

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Face time

Slim chance for Gore means publicity for Nebraska

Aside from one vice presidential debate during the 1988 presidential election, Nebraska hasn't been much of a political hotbed in the heat of November office races.

It could change in 2000 - key word there: could. Might not. But it's better than the perpetual unimportance that graces the only state never visited by President Clinton.

Why could it change? Al Gore's got a chance in Nebraska. Well, sort of - in Omaha, anyway.

That's what a copyrighted Omaha World-Herald poll said Tuesday after polling 986 Nebraskans about the presidential election in November.

Not surprisingly, Republican candidate George W. Bush has a hefty lead in the 3rd Congressional District - mostly central and western Nebraska - 57 percent to the Democratic Gore's 23. In the 1st District, including Lincoln, Bush has 50 percent to Gore's 36 percent.

But in the 2nd District, comprised of Sarpy and Douglas Counties, Bush has a slim lead - 46 to 42 percent - within World-Herald's districtwide margin of error.

This only matters because Nebraska is one of two U.S. states that splits up its electoral votes for presidential elections. Along with Maine, the Cornhusker State awards an electoral vote to the winner of each individual district and two bonus votes to the overall statewide winner.

Chalk it up now: Bush will get the bonus two. And he'll win the 1st and 3rd districts. And, chances are, he'll hold off Gore in the 2nd District, too. But the Gore camp must have a decent reason for launching an official campaign in the state, the first Democratic campaign since John F. Kennedy in 1960.

It's largely because Bush vs. Gore is shaping up as a real race, a dynamic the 1996 race lacked. The World-Herald quotes former U.S. Rep. John Cavanaugh as seeing the race coming down to "one crummy electoral vote."

A bit dramatic, yes. Nonetheless, a significant visit from Bush to Omaha seems a greater possibility. And it'll likely be more than Bob Dole's fly-through in 1996. Partially because his running mate, Dick Cheney, is a Nebraska native. But also because Bush has not only his own horn to play, but that of Republican U.S. Senate candidate Don Stenberg.

Stenberg, who was shown Monday to be 20 percentage points behind Democrat Ben Nelson in a copyrighted World-Herald poll, is seen as a key player in Republicans' keeping control of the Senate.

Stenberg hasn't hid any attempts to align himself with Bush and Sen. Chuck Hagel in an attempt to woo voters. The World-Herald poll suggests the tactic hasn't really worked, but Bush may be persuaded to throw ardent support behind a swing-seat election.

Gore could have the same concerns in mind. If the race is as close as it seems, his own visit to counter Bush's is possible. The media may prick its ears to Democratic candidate putting a chink - albeit an insignificant one - in the armor of a steadfastly Republican state. Seem too trivial? Did kissing Tipper?

Politics is often perception and impression. A Gore visit, as feckless an impact it might have on Nebraska, may be a proving-point type of photo opportunity. If the Clinton administration taught us anything, it's that polls matter, and an advantage in one meaningless poll could indirectly lead to one in an important poll.

Key word: could. Might not.

But it's better than status quo.

Editorial Board

Sarah Baker, Bradley Davis, Josh Funk, Matthew Hansen, Samuel McKewon, Dane Stickney, Kimberly Sweet

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Life's evil found in onion idea

Every time I see a criminal dressed in the orange prison garbs, being led down a hallway to some jail cell or questioning room, I wonder what makes him different from me.



Dane Stickney

Why can some people rape other people, then beat them senseless with a hammer? Why can some steal and hate so easily? What keeps me from being that way?

My philosophy teacher at UNK, David Rozema, would have said it's because there's no Christian God to direct them. Criminals don't have a higher code of religious ethics or sense of damnation after death.

Rozema is a tall, skinny man with a dark beard. He is a guest preacher at a local Presbyterian church. He teaches philosophy of ethics and religion.

This summer, while reading "The Brothers Karamazov," a story by Fyodor Dostoyevsky concerning morality and religion's effect on four brothers after their father's death, the issues of what makes a person terrible arose. Rozema basically attributed it to a lack of religion - that morality needs a sense of higher power to exist.

I'm not "religious" in the modern sense of the word. Being a good person is important, but I don't relate good works to a God or an afterlife.

So I disagreed with Rozema. But I couldn't explain why until he took a week off and was replaced by one of the greatest men I have ever learned from: Don Welch. Those familiar with Nebraska poetry probably know the name well. He was in contention for state poet a few years ago when Bill Kloefkorn eventually earned the title.

Welch is a physical poet. He doesn't write about feelings; he writes about the Platte River, cranes, his father. I had heard much about him, and I was eagerly awaiting learning from him.

