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## Newspaper Editorial Endorsements and Voting Results: An Examination of Two Newspapers

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Newspaper Editorial Endorsements and Voting Results:

An Examination of Two Newspapers

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication

by

Randy A. Grosse

April 1989

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Arts degree in Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the time the printed word was used to inform and motivate the colonists, the basic role of newspapers in the United States has been twofold -- informing people of the news and commenting on the people and events that make that news.

Even with the evolution of newspaper and reporting styles and formats through the years to meet the changing needs of Americans, that basic, dual role continues today.

The commentary of newspapers usually is reserved for the editorial or opinion pages. On those pages, editorial writers can comment on society from the viewpoint of the newspaper ownership -- suggesting action, praising people or events or condemning what has been or what might be. Individual columnists have broadened the spectrum of opinion articles, providing entertainment, humor, inspiration, enlightenment and challenge, and the topics are as varied as the columnists.

As for the editorials, the range of topics also is wide and varied. However, one topic weaves a common thread among newspapers of all types and sizes -- elections. Since the early 1800s -- when editorials replaced single-issue pamphlets and essays -- American newspapers have been commenting on elections and supporting or endorsing



candidates and positions. The mugwump editorial writers focused added emphasis on the editorial endorsements in the political campaigns of the late 1880s (Emery, 1962).

And while the newspapers of today may not show the intensity of the mugwumps, surveys show more than 80 percent of the nation's newspapers make endorsements at some level.

That percentage may change through the years, depending on newspaper ownership, the field of candidates and any number of other variables. But when elections are in the news, editorial endorsements are often on the editorial pages. What about those endorsements? Are the endorsements merely a part of Americana revered by print journalists, or are the endorsements a functioning part of newspaper journalism and an important cog in the election process? Do editorials impact voter behavior? Do editorial endorsements help candidates?

At the very least, there is indeed a perceived importance. Television networks and weekly news magazines monitor the editorial endorsements of national dailies, and those endorsements, especially major newspapers' endorsements of underdog candidates, are major news. Candidates, too, tout the endorsements, using the phrases of the editorial writers as prose for print advertisements and television commercials. From that perspective, it is evident some type of connection is perceived between editorial endorsements and voting results.

Through the years, researchers have attempted to examine questions about relationships between endorsements and voting results. Some of the early researchers simply included endorsements among possible factors when they studied what affected voter behavior. More recent studies have narrowed the focus to examine endorsements in a variety of newspaper and election situations.

However, even before questions about the influence of editorial endorsements are considered, a more basic question also must be asked. Is there any type of relationship, any simple correlation between newspaper editorial endorsements of candidates or ballot propositions and the voting for those endorsed candidates and propositions?

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In examining questions relating to editorial endorsements and voter behavior, such factors as the type of ballot question (candidate or proposition), level (local, state or national) of an issue or candidate, and newspaper circulation have been considered -- some in studies looking only for simple endorsement-result correlations, others in more complex studies seeking to establish some direct causal relationship. Both types of studies share a common denominator in that they often have looked at newspaper endorsement impact in one election, in a particular race in one election or at one race over a period of time in several elections and newspapers.

These studies began with or were based on an election, an issue or period of time, but seldom began with or were based on a newspaper. For this thesis, the study begins with the newspaper. The author of one study of endorsements suggested the impact of the press (including editorial endorsements) is enhanced by the monopolies many newspapers enjoy in their communities, where voters turn to newspapers both as a source of information and for advice. Two newspapers that enjoy such a monopolistic situation are used as the focus of this study. Those newspapers' endorsements and any agreement with vote totals for primary, general and

special elections during a specific three-year period have been examined.

Through this comparative examination of two newspapers, editorial endorsements can be studied not in terms of a cross-section of newspapers on a given issue, but rather in terms of varied issues, varied candidates and levels of office, varied elections and a given newspaper. Factors that may be diluted in a study of several newspapers may be more evident by looking at each of the two newspapers individually. And a variable that may have increased influence when perceived through the study of one election will not impact the results to that same degree in this three-year look at each of the two newspapers.

Although the approach is somewhat different from previous research efforts, this thesis relates to the selected conclusions from earlier studies. An examination of editorial endorsements and voting results for both of the studied newspapers is compared to three conclusions drawn from the literature. Those conclusions suggest:

1. There is a degree of agreement between editorial endorsements and voting results.

2. The degree of agreement between editorial endorsements and vote totals is higher on proposition questions than on candidate races.

