sense of chaos with a small amount of data.

Unless voters conduct an in-depth analysis of the initiatives themselves, voting in favor of either of them would be a foolish act.

Mook's
VIEW



Mighty North Dakotans

Nebraskans don't understand real winter



JOSH WIMMER is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Somebody shivered and said to me the other day, "I hate it when it gets cold."

I said, "Me too. That's why I moved to Nebraska. Weirdo."

Uff da.
I am a North Dakotan. Hear me roar!

Y'know, it wasn't until I actually got to Lincoln that I became proud of my state heritage. I mean, for 18 years, I couldn't wait to leave North Dakota. It was a snowy, flat, barren wasteland. I could not conceive of a single possible advantage to growing up there.

And then I came to Nebraska.
I swear to God, I felt like Superman.

Y'know how on Krypton he would have been just a normal guy? But then he came to Earth and our Yellow Sun™ turned him into the Man of Steel?

Well, that's what it's like for me. I mean, I see you guys pulling on your heavy parkas when it's like 10 degrees below zero. Ho ho ho! Oh, my goodness!

In North Dakota, we affectionately refer to that as "long-sleeved shirt weather."

And then I'll hear you guys talking about "the wind chill factor." You still believe in the wind chill factor!

Oh, you puny, silly, darling little mortals. Didn't you know? The wind chill factor is a Communist plot, invented in the 1960s to intimidate the American people. Fear of it was supposed to keep us from invading Siberia.

But it's not real. I know. Because when it gets as cold as it's supposed to get with the "wind chill" in effect, the wind freezes! I know you've never seen that before, but I grew up with it. So trust me on that.

Even my car has superpowers in this state.

I mean, I've noticed that sometimes during "winter" down here, your little vehicles won't start, just because

it's a balmy 3 degrees Fahrenheit.

I just want you to know: When that happens, my car is laughing at all of yours.

It just can't imagine what would happen if North Dakotan cars had trouble starting at 3 above zero.

We wouldn't be able to go anywhere during December and January.

We already have to plug our cars in at night to insure they'll start in the morning. If our cars were little wussies like Nebraskan cars, we'd have to keep 'em plugged in to drive, too.

And instead of just leaving their motors running in the parking lots when we went in to buy groceries, we have to actually have someone drive our cars around so they wouldn't shut off in the 15-minute interval.

Yep, I am He-Man, and y'all are Teela. My car is Battle Cat, and yours is Cringer.

And it's not just a seasonal thing. You folks really don't understand what "summer" entails either.

In the Red River Valley of the North, conveniently situated next to the 10,000 lakes of Minnesota, summer means moisture.

And moisture means mosquitoes. I'm not talking about the one bug bite you guys are used to every couple weeks during July.

I'm talking about a living fleet of creatures who form their own sovereign nation.

We make treaties with them. For example, they can suck our blood if they just do their damndest to keep the Canadians out.

(Just don't betray them. I had a little sister, once....)

Anyway, point is: Dealing with your measly pretend mosquitoes makes me feel superhuman, too.

What else can I do that's awesome?

Oh, you mean besides the time I drank Thor, God of Thunder, under the table?

Seriously, you guys. USA Today reported that between June of

1996 and July of 1997, North Dakotans went through 17.5 million gallons of alcohol.

And there are only about 600,000 of us.

And that means, if you don't count one-third of the population — a reasonable estimate, I think — the North Dakotan people consumed almost 44 gallons of alcohol, in 13 months, each.

Hell yes, we're superheroes. And if some of you out there doubt me, I welcome you to just see how many drinks you can buy me before I collapse. Just try it. C'mon.

Oh, my poor little Nebraska buddies, my little Jimmy Olsons, if you've read this far, you're probably suffering from a mad inferiority complex by now.

Don't sweat it. You've still got the Huskers.

(Even if one of the only notable athletes to go from this school to the pros in the last four years — without getting arrested, that is — was one Darin Erstad of Jamestown, N.D.)

And if you're very, very nice to me, maybe someday I'll let you come home with me for Christmas. You'll have to wear one of those insulated suits the astronauts wear to go out in space — but you can still come.

And you can experience the secret jewel that is North Dakota, if only for a week. And maybe some of our magic will rub off on you.

If you're real, real lucky.
Uff da.



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