

It's party time

Eliminating partisanship from government would ruin checks and balances



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Partisan. Contrary to what the national media seem to believe, it is not a four-letter word.

Partisanship is the key to a functional America. What about apple pie and 4th of July parades? Partisanship is the American way.

Just envision our government on a national level if it were converted into a "nonpartisan" process.

It would be nonsensical. Wacky even. As wacky as this ridiculous sham we have here in Nebraska.

Not quite that wacky I guess, unless of course we just said to hell with the Senate.

Unicameral structure aside, this nonpartisan thing we have going on here in the Cornhusker State is a crock.

It's just a fancy-schmancy, official-sounding term fashioned by politicians

so they can avoid taking a stand on tough issues.

It's an elected official's protection from accountability.

It may very well be a conspiracy to increase voter bewilderment.

It's criminal.

And it's about to get worse.

There are several bills before the Nebraska Legislature this session specifically designed to further this nonpartisan mumbo-jumbo.

LB96, sponsored by Sens. Schellpeper (D), Cudaback (R), Vrtiska (R) and Matzke (R), would require counties with populations under 50,000 to eliminate partisanship in county elections, and counties with populations over 50,000 would have the option of removing partisanship by resolution.

LB241, sponsored by Sen. Coordsen (R), would require counties with a population of less than 50,000 to eliminate partisanship in elections.

LB266, sponsored by Senators Wickersham (D), Chambers (I), Engel (D), Schellpeper (D) and Vrtiska (R), would allow those voters registered without party preference to select a Republican or Democrat ballot at the primary election.

I find it rather interesting that all of the senators sponsoring these bills, with the exception of Ernie Chambers, associate themselves with a political party, even though they are part of this

supposed "nonpartisan" structure.

In fact, all but two of the 49 Nebraska state senators laud themselves as Democrats or Republicans.

You see, without that (D) or (R) behind their name, it is considerably more difficult to win an election.

Political parties in Nebraska serve several functions for candidates, including grass-roots support, mailing lists, validity through recognition and endorsement and, of course, campaign contributions.

It's fair to say the majority of our distinguished senators enjoyed the resources of partisan organizations at one point in time. It's fair to say they were able to establish themselves in their respective districts because of their party affiliation.

With the Nebraska nonpartisan trend the way it is, perhaps some of these guys can get re-elected, after they establish themselves a bit, without party assistance. Hell, maybe they could have even gotten elected without party affiliation. But, save two, they didn't choose that route.

And guess what? Nothing ever gets done. Sure, we're all one big happy family (under a big tent), but how about that property tax relief? Nebraska has an absurd property tax rate, one of the highest in the Midwest, and still no action is taken to remedy this problem. Why? Nobody wants to rock the proverbial legislative boat.

If LB266 were to pass, there would be rampant ideological espionage. Political anarchy, if you will. Sure, Ernie Chambers doesn't claim party affiliation, but nobody is going to mistake him for a Republican.

Voters could register as independent even if their opinions lined up with one of the parties, and sabotage the party with opposing ideology in the primary.

Criminal.

If LB96 and/or LB241 were to pass, what do you imagine would be accomplished? More effective government? Honest politicians? Oh no.

Try less-informed voters.

With party affiliation on the ballot, lazy voters can at least make a guess. If they're all about increased government funding for education, vote Democrat. If smaller government is their bag, they know to go Republican.

What in the blazes are they thinking over there? Without party affiliation it'll be like pin the tail on the donkey. Hey friends, just close your eyes and hope you're close enough!

Sure, voters could research the candidates, and I'm soooo sure that will magically begin to happen when partisan lines are erased.

Nebraskans, Americans for that matter, elect on a partisan basis for a good reason. We elect on a partisan basis because we want our elected officials to stand for something.

We elect on a partisan basis because candidates' ideologies are similar to our own. We elect on a partisan basis because we want to know how they will vote on the big issues. We elect on a partisan basis because we want elected officials to be accountable.

If not the party structure, who will hold these wise guys to their word? Constituencies? Voters who don't even take the time to research the candidates are going to track voting records and campaign promises? I bet.