3. The degree of agreement between vote totals and editorial endorsements is higher on local issues and races

than on state and national ballot propositions.

Proving or disproving those statements is not the purpose of this research. Those conclusions have been the result of many and varied studies of the editorial endorsement. Instead, this thesis takes a comparative approach, pairing the results from the examination of the two newspapers selected for this study and the corresponding research-based conclusion. That comparative approach is based on one research question: "How does the agreement (or lack of agreement) between editorial endorsements of the two newspapers and voting results compare to the three literature-based conclusions regarding endorsements and voting results?"

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As mentioned, the conclusions being used as the basis for this comparison are the products of research over the past 40 to 50 years. Those studies of endorsements have been varied both in scope and approach. Some have focused on the endorsements, while others have considered endorsements as one among many factors possibly influencing voter behavior and, thus, the election results.

In one study of the latter type, researchers suggested that election propaganda, including the media (and editorial endorsements) ". . . had the effect of reinforcing the original vote decision" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944, p. 87). They said interest in the 1940 Roosevelt-Willke presidential race was a factor in what people saw and heard about the election.

Lazarsfeld et al. studied the behavior of Erie County, Ohio, voters, and the three researchers examined a variety of factors -- income, religion, education, political party and propaganda -- in what has become a classic among voting studies for researchers in political communication and political science.

That broad-based look at voter behavior more than 40 years ago compares to a Fedler, Smith and Counts (1985) examination of the 1982 general election in Orlando,

Florida. Similar in that both trios of researchers used voter surveys, the studies contrast in their focus. Using an exit-poll survey, Fedler et al. attempted to determine the helpfulness of editorials to the voters, and correlated the helpfulness to the outcome of the various candidate races and ballot questions. They concluded voters were aware of editorial endorsements and were affected to some extent by the endorsements.

In the years between those two studies, researchers continued examining voter behavior, and began looking at perceived media bias, news coverage and editorials as factors.

Noelle-Neumann (reported in Nimmo, 1978) reflects the general findings of that research, noting ". . . a change of individuals' voting intentions during an election campaign in favor of the opinion presented most forcefully in public" (p. 244).

Noelle-Neumann was discussing opinion in a broad, general sense. Kraus and Davis (1976) took a more focused look at opinion, differentiating between editorials and editorializing as a part of news stories in their study of the media's editorial influence and as an agenda setter. They described editorials as a sign of preference and editorializing as a sign of bias. That media bias -- perceived or real -- was examined by Robinson in 1972. He compared voters' perceptions of newspapers to the editorial

stands as reported by Editor & Publisher. Controlling for other variables, Robinson reported, "it was estimated that a newspaper's perceived support of one candidate rather than another was associated with about a 6 percent edge for the endorsed candidate over his opponent" (p. 245).

Kraus and Davis (1976) also discussed the general role of the media, including endorsements, and they suggested "editorial support and endorsement may be considered part of the process of structuring reality for voters" (p. 222). Nimmo (1978) said "public opinion, like society, is activity constructed through social control, coinciding personal choices and personal and group transactions" (p. 247), and he suggested the media is part of the control and transactions.

One of those transactions -- editorials -- is designed to influence, if not control in some cases, public opinion. Focusing on editorial endorsement impact, Fedler (1984) pointed to the reluctance of some newspaper editors (representing about 29 percent of the U.S. dailies) to make endorsements in the 1980 presidential election. Fedler said the editors doubted the effectiveness of the endorsements; however, Fedler suggested the editors were incorrect in their assumption. "It does not matter whether research is conducted by journalists, by sociologists or by political scientists. . . . The results are always the same. Researchers indicate that the endorsements influence voters,



perhaps 5 percent or more" (pp. 21-22).

Fedler apparently was generalizing the findings of several studies he was reviewing, because he did not specify if the 5 percent was a difference in vote totals, a change in the vote, a positive impact for one candidate, a negative impact for another or a combination of both.

#### Looking at Elections

The 5 percent figure is not a given in any election, at any level, for any office or any ballot question, but some type of impact is evident in studies of several presidential elections.