My father had taken college courses from Welch many times and praised him. I had always wanted to take one of his classes, but he retired before I got the chance. By doing his colleague a favor by substituting for a few days, he was doing me a great favor.

Welch walked to the front of the room. He turned to the board, picked up a piece of chalk and drew something that looked like a Valentine heart with a line sticking out of the top. He then drew a shaft down the middle of it. Underneath it, he wrote "Apple."

He then drew a circle with other circles inside of it. It looked like a record. Next to it, he wrote "Onion."

From behind thick glasses, he peered out at the class. He held up a copy of "The Brothers Karamazov."

"From reading this book, it is obvious that there are two types of people in the world," he said with a deep, strong yet shaking voice. "There are those who have the ability to love, and there are those who do not."

He turned back to the board and pointed at his drawings. "There are apples, and there are onions."

Apples have a core, which gives them the ability to give and receive love. Onions have no core; they are just layers of humanity piled on top of each other, lacking the ability to receive anything while only giving out hatred.

Apples, said Welch, are far more common in the world than onions, but the number of onions are growing at an alarming rate.

So why are people onions? How do they get that way? Is it because they can't find God? Welch didn't mention God, like Rozema would have.

He attributed the cause of evil people to one thing: They weren't loved. No one picked them up when they cried as a child. No one played with them or read them books. No one came to their athletic events or parent teacher conferences. No one nurtured them.

An onion can be formed many ways. Most of the time, they spring out of lust, grabbing and groping on a cheap mattress.

Then when the time rolls around, lust's product isn't wanted, so it in turn isn't loved. Where a core should begin forming, an abstract bulb of hatred forms, and the cycle is started again. By adolescence, it might be too late to change anything.

At that stage, Welch said, physical love, not spiritual, is needed. Without a real, loving touch, cores can't form.

"Onions can't love," Welch said. "Ask yourself, can you love? If you can, think of who made you an apple. A parent, a sibling, a teacher, a coach, whoever."

He paused and looked down at the book, then at his watch.

"We're out of time, but your assignment for tomorrow is to read the next two chapters in the novel."

"And thank whoever is responsible for making you an apple."

Greeks blowing smoke

I am writing to address the reasons that greek-bashing is so prevalent on the University of Nebraska campus. I have been here for over three years and have my own ideas as to why it goes on.

I base these on true experiences since that's what Kevin Sypal wanted in his letter to the editor on Sept. 18.

Reason 1: People hate the greek system because of the stupid things fraternity people do that gets publicized. These things, contrary to belief in the greek system, are worthy of front page news coverage more than their charity work because news is when something big happens.

Examples of stupid stuff done by members of fraternities are as follows: the cutting down of a Christmas tree on campus, stealing lumber for homecoming floats, throwing snowballs at international students, handcuffing someone to a radiator while in the process of hazing them and, finally, the ever-famous cross-burning incident.

Reason 2: People hate fraternities and sororities because every time something bad happens, the greek system harps on charity and high GPAs.

A direct quote from Sypal stating: "I'm not going to spout off the facts about how many tens of thousands of dollars the greek system donates to charity each year or how much higher their GPA is than the rest of the university..." If you're not going to spout it, don't even mention it.

What do greeks measure their high GPAs against? The rest of the student body in whole? Let's compare the Honors Program GPAs to any house GPA and see if it isn't a little closer.

Reason 3: People hate fraternities and sororities because they don't understand them. I personally don't get it. I don't get why all of you shop in the exact same places and wear the exact same clothes. I don't understand what all those stupid chalk letters on the sidewalk along 16th Street are for.

One feather short of a boa

I'm so straight, it's scary. My political views tend to be to the right. My clothing is conservative. I don't like to dance all that much. I don't wear exotic scents, and my hair is plain, unstyled and uncolored.

But I'm not straight. I'm gay. I was a card-carrying gay for a couple of years, until the National Association of Gays discovered my transgressions. They came by a couple of weeks ago to take back the card and my poster of Ricky Martin, which was all right because Walgreens doesn't take NAG cards.

But still, I'm left emotionally distraught by my disconnection from the gay community. Everywhere I turn, I am faced with the message, "You are not one of us," as if it were a looming, dark face, tight-lipped at the door of a dance club, big burly arms crossed on a manly, heaving chest... oh, sorry.

I mean, gays come in all shapes and sizes - you have the str8-actings and the flaming queens, the party-all-nighters and the closet cases. Gays are short, tall, science majors, liberal arts majors. They are smart; they are stupid.

