

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Is that all?

Small number of chancellor finalists cause for concern

Two chancellor candidates are mulling whether they want the top seat at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln this week.

After NU President Dennis Smith announced the finalists for the chancellor position - Interim Chancellor Harvey Perlman and University of Minnesota Regent William Hogan - we're left with one question?

Where are the rest?

Don't get us wrong - we're not saying that both Hogan and Perlman aren't the best candidates to lead this university. But in a Daily Nebraskan story, Joe Rowson, NU spokesman, said he expected six or so names to be forwarded to Smith by the chancellor search committee.

But on Monday, Smith let out the names, and the list was down to two.

Of course, the short list isn't really so short when compared to the last time UNL searched for a chancellor. In 1995, former Chancellor James Moeser was a finalist with only two other candidates.

But the discrepancy in Rowson's and Smith's numbers leads us to wonder whether the actual pool was bigger and why more candidates weren't included in the final cut.

A couple weeks ago, the Omaha World-Herald announced that it was pressing the university to release the names of all the finalists, saying state public records law required the university to hand over the list of finalists it was pouring over and planning to interview.

Smith promptly released the list a few days later. The World-Herald was clearly anxious to get its hands on the list only the chancellor's search committee had access to.

But we're wondering if the paper's drive to get the information led to the university making its decision on the finalists in haste and some potential candidates dropping out because of unwanted publicity.

It's obvious why a candidate would want their names kept under wraps until they have advanced into the last stages of the interview process.

After the university found out its own Moeser was a candidate for the University of Florida presidency position last year, speculation that Moeser was looking to leave the university spread. He took the top job at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill instead a few weeks later.

It's understandable why The World-Herald - or any news organization - would want to know what's going on behind closed doors at the chancellor's search committee meetings. But we wonder whether the World-Herald's push to get names actually hurt the search process.

Other questions arise as well. When it came down to it, maybe the six or so who were being considered decided the position wasn't worth enough to go through the interview and dropped out when they got the offer to be on the short list.

When Moeser said he was leaving the University of Nebraska, he said the position would be attractive to applicants and would draw talented candidates.

But issues still remain when it comes to recruiting talented administrators to the state. Pay is one of the biggest ones. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln paid Moeser \$180,000 - a drop in the bucket compared to what chancellors and presidents across the nation make.

The short list is final now, and both candidates' appearance on campus will be widely anticipated.

But we're interested to know if we're missing out on anyone.

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Megan Cody/DN

Behind closed doors

"The government being the people's business, it necessarily follows that its operations should be at all times open to the public view. Publicity is therefore as essential to honest administration as freedom of speech is to representative government."

- William Jennings Bryan (1915)



Jeremy Patrick

Last week, a controversy erupted over a suggestion Timothy McVeigh made in a letter published by the Sunday Oklahoman.

McVeigh, observing the problems prison officials were having in finding room for relatives of his victims (more than 250) to view his execution, suggested that "a reasonable solution seems obvious: hold a true public execution." (OWH, 2/11/01)

Predictably, Bureau of Prisons spokesman Dan Dunne said: "It hasn't been considered. It won't happen." (OWH, 2/11/01) Instead, the prison system will set up a closed-circuit television system for the relatives to view McVeigh's execution.

Many newspaper commentators oppose showing McVeigh's execution publicly because they believe it is playing into his vision of himself as a martyr.

Of course, it's bad policy to promote general rules based on exceptional instances. The "normal" convicted murderer is certainly not happy about being executed and would probably be adverse to having his death seen by all.

In fact, public executions have gained support from people on both sides of the political spectrum, including liberals such as Jesse Jackson and Nat Hentoff and conservatives such as George Will and James Philip (President of the Illinois Senate).

By turning from an unusual instance (McVeigh) to a general policy applied to all convicted murderers, it seems clear that both supporters and opponents of capital punishment should favor public executions.

Supporters of capital punishment are motivated by a variety of factors, but at least publicly they espouse three reasons for their belief that the death penalty is justified: deterrence, "closure" for victims and retribution.

The idea that the death penalty deters future murders has never been supported by a shred of evidence (in fact, recent studies show that 10 of the 12 states without it have homicide rates below the national average, even when one controls for demographic differences), but even if it somehow does prevent crime, presumably, deterrence

could only take place if people know about it.

Public executions would increase public awareness that evil people get what's coming to them and would thereby increase the deterrence effect of capital punishment generally.

A belief in "closure" also should entail a belief in capital punishment. The victims of a crime include far more than one's close relatives; they include friends, coworkers and the public in general (often we hear about how a murder was a crime against an entire community). By this logic, the more people able to view the murderer's execution, the more "closure" will be available.

