

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Bully for Ben Nelson offers alternative to Stenberg's icy persona

We knew it'd get messy. And messy the Senatorial race between Republican candidate Don Stenberg and Democratic nominee Ben Nelson became. It has been a war of television ads, accusatorial tactics and innuendoes. At last call, Nelson still held a fair lead in the Omaha World-Herald poll over Stenberg, which confounded some political experts who figured it was Stenberg's race to lose.

That's an accurate description of it: Nelson certainly lacks the charisma to barnstorm the state and roll over the icy Stenberg. It was Nelson that dropped a lofty cushion to Chuck Hagel four years ago. Though Hagel has proven a fast learner and capable leader of Nebraska, questions about Nelson's campaigning skills still linger.

And yet, Stenberg was never able to turn the tide. He is no Hagel. He's other things, too, that make Nebraskans a touch leery. We endorse Nelson, partially because he'd be a more capable leader for the state, as he has had eight years gubernatorial experience and has proven skilled at adopting workable, centrist policies both sides of the aisle can deal with.

But we endorse Nelson also because he is not Stenberg, who has remained a distant personal figure on the political landscape in his term as attorney general, a position he seemed to politicize for self-serving means. Agree or disagree with Stenberg's conservative-Christian platform — which isn't significantly different from Nelson — but can you, or would you, like the man?

Is his perceived Republican integrity worth the prospect of delivering a surly image to Washington? Stenberg's modus operandi is rooted in bulldog tactics — he sticks unwaveringly to his guns, pointing a finger at immorality.

In the same breath, he attempts to align himself with Hagel and presidential nominee George W. Bush, who only totes the Christian party line because he needs to get elected.

We also believe he utilized his conservative leanings to politicize the attorney general's office, using it as a platform to sound off on the ills of abortion and the virtues of the death penalty. His apparent approach to opposition — "I'm right and you're unconstitutional" — became his standard response.

Nelson's been around longer and has more direct experience with his constituents, holding the position we suspect Stenberg would've liked to own. He has fiscally conservative leanings, yet we agree with Nelson's stance of keeping Social Security away from privatization.

There is a fair argument that Nelson is no longer a Democrat, but a centrist Republican playing the other side for election purposes. The same was sometimes said of Kerrey. Nelson, we sense, is more liberal than his public persona lets on. With Stenberg, it's hard to gauge.

Another difficult gauge is how Nelson might work with Hagel. Assuming the polls stay the same, Nelson must find a way for the relationship to work. Bob Kerrey, the dignified Senator stepping down to work at New School University in New York City, managed that with Hagel, along with a reputation that went far into Congress.

Kerrey served the state well by most counts. His support has been for Nelson. Expect that to carry some weight, as will Hagel's backing of Stenberg. While the endorsements have broken down party lines, the election is not a time to vote down the line simply for partisanship.

We know that fewer Nebraskans would actually side with the fierce doctrine of Stenberg's conservative-Christian stance in the privacy of a voting booth. Our message to those still unsure: Get out and vote Nelson. He's the safer, more experienced selection. And he is not Stenberg.

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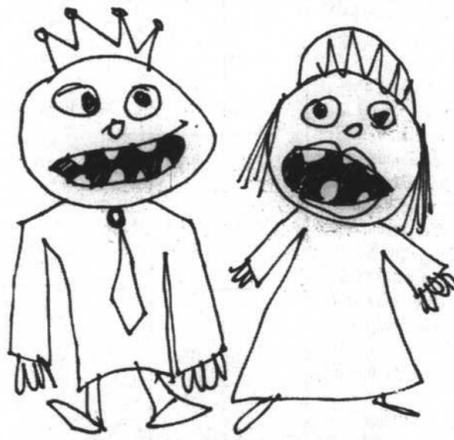
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LAST YEAR, THE DAILY NEBRASKAN WAS CRITICIZED FOR NOT HONORING THE HOMECOMING WINNERS. SO, FOR THE HOMECOMING 2000 ROYALTY:



CONGRATU-FREAKING-LATIONS. 5 PEOPLE THINK YOU'RE COOL.

