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**Capitol View
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**Can We Just Play Nice for a Change?**

Just when we breathed a sigh of relief that the particularly nasty primary election was over and our mailboxes would once again be empty and our TV sets would resume regular programming; somebody decided we deserve more of the same.

You know what I’m talking about. Negative campaigning is once again rearing its ugly head just in time for the general election. Why do candidates and their handlers turn to pointing out the bad stuff about their opponents rather than emphasizing their own positives?

Sadly, negative campaigning works if it reaches voters who are undecided or uninformed about the issues at hand. In the case of unsuccessful Republican gubernatorial candidate Charles Herbster, it seemed that he was the one uninformed about the issues. His Trump-fueled talk about securing the southern border had me questioning what problems we have with Kansas. I mean, I don’t like it when the smoke from their annual burning of the Flint Hills drifts north, but that’s hardly a campaign issue.

While not necessarily negative campaigning, what was up with the three front-running Republican gubernatorial candidates shown handling shotguns and promising to support gun laws and ownership? Was that important to educated voters? Do I really want to think about the governor and his buddies going hunting? Note to the winner, Jim Pillen, that image of you in your orange hunting vest is NOT the way I want to envision the governor.

Negative campaign tactics are often used by those who believe they can’t win an election based on policy alone and instead must rely more heavily on personal attacks against opponents. That worked during the Republican primary where two men spent millions trying to “buy” the office.

But it has no place in the general election. Why use it in a Republican state to try to defeat the Democratic candidate, Carol Blood, who is already facing an uphill battle because of lack of funding and support. Kudos to her for running and shame on the Democrats for only

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fielding a candidate in one of five elected constitutional offices. There will be no choices in November in the races for Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Attorney General or Auditor, all but guaranteeing Republican victories.

Not to let the Nebraska Republican Party off the hook, its high-profile primary campaign was chaos at best, downright ugly at worst. Throw in a few sexual assault allegations (Republican vs. Republican) and you’ve got a shameful drama that is anything but “Nebraska nice”. Perhaps “Nebraska, it’s not for everyone” is more fitting. Try to focus on something more than ensuring 33 Republican votes to end filibusters in the Legislature. Stop making it personal by trying to eliminate fellow Republicans who are seen as enemies.

So, even though it might work in some instances, research has also shown that negative campaigns often lead to a cycle of hateful rhetoric and name-calling. Were we paying attention during the Trump era and the aftermath? Are we ever going to live down or stop talking about the “January 6th” events is Washington, DC?

Attacks on credibility can be seen as attacks on character or identity causing more anger in the opponent. Negative campaigning stirs up animosity in undecided voters by activating intense emotions through hate speech, causing them to feel personally attacked.

How can we change all this? Become better educated about the issues and the candidates. Challenge them to stick to the issues and not the personalities of their opponents. Tell them you want to know how they would govern. Ask them to take a stand on a real problem.

It’s up to all of us to stomp out negative campaigning.

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