

OPINION PAGES

EDITOR
Erin Gibson

OPINION EDITOR
Cliff Hicks

EDITORIAL BOARD
Nancy Christensen
Brad Davis
Sam McKewon
Jeff Randall
Bret Schulte

Our VIEW

True justice

Death penalty halt would remove blinders

This week, for the first time in over a decade, the Nebraska Legislature is expected to engage in a serious debate over capital punishment.

Don't get too excited.

In this, perhaps the most conservative of conservative political regions, the repeal of the death penalty is not likely to even skirt the realm of probability.

Instead, this week's round of debate will center on Sen. Ernie Chambers' request that Nebraska instate a three-year moratorium on capital punishment. This downtime would allow for a full investigation into many aspects of the death penalty, most notably the apparent racial bias that seems to go hand-in-hand with the electric chair.

If our senators approve this moratorium, Nebraska would join Illinois as front-runners in the move to re-examine capital punishment's fairness and effectiveness. Seven other states have similar bills in the works.

And for the first time in a long time, it would appear that momentum is gaining on the side of the anti-death penalty movement.

Hawks on the other side – boisterous defenders of "victim's rights" and "American justice" – are undoubtedly wary of this movement to study the flaws in their cherished tools of fairness.

But anyone with a rational mind and a true tendency toward justice would welcome this moratorium with open arms. This moratorium would not directly bring about any change in the system; it merely would let Americans get a good look at their most irreversible and sinister form of punishment.

The results of this long look are likely to be eye-opening for the many Americans who either support the death penalty or ride the fence. Past studies have indicated that there is a dark cloud of racism hovering in nearly every criminal case involving capital punishment.

For whites who kill minorities, death row is a dim and distant prospect. For minorities – particularly blacks – who kill whites, it is almost a certainty.

According to Amnesty International, only five white people have been executed for killing a black person since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976, and only six have been sentenced. Blacks and whites in the United States are the victims of murder in almost equal numbers, yet 82 percent of prisoners executed since 1977 were convicted of the murder of a white person.

Until we give our states a chance to dig these numbers up for themselves, the discrepancy will only increase.

This proposed moratorium would give us nothing but information. And no matter how damaging it is to the criminal justice system – or America as a whole – one thing can be said for information.

It's never killed anybody.

Branch's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Right on

I just wanted to compliment J.J. Harder on his column "Love the Sinner." Unfortunately, many of us are afraid to confront the sin and instead confront the sinner with judgment. I hope that those of us who read your column will take more time to judge our own acts and use God's guidance in a positive way to teach others.

Tricia Vlach
UNL alumna

Let the smart ones in

In response to Matt Johnson's letter to the editor regarding tornado procedures on campus, I feel the need to respond. I believe that UNL has a duty to provide the warning of severe weather and a shelter to go to. If an individual chooses not to seek shelter, only the individual is to blame. Of course, the university can't really force anyone to go to the shelter. I believe biologists call this natural selection – weeding out members of a species who are unable to adapt to their environment. As the UNL operator who activated the warning on campus, I find it sad that during the course of the tornado warning, students were sitting in their rooms calling the operators to find out if class was canceled for the day instead of seeking shelter.

It's a good thing that as we age, we live less and less for "the heat of the moment" and realize our mortality. Tornadoes are a very unpredictable weather phenomenon. Please remember "Twister" was a movie. Tornadoes are real.

John Gilliam
UNL telecommunications

Parochial preaching

After reading the April 14 edition of the DN, I wondered if I had enrolled in a parochial school or if I was, in fact, registered at a land-grant institution. With

the cover article titled "Sex, Drugs & Saving Souls," which contains a series of articles that include "how ministries reach and affect students by teaching them morality through religion" and "how personal convictions drive secular activists ... to fight vices ..." I wondered if the DN had ever heard of the separation of church and state. Then when I find a commentary by J.J. Harder about the sinfulness of being gay, I had to wonder if I was reading a fundamentalist journal. When I read that "Some people treat gays as committing some kind of sin worse than all of the rest. To God, it's just a sin like any other," I have to question why student fees are used to support the publication of this type of propaganda. The DN needs to realize that we are not living in the 1950s and needs to not act as a campus ministry and provide insightful articles that are relevant to students regardless of sexual preference or religious affiliation.

Brian Gaskill
graduate student

Parking puzzles

The Daily Nebraskan's editorial Tuesday ("Apples and oranges: Raising parking fees is faulty logic") was right on target!

I attended the East Campus information meeting last week conducted by Assistant Vice Chancellor James Main. This meeting was the closest thing to a lynch mob I have ever seen. Employees were VERY angry. Mr. Main managed to show an incredible amount of arrogance and lack of empathy for what employees were saying.

Also in attendance was a resident of the East Campus neighborhood. When Mr. Main was asked if "they" were planning to notify neighborhood organizations in the area of the new increases, and the possibility of more employees and staff parking in the neighborhoods, his answer was: "No, that would be a public relations nightmare."

I'd like to add that some of the parking lots are being displaced by new buildings being built by donated money. There needs to be a PLAN in place so employees are not displaced by, or burdened with, the cost of replacing parking lots eliminated by new construction.

The new construction should bear the burden of replacing the parking it is taking away. If this means a smaller building, so be it. I understand the new film theater to be built at 13th and P will be reduced in size in order to accommodate a visitors' center. Why isn't parking for employees as important as a visitors' center?

We believe we cannot afford any more "horizontal cuts" that trim programs across the board without regard to priorities. Instead, future cuts are likely to be vertical – elimination of entire programs and departments, enabling us to focus resources where our clients tell us our resources are needed.

These impending increases are going to hurt – a lot – especially the lower-paid staff. Some staff members are going to have to face some tough budget decisions of their own. Many of us are already living from paycheck to paycheck on the low salaries we are making, and finding ourselves falling further and further behind each year as we receive pitiful "cost of living increases" that don't begin to cover our increased insurance costs or utility, food and gas-price increases.

What is it going to take to get the attention of administrators, legislators, and taxpayers? Are they willing to risk losing some very good employees because they've "had enough"? Are they willing to risk people getting fed up and organizing a union? Are they willing to risk someone getting pushed to the point of ending up on a roof with a rifle? Just what will it take? I'm not sure I want to know the answer.

Jacque Keller
UNL employee/UNOPA member

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials are the opinions of the Spring 1999 Daily Nebraskan. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, its employees, its student body or the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. A column is solely the opinion of its author. The Board of Regents serves as publisher of the Daily Nebraskan; policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. The UNL Publications Board, established by the regents, supervises the production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its student employees.

Letter Policy

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor and guest columns, but does not guarantee their publication. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject any material submitted. Submitted material becomes property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Those who submit letters must identify themselves by name, year in school, major and/or group affiliation, if any. Submit material to: Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St. Lincoln, NE. 68588-0448. E-mail: letters@unlinfo.unl.edu.

If you have opinions and the ability to write, we might publish them. If you can't write, but like to draw pictures, we might publish those too.

The Daily Nebraskan is now accepting applications for fall columnists and a cartoonist. Any major field and class standing will be eligible as long as applicants are enrolled in at least six credit hours and maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher.

Prospective columnists or cartoonists must complete an application, available in 34 Nebraska Union, and submit two sample columns or four sample cartoons, published or unpublished. Applications are due Friday, April 16, and interviews will be arranged by the opinion editor.