Fedler, Counts and Stephens (1982) compared the endorsements of the nation's 100 largest daily newspapers with the vote totals in the newspapers' home counties to test four hypotheses in a study of the 1980 presidential race. Results showed more support for endorsed candidates over other candidates in cities where the only daily made an endorsement, more support where only one of the dailies in a city made an endorsement and more support where all dailies in a city agreed on an endorsement. A hypothesis relating circulation to endorsement impact was not supported by the research. Fedler et al. did not address such questions as city population, party affiliation or other facts that could have been involved in the voters' decision.

In another study of the 1980 election, Hurd and

Singletary (1984) looked at the question of endorsement impact on the voting of registered Independents. The two researchers showed a significant relationship between endorsements and the Independents' voting. The relationship they found was stronger among Independents who read an endorsement of Jimmy Carter than those who read endorsements of Ronald Reagan.

Robinson (1974), in a follow-up to his 1972 study, looked at the voting of Independents, as well as Democrats and Republicans, in five presidential elections -- 1972, 1968, 1964, 1960 and 1956. His research was based on data gathered from voter surveys conducted by the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies after each of the elections. Among Independents and members of the two major parties, Robinson found a significant relationship between endorsements read and voting behavior.

Even controlling for several other factors and using MCA (multiple classification analysis) to weigh the impact of those factors, he determined there was still a significant relationship between the endorsements and voting behavior, although the level of the relationship was considerably less than when controlling only for political party.

Erikson (1976) concluded newspaper editorial endorsements did influence voter totals in the 1964 Johnson-Goldwater presidential race, noting that in single-newspaper

counties (where Johnson was supported), the vote totals were about 5 percent more Democratic. With his study, he challenged the reinforcement theory suggested in the early research.

Newspaper communication may provide an exception to the generalization that political communication produces little change in voter choice. Because newspapers often enjoy readership monopolies in their local circulation areas, they generally hold captive audience. . . . [V]oters generally regard newspapers as reliable sources of information and even editorial advice. (p. 208)

#### Multiple-level Election Studies

Rather than looking at vote swings in one race -- the presidential race -- researchers examining multiple-level elections considered a variety of factors in studying the impact of newspaper endorsements.

Rystrom (1986) examined California elections -- including races at all levels from 1970 to 1980 -- and reported the overall difference in the vote he could attribute to editorial endorsements was just over 1 percent. Rystrom used net percentage differences in vote totals, comparing local city or county vote areas to the state's total and the endorsement of newspapers in each geographical area. He also grouped newspapers by circulation, ownership

and position on the political spectrum to consider those factors.

Even though the overall impact was small, Rystrom's study showed the endorsements had more impact in primary elections and on propositions, with privately owned, small newspapers having the most influence. Rystrom based his study, in part, on Gregg's 1965 study of the 1948 to 1962 elections in California. In that study, Gregg used the county as a unit of analysis, noting where a majority voted for the endorsed candidate. He concluded that the influence on local elections was greater than in state or national elections. Like Rystrom, Gregg also reported a greater endorsement impact on propositions than on candidate races.

Before Rystrom modified Gregg's methodology, McCombs (1967) questioned the use of the county vote totals and used the individual voter as a unit of analysis in a study of the 1966 election in California. Sixty-one respondents were selected at random from registration listings. Questions focused on three state-wide races and one local contest and which endorsements the respondents had read or seen. His work, at least indirectly, related back to the early research, suggesting a compounding of relationships among all variables impacting voter behavior.

McCombs said his study showed the impact of the endorsements is greater when there are few variables affecting the voter, or when there is considerable

disagreement among the variables. For example, McCombs said endorsement impact would be expected to be greater on a ballot question relating to the taxation of insurance companies. Voters, he said, would use the editorial as a point of orientation on an issue where little other information is available.

McCombs wrote that his two new hypotheses "suggest one addition -- editorial endorsements -- to the matrix of variables that explain political behavior. . . . For the communication researcher, the task is to determine if the size and consistency of the matrix do in fact account for the influence of editorial endorsements" (p. 547).