In other words, they permeate the spectrum, if that isn't a semantic knot. More and more, though, I'm finding there is one area into which gays don't cross, except on extreme occasions: the philosophy of objectivism - whose principal ideal is rationality, whose founder is Ayn Rand.

It's as though the only circumstances under which gay objectivists arise is when their mothers drink coffee that has been laced by a trace amount of radioactive spider-parts while the child is in utero. I don't know why this is - I've just come to the conclusion that gay objectivists are so rare, for all effective purposes in Nebraska, we are - or more accurately, I am - alone.

A piece of evidence: Like any well-meaning g-boy, I recently became more active in a couple of on-campus organizations devoted to the ends of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities. The ones I have so far participated in are: Allies against Heterosexism and Homophobia, and the Committee for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns. There are a few others: Spectrum, Lesbian, bisexual and questioning group, a confidential gay men's discussion group, as well as an ad hoc organization designed to defeat Proposition 416, also known as DOMA.

So I have recently been inundated with modern gay political thinking. Implicit is the value of our goal: to expose the university community to us, which is to say, GLBT persons. Diversity is an unspoken value. Domestic partnership benefits, or with 416 just around the corner, the ability to pursue such benefits,

It's stated best in Sypal's second to last paragraph. "Simon, do you hate the greeks because they were the same people who beat you up after high school every day..."

You know what that statement tells me Kevin? That tells me that members of the greek system are no better than high school bullies. It tells me that you think you're better because you're in the greek system.

You're no better than anyone else at this university. In fact, I think that statement makes you lower than a lot of us. But look at the bright side, you can always fall back on your enormous GPA.

Joe Scharfbillig
Junior
Advertising

Double standard?

Matt Hansen's speculation about "who is guilty in the Mark Vedral sexual assault case" is based upon a presumption of guilt.

Because Vedral had sex with someone he hardly knew (admittedly a poor choice), Hansen is prepared to treat him like a sex offender, regardless of the fact that he was acquitted.

Hansen may claim that he is "uncomfortable assigning absolute guilt," but that is exactly what he has done.

His suggestion that we are "letting [athletes] get away with it," that we "excuse often inexcusable behavior," and we should "shun" Mr. Vedral instead of giving him "total acceptance" all presume that Mark Vedral is guilty of more than just premarital sex, but that is not the verdict the jury returned.

What Hansen advocates is a situation where an allegation is as good as a conviction, where guilt should be presumed and where evidence sufficient to convict is unnecessary.

Brad Pardee
Staff
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Jake Glazeski

seems to be the most prominent goal right now. The strategy is to rabble-rouse, to be loud and obnoxious, to force acknowledgment.

At first, I just soaked it in. I wanted to be part of the "solution," and I wanted to make it easier for "my community," even though I didn't feel like one of them. But now that I have considered it, I am overwhelmed with questions.

Why are gay activists doing this? Is a gay civil union really within the bounds of their fundamental rights? And if it is, why are they using the strategy that they are? They seem to overwhelm the public with their presence - to fluff up their feathers, so to speak, to make themselves seem larger than they really are, so that maybe some people will not so adamantly oppose their attempts at equality in privilege and law.

The approach is not rational. No one asks, why should straights support us? I ask this question and can't answer it. Most of you are straight. Why should you care about my sexuality or a random GLBT person's attempts at social change? I can't think of a good reason.

And I'm not going to try to force you to think the way I do - not like most gay activists. They are trying to force you to think like them.

But they haven't answered these question themselves. To be sure, there is a weak logical chain, connecting homophobia to oppression they call "gender stereotyping." I suppose the argument has some merit - but what if people don't want to "gender-bend"? They say you should care because you can't express yourself fully within the bounds of your social category. Then again, none of us can. Which brings me back to my objectivism.

GLBT persons don't seem particularly interested in rational thinking. To be sure, lawyers devote themselves to the cause, and they use reason to reach their conclusions. At base, though, are simple assumptions no one has any reason to accept. Those assumptions lead to the desired conclusions.

I see this as an objectivist, but no one in the GLBT community seems to care. Quibbling, they might say. However, by not addressing these questions, they create for the GLBT person a rut, the nature of which is parallel to the rut of gender stereotypes. In other words: Men shouldn't express emotion; gays shouldn't think.

I can do only so much justice to my point; a gay objectivist Web site exists, though, at www.rattigan.net. The Rattigan Society is a group of gay objectivists whose goal is to tell gay people simply, it's all right to think. Their call for rationality falls on the deaf ears of most gay activists.

Well, I suppose if the activists prefer hysterical cat-erwauling to rational debate based on premises that both parties will accept, I am not going to try to stop them. I'll let them play their game. Not that it will get us anywhere.