Neal Obermeyer/DN

GLBT leaps forward in 416 debate

"The moments of freedom, they can't be given to you. You have to take them."

— Robert Frost

When the Initiative 416 campaign began months ago, the queer community sent out a cry of alarm. Opposing groups formed, canvassing started, rallies were held.

Yet I did not take part; I was certain the measure would pass. Opposing it would simply be a waste of time and resources. My certainty in its success has not changed, but I regret not having done more to oppose it. I have come to understand that the process of resisting is far more important than the outcome of tomorrow's vote.

From our defeat here, we have laid the groundwork for future victories. Never before in Nebraska's history has there been such widespread public discussion of GLBT issues. Every speech was an opportunity to show we exist, that we have families too, and that our lives are worthy of respect and equality before the law.

Simply reading the newspapers should encourage us for the future. From the sidelines, it's clear that this was an issue Nebraska really struggled with. The letters pages were often filled with heated debate, but usually letters from 416-opponents outnumbered those of its supporters. Nebraska's two largest newspapers, the Omaha World-Herald and the Lincoln Journal-Star, even came out in opposition to the measure.

We saw leaders in high places put their jobs on the line to stick up for equality; Regent Allen's attack on Interim Chancellor Perlman only testified to the integrity of the latter, the dangerousness of the former and the real progress we have made.

We saw hundreds of students rally for our cause. Guyla Mills, at a recent hearing on campus, complained that she was "ambushed." She wasn't "ambushed" — she knew opponents and supporters of 416 would show up — she was simply surprised and overwhelmed by the number and enthusiasm of 416's opponents.

This youth activism is an example of what's happening around the country. Studies show that younger generations are increasingly accepting and supportive of GLBT equality. The future, if nothing else, is on our side.

Perhaps most importantly, dozens of religious leaders proclaimed their opposition to 416 and their belief in the essential dignity and equality of all Americans. No longer can anti-gay groups claim that this is a battle between the "religious" and the "godless." No longer can they claim the Christian view to support their prejudices.

Just as in the latter parts of the black and women's civil rights movement, the once-unified religious opposition toward equality is crumbling from within. Even the polls are a testament to our progress — a solid third of Nebraska supports us, inconceivable a decade ago. The right wing's haste to abandon homophobic rhetoric and cloak themselves solely as "Defenders of Marriage" will undermine them in the future.

As Dan Rather said recently: "The conundrum the Republicans are facing now echoes the one with which segregationists of both parties were confronted as the black civil rights movement matured: Once bigotry falls out of mainstream fashion, it's hard to talk the accepted talk without walking the walk."

"When the prevailing political winds force a party to abandon prejudicial rhetoric, how can it continue to advocate prejudicial policy without wrapping itself in the cloak of hypocrisy?"

Like all civil rights movements, ours too will face setbacks. This is an issue, however, that the entire world is facing, and it is clear that the trend toward full equality is picking up steam.

The supporters of 416 will see tomorrow as a victory, but in reality, they have already lost — they will never again make us be silent, ashamed or secretive. Their dream of a 1950s-style patriarchy have already been shattered.

A conservative professor (and supporter of 416) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln likes to say that "as long as there are traditional families, there will be traditional family values." I know that as long as there are queer people, there will be queer families with just as much warmth, love and support.

Perhaps, someday, our families will coexist peacefully with mutual respect and full equality under the law. Someday, when he and other Nebraskans let them. Until then, however, the struggle continues.



Jeremy Patrick

Hemingway's triangular zone

Almost midnight and I am in love.

I let the book close with a thud and listen to the sound of the generator. The ending of, "The Garden of Eden," brings me to tears each and every time. "Mi bramare Ernesto, mi bramare," I whisper, hoping to stir sleeping spirits.

I think back on my days as an undergraduate when once I passed through a triangle of my own with a remorse and regret as heavy as a sopping-wet comforter.

I am unable to clear my reflection from the mirror, and my soul not only smiles its wickedness, it challenges me to come hither, and so I enter the fun house.