Illinois also received considerable research attention after a 1964 election when voters elected all members of the state General Assembly on a state-wide basis. McDowell (1965) looked at the general impact of newspaper endorsements, comparing the endorsements of newspapers reaching most of the state's population with the vote totals (each voter could select 177 from among 236 candidates). He concluded voters were significantly influenced by endorsements, whether the endorsement was for a full slate of candidates as was the case with the Chicago newspapers, or with a small number of local candidates, as were endorsed by some of the downstate Illinois newspapers. Looking at the same election, Hooper (1969) examined political party and newspaper endorsements as predictors of election

results. Correlation and regression analyses were used to determine the percent of variance associated with party and endorsement. While Hooper said political party was the major factor in deciding the outcome of this special and unusual election, endorsements were one means of setting some candidates apart from the others. Candidates receiving the endorsements averaged about 24,000 more votes than non-endorsed candidates (about 2.5 percent over the mean of 970,000 votes for Democratic candidates in Chicago).

#### Impact at the Local Level

Gregg (1965) and others who have studied multiple-level elections have suggested the impact of editorial endorsements is most evident in local elections, and several researchers have examined that contention. Smith (1985) studied a local election in Jefferson County, Kentucky, where election of a Republican judge by a 51-to-49-percent margin contrasted with other races where Democrats won, some by large margins. Smith attributed the Republican judge's victory to a cross-over vote and the support of 70 percent of Independents. Based on a voter survey, Smith concluded newspaper endorsements had more effect on the Independents than on partisans who crossed party lines.

Mueller (1970) examined an election where voters faced a seemingly endless block of candidates for a small number of positions, similar to the McDowell and Hooper studies of

the Illinois General Assembly election. Fourteen candidates of 139 listed were to advance to a run-off election for the Los Angeles Junior College Board of Trustees. Each of the two major daily newspapers in Los Angeles endorsed about 18 candidates and recommended voters select seven. Vote totals show candidates endorsed by the newspapers received as many as 24,000 more votes than candidates not endorsed. Mueller concluded the authoritative endorsement -- support from the media, a political party, etc. -- is one of the major factors in determining the outcome of these types of multiple-candidate elections.

Scarrow and Boran (1979) examined the impact of an endorsement by a twice-weekly newspaper in the New York City area. While not supporting the winning candidate, the endorsement of the Suffolk Life was credited with influencing voting behavior in areas where the newspaper was distributed. In those areas, the endorsed candidate ran ahead of the winner by a 54.9-to-45.1 percentage and lead Democratic candidates for other offices by 8 percent.

In summary, many researchers have attempted to answer questions on the relationship between editorial endorsements and the way people vote. That research -- from the early to the recent, from the general to the focused -- has indicated a relationship does exist, sometimes as a factor in the decision process, sometimes as a change agent and other times to simply reinforce voters' decisions.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Since this thesis uses the newspaper as a starting point and focus of study, selection of a newspaper or newspapers was the first critical step. Two Nebraska newspapers -- the Omaha World-Herald and The Daily News of Norfolk -- were selected.

Obviously not random selections, the newspapers were chosen for a variety of reasons. The World-Herald is the only daily in Omaha, and is not only dominant in Omaha but in much of the rest of the state of Nebraska. Employee-owned, the Omaha paper has a listed daily circulation of more than 220,000 (more than 270,000 on Sunday) extends throughout most of Nebraska and into areas of Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and South Dakota; however, much of the circulation is concentrated in the area immediately around Omaha.

The World-Herald has a tradition of an active editorial role, with two pages of editorials, columns and other opinion articles in every issue. That active role includes editorial endorsements on almost all candidate races and ballot questions, and the total for any election provides a good sample for testing and comparison purposes.

The Daily News is a six-day-a-week daily enjoying the same monopolistic role as the World-Herald, although on a



much smaller scale. Family-owned, the Norfolk paper has a circulation of more than 22,000, spread throughout rural northeast Nebraska, but with much of it concentrated in the newspaper's home county -- Madison County. A full opinion page is featured in each issue, but endorsements are made in selected races -- most at the state/national level.

Endorsements made by either or both newspapers for any election -- primary, general or special -- during 1984, 1985 and 1986 were considered for this study. That recent three-year period provides an overview of the types of elections voters face today.

A presidential year, 1984 featured the national elections needed to compare the newspapers' endorsements of local and state/national candidates and issues. In the case of the Norfolk newspaper, that election year also provides the opportunity to examine a high-awareness local issue -- a ballot proposition on the implementation of a city sales tax.