How about lobbyists? Special-interest groups? Oh no. Money talks, folks.

We need parties to provide accountability. To affiliate with a party, a candidate must subscribe to a platform. They have to take a stand.

Then the parties track campaign promises and check them against voting records. If an official strays, in kicks the accountability function.

Eliminating partisanship does away with inter-unicameral checks and balances.

It allows checkbooks to flagrantly corrupt.

It permits candidates who stand for nothing except their own interests to masquerade as public servants.

Blast the fence-riders.

Take a stand. Let out a cry for partisanship. Demand that your state senator stand for something.

I left my toilet in San Francisco

Distinctions between time, space disappear



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I woke up early this morning to discover my bathroom had been magically transported to San Francisco. I don't know what made it San Francisco - the angle of light leaning in at the window, a light tarnished, filtered through cloud layers like a dirty skylight.

But as I stood, swallowing my daily pill, noting the nightly deterioration of my features in the little mirror over the sink, I knew it was SF and not NE.

This is not the first bathroom I've seen transported. Once, in a little shared bath off a tiny apartment over on F street, I looked up to find the bathroom was now in Mexico - shadows of clouds crossing in the doorway.

But as I splashed cold water on my face and hands this Monday morning, and as I towed them dry, I happened to look out the window to see the snow coming down.

I went back to bed - it was not San Francisco.

My penguin makes threatening noises in Korean and fires off a round of shotgun blasts. Then the fanfare plays and, unless you press down on his little hat, the whole thing starts up again. The clock in his belly says 8:00. I have missed my first class. Somehow I must've reset the little fellow and now I don't have to be anywhere until 11:30. I pull the bed-sheet over my head to block the full daylight blizzard blight and curl up on the couch.

The bathroom is still in San

Francisco. I keep telling myself this; as I scrub, sitting in three inches of hot water, with a hemp bag full of "tea tree oil" soap; as I rinse that off with Dr. Bronner's peppermint soap (scabies teaches us that cleanliness is next to impossible - go all out); as I read, again, the vaguely Masonic admonitions printed on the bottle ("As Rabbi Hillel taught Christ 6000 year old Moral ABCs ...") I keep repeating it, like a mantra: "It's just a chilly day in San Francisco."

I try this out on a stranger as we wait by the street for the bus: a mistake. Microscopic snowflakes float everywhere. I inhale and feel cold inside.

"I keep telling myself I'm in San Francisco," I say, sidling up and leading against the sign. He only grins at me, quizzically.

"But it's not working," I say. It never works.

I'm in my classroom an hour early. Still groggy, I do not recognize this fact until a strange teacher takes the podium. I look at the clock on the wall, ask the stranger next to me if that, indeed, is the correct time. She says it is, and I ask her to have me paged - but I don't have a pager, and she seems unwilling to loan me hers (I assume she has one) so I face the long, ignominious walk under the curious gaze of the prof and 150 sociology students.

I got one thing out of the experience, anyway: Propinquity.

The overhead projector had displayed a list of terms when I sat down, only one of which I didn't recognize: Propinquity.

With an hour to kill I settle in the periodicals room at Love Library to collect my thoughts behind a propped-up copy of "Stern."

"Propinquity, propinquity, propinquity," drips in my head like a faucet.

At the front desk they loan me a tattered Miriam Webster:

Propinquity: nearness in time or place, kinship.

Is there a secret kinship between places, between times? Between my bathroom on 13th street and some spot in San Francisco - perhaps

someone else's bathroom? I offer this only as a suggestion and really, the physics of it are beyond me.

But isn't it possible the two places are connected?

I leave it to the science fiction writers to get us from here to there without having to move

all our picture frames, etc.

It's almost time for me to go to class for real, but I crouch at a little study table in the periodical room, scribbling this all down longhand, something I haven't done in years.

I think I'm coming down with something. I want to go home and take a nap.

And I can't help but wondering, as I languish here in plain old Lincoln, where is my bathroom off to now?



DEB LEE/DN