I remember sitting outside the doctor's office and tap-tapping my foot in the air, up and down, 567, 568, 569, now triple time, smack some more of my gum 571, smack, 573 smack smack, 575 smack, 577 smack smack smack and the nurse calls my name and says, "Please step up on the scale," something inside of me smiles defiantly and I say, "No thanks, you first."

Doctor says, "What's wrong?" I say, "Oh, you know, besides the fact that I wanted to see how far I could fly off of the top of Oldfather, and besides the fact that my mind won't shut off, I'm just peachy." He looks worried. I smile and say I was just kidding. I tell him I think I'm obsessive/compulsive. He says, "Really? You don't seem that way, do you ever find yourself counting things, doing odd rituals?"

I decide not to tell him about the triangle or that I tapped my foot in midair 632 times before getting in to see him, and that when I lean down to take a

drink of water, I must count to nine before I can stop drinking. Instead I say, "Well, what if I lose my car keys a lot?"

"OK?"
"What if I can't stop thinking?"
"About what?"
"The lottery."

He looks worried. "Just kidding." He looks into my eyes and says he thinks I'll be OK. That's the big lie. None of us are ever OK. This is, of course, the state I was in as I passed through the triangle. All I can tell you is: Beware of the triangle.

"Don't talk rot."
"What?"
"Don't talk rot."
"What's rot?"
"Meaningless drivel."
"That's not true. This story is full of meaning," he says to me. Billy and I are soaking up rays on the steps of Andrews and he's got "Hills Like White Elephants," between his thumb. He flaps it at me in 2/4 time. I think of the rhythm of his hips in 2/4 time last night and my thighs begin to tremble. I try to focus on the stone columns instead.

"Don't you see what a great writer he is? This man is the master of storytelling."

"You're telling me? You don't even know what rot is." I start to lay into Billy, start to rev up my engine. Billy — who is telling me about his recent pinning to Liz beth, and how their life is going to be so unbelievably awesome and how Liz beth's parents were both from the same houses that she and Billy are from and just how cool is that, and I hear the train coming down the track.

I hear the steam whistle blowing, can feel it pulling me closer to the tracks, the circular motion calling out to me, beckoning. Where's my gin and tonic when I need it?

"Do you even know what this story is about?" Billy looks up to the blue sky for help.

"You won't find it up there. This ain't William Blake; we're talking sans inspiration. Hemingway tells it like it is, only you apparently aren't accustomed to seeing things as they really are."

I get the scowl. "What does that mean? Are you mad about last night?" What I love the most about Billy is his feigned ignorance.

"It means this ... the Eagle was never so foolish as when he submitted to learn from the crow."

Billy shrugs his shoulders. "I don't have a clue what you are saying, and I don't have time for this."

"No one ever has any time. You think I've got time? The only way you will ever have any time is if you take it. You've got to grab it by the throat and take it!"

"Now that's profound."
"I know."
Professor Winter told me that.

"Who's that?"
"He is the man who came before most."

"What?"
"Ah, look at the time."

Later I am falling asleep in class dreaming of Hemingway, my true fictional love of all time. Then I hear something familiar. What is my professor reading? I look up to see the bright-yellow legal paper in his hand. It's my journal entry. A smile starts to spread across my face like a ripple makes its way across the lake on a late June evening. Billy kicks my chair and slips me a note.

"This class sucks. Can I come over tonight?" I look into his deep-blue eyes and see a face I had fallen so hard for at the beginning of this semester. The way I fell into the sexual chemistry is the way a scientist can't avoid memorizing the table of elements.

The triangle is beginning to close in on me, choke me. I see Liz beth, truly a glowing vision, trotting like a faithful Labrador retriever to his side at the end of class, flip flipping her hair. She doesn't have a clue how much the desire to be her is killing me.

Then it dawns on me, I cannot be the retriever. I am doomed to play the role of Catherine for the rest of my life, this is who I am, ugly as it may be, I have to begin to embrace it, or I'll never get out of the triangle.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Billy says to me as I start to walk away.

"I'm fine."
"You don't look fine."
"This devil is fine."



Yasmin McEwen



Delan Lonowski/DN