

## Unwarranted death sentences unintentional murderers should not face execution

Under current Nebraska state law, cold-blooded killers are sentenced to death. Those killers set out to murder someone, planning the act and carrying it out.

But Nebraska also sentences unintentional killers to death. They are the burglars who scared someone into a heart attack in the middle of the night. They are the arsonists who did not think anyone was home. They are also the robbers who panicked when things went wrong.

*"In most first-degree murder cases where intent has been proven, the circumstances do not warrant the death penalty."*

Nebraska's felony murder law permits these criminals to be sentenced to death without having to prove the intent to kill. Felony murders are homicides committed in the course of another serious crime, such as sexual assault, robbery, arson and kidnapping.

Prosecutors must prove the criminal intended to commit the underlying crime but not the homicide.

A proposed legislative bill would make felony murder punishable by life in prison without parole, instead of execution.

The bill also expands the current felony murder law to include three additional felony murder crimes.

The bill's proponents argue that it should never be possible to put someone to death without proving their intent to kill.

We agree.

To prove first-degree murder, prosecutors must demonstrate that the criminals planned their crimes with the highest level of intent.

But even at that level, not all people convicted of first-degree murder are sentenced to death.

In most first-degree murder cases where intent has been proven, the circumstances do not warrant the death penalty.

Why then, should we put people to death when we do not know their intentions?

In first-degree murder cases, a jury may decide to convict on a lesser offense, such as second-degree murder. The felony murder law does not give juries that option.

The proposed change would help ensure that the death penalty is administered as fairly as possible.

However, we do not, in any way, condone felony murder. The actions of these criminals must still be punished, and life in prison without parole is appropriate.

Regardless of your stance on the death penalty, you should support this bill.

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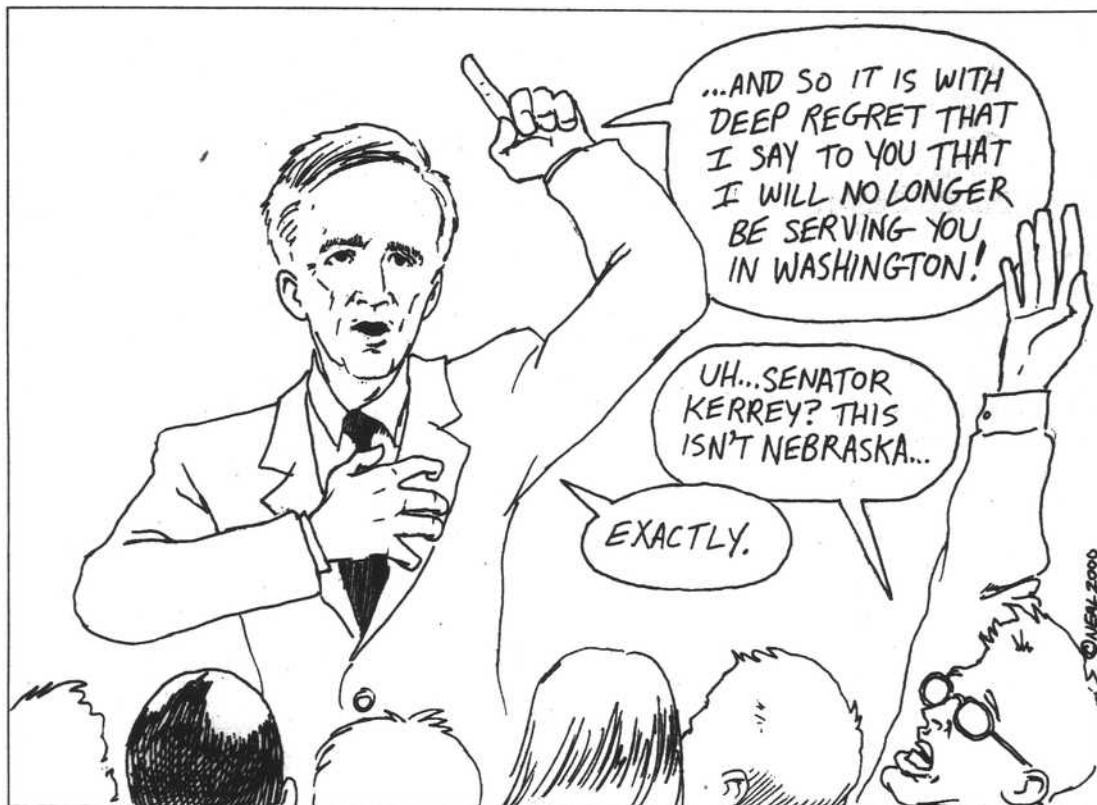
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### Obermeyer's VIEW



## Ignorance is not bliss Public school system has failed Americans



In a campaign speech over the weekend, Vice President Al Gore proclaimed that Democratic leadership in the 21st century would affect "revolutionary improvement" upon America's public education system. Great! We need it.

Although college attendance is at an all-time high of 62%, standardized test scores have dropped about 5.5% over the last 30 years.

Public education is failing the American public.

Now that we have 30 years more experience on how to run a public education system, shouldn't we be doing better than our parents — not worse?

Offer teachers more money?

One rationale claims we should pay teachers more money. This would attract more skillful people who would teach our children more. We hear a lot about this strategy around budget time.

I have only two problems with this. First, it would never happen. And second, it would never happen. I don't know if anyone has noticed, but we live in a capitalist society. A fundamental tenet of capitalism is that in order to gain financial rewards, one must create value for the economy.

You may be thinking teachers help

the economy by educating people, but they don't. They assist others in gaining skills that will someday benefit the economy. Teaching is a support position. Just like a human resources division of a corporation. Do human resource people make as much money as those actually providing the product for the corporation? Again, no. It's a support position. The career ladder is shorter, and teachers will never make substantially more money. Sorry.

Get the family involved.

Recent studies show that children spend more time watching television than they spend at school and doing schoolwork combined. This scares me. The main problem here is that parents are not involved enough in their children's education.

It's not that parents don't want their children to do well in school. Research also shows that parents of all incomes and education levels list education as a top priority in their household.

Unfortunately, with the dual-earner household becoming the norm, parents just don't know what's happening with their children's formal education.

As always, I have a solution.

Governor Johanns should champion a new statewide policy, which I call "uniform preparation." Every day, every teacher of every subject at every school in Nebraska would assign homework. It wouldn't be a dissertation or 500 algebra problems. Each teacher could assign his or her students a paragraph to write about a topic that would be discussed the next day or a similar minor assignment.

As soon as word got around to the parents in our state about this program,

the kids would lose the excuse that they didn't have homework. Parents would know their child had homework and that their child had homework in each subject.

Uniform preparation would create a nightly obligation for parents. This plan would get the family unit more involved in education.

New curriculum, please.

Thomas Jefferson thought schools in a republic should teach people to "read and understand what is going on in the world." Again, American public schools get an F.

Upon graduation from high school, many people cannot define any American political ideology. This is unacceptable. Should we be surprised that people don't vote in this country? Of course not. If you can't evaluate the candidates properly, you should stay home.

When many people graduate, they can't define their own system of ethics. Should we be surprised that children go on shooting rampages if some of them can't even define the term ethics? Ethics have to be taught somewhere. If people aren't going to go to church, ethics should be taught in the public schools.

I know our schools are not single-handedly responsible for the problems of America, but the schools can be part of the solution. If politicians want to talk about real, revolutionary changes in public education, they need to get over the argument of local control and take a leadership position for policies that will actually work.

The gauntlet has been thrown down. THUD.

Michael Donley is a senior sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist

## P.S. Write Back



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