

# OPINION PAGES

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## Our VIEW

### Finger pointing Governor-appointed regents would be unwise

Once every six years, Nebraskans go to the polls to decide who will sit on the Board of Regents — the committee that oversees how the University of Nebraska functions and is financed.

If Nebraska Gov. Mike Johanns had his way, the check of a box would be supplemented by the pointing of a finger ... his finger.

Speaking at a Lincoln Chamber of Commerce luncheon last week, Johanns nonchalantly announced his desire to appoint some of the members of the university's governing board.

Turning the university's only democratically representative body into an extended arm of the governor is a bad idea.

The NU system, which includes the state's land grant university, exists to serve the people of the state through education and research.

“Turning the university's only democratically representative body into an extended arm of the governor is a bad idea.”

Supporting it with their own tax dollars, Nebraskans look to NU to provide a well-rounded education to all who attend and to support extended learning and research across the state.

The Board of Regents exists to represent the people and ultimately hold the university accountable to its mission.

If isn't meant to be the tool through which the governor gains influence over university affairs.

If the governor were allowed to appoint regents, the university would be vulnerable to whatever partisan agenda he or she brought into the office.

Johanns may have a point when he says the board lacks racial diversity and representation from western Nebraska.

But Nancy O'Brien, chairwoman of the board, made a point when she mentioned the lack of racial diversity among state senators and pointed out that the governor isn't appointing them.

As for geographic diversity, perhaps district lines that determine how many regents are allocated through the state should be redrawn.

The state Legislature must approve the proposal to change the way regents are selected. It would then have to be approved by a vote of the people.

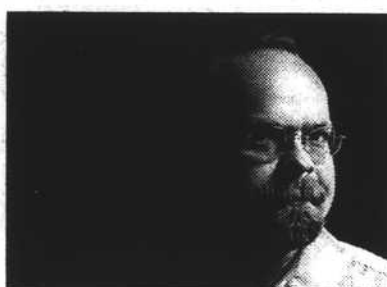
Johanns isn't the first governor to suggest the proposal. Perhaps there is a solution to give the governor representation without total control: appoint non-voting members.

## Obermeyer's VIEW



### Birthday greetings

Conversation with mother brings up questions of life and death



I was finally worn out enough to sleep. In quick order I had shucked off my pants and was in bed.

Just as I was picking up that murmured conversation that marks the boundary of dreamland (... have you any mangoes ... the raid is hairy ...) I remembered it was my mother's birthday.

Normally, I would have clean forgotten (dyslexia has its advantages), but I had unfortunately committed it to memory by means of one of those harmless mnemonic devices you can't ever get out of your head: She was born on the 25th of October, the Christmas of Halloween.

Awake again, I lay there for some minutes looking at my penguin. He looked back scornfully, the clock in his belly reminding me that I still had plenty of time to slither back into blue jeans and crawl out to the pay phone by the Dip and Strip to wish my mother a god-damned happy birthday.

"It means so much to her," he seemed to be saying, but he speaks Korean so I couldn't quite make it out.

Eventually I went. But for some reason I preferred the phones by the neighborhood gas and grub. I don't know why.

As phones go, these are the phonest: always sticky, you hate to put the handset too close to your head, so you stand there yelling across the inches and the miles at your elderly mother who is still awake because she's basically a recluse and stays up all night watching movies like "Pulp Fiction," which she thinks is funny.

She's also hard of hearing, so there you are, screaming in the parking lot, like the out-of-work fellows (men of leisure) who are usually there, plugging quarters and screaming at their girlfriends.

My mother was happy to hear from me.

She said she's getting hearing aids.

("That's what you get from shar-

ing earplugs!" I shouted. She didn't get it.)

I begged her to forgo the usual litany of family woes (I come from a large, screwy family), and she seemed pretty cheerful otherwise, a nice change.

She's been sick, you see. A minor stroke. This on top of being old and having suffered from chronic fatigue at least as long as I've been alive (don't look at me, I didn't do it).

And so it's no real surprise if she's depressed.

I've spoken with her about this. I think she's grateful to have someone to discuss it with.

So many people these days don't want to hear negative things about old age. We've pretty much shoved our elderly into social toilets if you really want to know, like stinky turds we'd rather flush.

My mother has said, sometimes, she doesn't want to live anymore.

Can't say I really blame her for feeling that way, but of course there are still people who need her support (all those screwy, grown-up kids, for instance).

She has obligations, and she's sticking around to fulfill them.

But there may come a time when no one could expect her to continue. Another stroke could do it. And then she should be prepared.

She says she doesn't ever want to be a burden.

I say, no one can possibly blame you for lingering, if that's what you want to do. But what if you don't want to?

When my mother began talking about her depression, some weeks ago, I was glad for the opportunity to bring up what I consider a vital point in the life of anyone facing sickness, old age and a stinky, deranged death.

"I didn't want to say, after your stroke, 'So, have you bought your rat poison yet?'" I told her. (We share a streak of gallows humor.)

"But you have the right and the obligation to prepare yourself for the possibility that death may not steal sweetly into your sleep one rainy morning."

"It may push you down the stairs, instead."

So we agreed that this year, breaking a long-standing tradition, I would buy her a present for her birthday: a copy of "Final Exit."

This notorious book (by Derek

“There's the door,” as the Stoics used to say. “Don't let it hit you in the ass on the way out.”

Humphry, founder of the Hemlock Society) is a how-to manual for painless suicide.

Evidently Humphry believes, as I do, that everyone has the right, at least, to die.

It shocks me that religious people don't always see it this way, especially considering that the creator seems to agree with me and Humphry, having made death obligatory. He could hardly complain that we comply too readily.

My mother is a religious person, and she also agrees with me and God and Humphry.

She has expressed admiration many times for those who've taken arms against an intolerable and terminal condition, whether by refusing treatment or simply saving up the medications doled out to them in their hospital beds until they had enough to check out — permanent-like.

I am not encouraging my mother (or anyone's mother) to off herself before her time. But the time is hers, and she can choose it.

I made it clear that I, personally, would find her suicide pathetic if it was chosen for trivial reasons, which might be addressed by more appropriate means.

I also suggested that empowering herself with the knowledge and means to end her life might make her remaining time more bearable.

"There's the door," as the Stoics used to say. "Don't let it hit you in the ass on the way out."

It can be comforting to know there's a way out.

Anyway, as I stood there, in the parking lot, shouting at my mother that she has the right to die, I noticed a \$10 bill lying, abandoned on the asphalt.

As I had just drunk up my last dollar in cheap beer, this was a welcome sight, and I ditched Mom just long enough to snag it.

She never knew I was gone.

Mark Baldridge is a senior English major and opinion editor for the Daily Nebraskan.

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