And for those who believe in some cosmic notion of retribution or justice, public executions will have the exact same effect in ensuring that the offender gets what he or she deserves. For those who believe that capital punishment is unjust, the major objections (e.g., its violation of religious law or its racist and classist application) are not changed by having public executions.

Some concerned citizens, except those who support a deterrence rationale, may be afraid that it will make the public bloodthirsty or that it will harm children emotionally. But death by lethal injection, for example, is tame compared to the gruesome deaths we can all see on cable television or in comic books or, for that matter, on "Faces of Death," available in most rental outlets.

Like the public's choice for all other forms of media, those who wouldn't want to watch it wouldn't be forced to.

There is, however, an important benefit to having public executions: increased awareness of exactly what the government is (or is not) doing. There is often much confusion over what happens during executions: Does the convict feel pain? What exactly were his last words? Was the execution team gentle or rough?

According to some reports, inmates have burst into fire during electrocution or gone into convulsions after lethal injection; if denied by prison officials, how do we know who is telling the truth? Allowing the media access to executions would solve these problems.

According to Justice Brandeis, "Publicity is justly commanded as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman."

Government action, especially action that is so potentially fraught with abuse such as capital punishment, needs to be in the public's view. Justice cannot exist in a world of lies or in a world of shadows.

When prison officials refuse to even consider the idea of public executions, one wonders what exactly they are afraid of.

As Camus said, "One must kill publicly or confess that one does not feel authorized to kill."

Single questions piercing the ether

Dark brown plastic chair. You are there. You are clay.

In a room, the penguins float on top of the mercury in their glass box.

It never fails, I can catch her in the breeze. Poetry in the slices of summer sun that filter through the thick fog of winter. Collapsed is the season, tucked away in a closet like an old inflatable toy.

The candle I lit grows. It is bobbing in the air - jabbing at the sky. Maybe it wants to go home. The snow outside drips like blood from the branches and tree limbs that tear into the flesh of the storm.

The drops are like little storms, left by mother, glimpses of spring as they fall, trickle down the invisibility like pieces of the shattered diamond sky. I am static in the air, warm fuzz reverberating around my edges.

He stretches his legs back around the chair as if they were giraffes' necks. The ether I am afloat in is stale. It is warm with the buzz of electricity.

I sit on the desk. I walk the concrete outside. I am here, not always where I want to be. Walking away - in my silent nobility. My feet seem to push to each step - and me, I somehow follow.

My shadow grows long - to be sized up, like meat, and cut by the night. I tread upon the wisps of flowers' hair that dust the wind. Into the sun I venture - maybe I am not fading, but becoming just as brilliant.

I steal all that I can. I have to hold as much as I can close to me, for I need them to travel, to go where I am going.

"What is faith?" he asked. A profound question, I suppose. What is it to have faith? What is it to believe in something? To instill in a being or a presence - instill in a fairy tale - the very essence of which that fairy tale is to be the creator of?

Isn't it ironic that to have faith, we must give it to that which is already?

"What is faith?" he asked. Faith, I believe, is the unseen. It is the inexplicable. Faith accounts for the things that don't exist - the feelings we cannot experience. Faith is of the sensations we touch not. Faith is of the whispers we hear not - the words we speak not. Faith is not to be known.

Faith is to remain in the silent ocean of the poetic chaos of the duality of man. Faith is to define, to draw the lines between peace and war. To make left and right, black and white. This is faith. Faith is to draw out the long blade and dig into the bark hide of the human mind as if it were two lovers carving their initials in some aged tree's flesh.

With faith, we do not understand - we have no answers. When he asked God to take him if there was no God, he lived because his belief in God was stronger than he would ever know.

This is faith because faith is the blind beggar with his hand outstretched into the shadows of the stiff, black night.

"What is faith?" he asked. What it is, is that he already knew and understood faith in a sense which he could not adapt into his reality.

He questioned, just as I once did, and through it, he has found the faith of his own heart which will carry him beyond his moments of faithless doubting. When I reach the horizon, I find myself all alone with the provoked and now settled sun.

I dare not look over my shoulder - I don't - but instead take a prominent, definite, brash step into the seasoned salts of the seas that spill below with the setting of the sun.

I step out onto the lip of the dawn. I unfold outward, rolling toward the edges of existence. The cold breathes. It is raw and dry. I think about him almost everyday.

The jagged night with the twinkling lights in the periphery of my thoughts. I wish, sometimes, to just break down and cry.



Dan Leamen



Jake Gillespie/DN