While 1985 was not a regular election year, it provides the opportunity to examine any special elections in either community, and the off-year city government elections in Omaha. The third year considered for this study, 1986, provides the off-year Congressional elections, as well as the Nebraska governor's race and other statehouse elections.

One additional election, the January 1987 recall election of Omaha Mayor Mike Boyle, also is included. While

not actually part of the three-year time frame selected for the study, that election had its beginnings in 1986, including editorial commentary by the Omaha World-Herald.

Editorials were gathered by two means. With the Omaha World-Herald, a computer review of the newspaper's library was conducted, producing copies, dates, and other pertinent information about all editorial endorsements made during the three-year study period. For the Norfolk newspaper, microfilm files of the newspaper were reviewed for all issues within the two-month period before each election during the three years included in the study. Endorsements -- editorials making clear and specific voting recommendations on candidates and issues and not merely praising a particular candidate -- were categorized by year, type of election, type of question (candidate or proposition) and level of election (local or state/national) to facilitate the comparison of the study. No attempt was made to weigh the editorials on the strength of the endorsement.

While the circulation areas of the two newspapers are broad, the endorsed candidates and issues were compared with the voting results -- win or lose, approve or reject -- in only the home counties of the two newspapers. Those county totals are based on the results published in the respective newspapers. This provides some consistency in examining the results, with no other special procedures or criteria

required for determining which voting areas to use. Endorsements and voting results, as well as level of election and type of question (candidate or proposition) were analyzed by chi square tests.

Where a strong level of agreement or correlation exists between the endorsements and the voting results, causality is not inferred. Endorsements may be one of many factors impacting voter behavior, but this study cannot suggest any causal relationship. That is beyond the purpose and the scope of this research. However, the presence of a significant relationship ( $p < .05$  for this study) between the voting results and the editorial endorsements increases the potential for future research on the question of endorsements and voter behavior and adds to the theoretical base for that research. Comparison of the two studied newspapers with the selected conclusions of previous research -- showing similarities or differences -- raises other questions to be addressed in future research.

## RESULTS

A total of 106 Omaha World-Herald endorsements made prior to primary, general and city elections in 1984, 1985 and 1986 (plus the one city election in 1987) were included in this study. The newspaper made many other editorial endorsements, but those were for candidates or issues not on the ballot for Douglas County voters -- the vote total source for the study.

Those other endorsements included Congressional and legislative races in Nebraska, votes on judge retention, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents and public power boards outside Douglas County, as well as various races and issues in Iowa.

Douglas County voters agreed with 79 of the 106 endorsements included in this study (outlined in Table 1), or 74.5 percent. A single-sample chi square test showed a significant difference between the observed number of times the endorsed candidates or issues won and the expected frequency for that occurrence. That difference reinforces the assumption that newspaper endorsements do show a correlation with voting totals (chi square = 25.51, df = 1,  $p = .001$ ). The chi square test points to the significant difference, and it is that difference that suggests the correlation.

With a standard error of 4.25, the three-year sample of World-Herald endorsements provides a relatively strong basis for future predictions about agreement between that newspaper's editorial endorsements and vote totals in Douglas County.

TABLE 1  
 OMAHA WORLD-HERALD  
 ENDORSEMENT FREQUENCIES  
 ELECTION RESULTS FOR ENDORSED CANDIDATE/POSITION

Category	Frequencies	Endorsed Candidate/Position	
		Wins	Loses
Overall*	106	79(74.5%)	27(25.5%)
Type of Election			
Primary-multiple	27(25.5%)	19(70.4%)	8(30.8%)
Primary-two	6(5.7%)	5(83.3%)	1(16.7%)
General	73(68.9%)	54(73.9%)	19(26.1%)
Type of Question			
Candidate	83(78.3%)	60(72.3%)	23(27.7%)
Proposition	23(21.7%)	19(82.6%)	4(17.4%)
Level of Election			
Local	84(79.2%)	62(73.8%)	22(26.2%)
State/National	22(20.8%)	17(77.3%)	5(22.7%)

\* chi square = 25.51, df = 1, p = .001

Note: Statistical analysis was used only for comparison with three literature-based conclusions -- overall agreement, type of question and level of election.

Eighty-three of the 106 endorsements were for candidates, with 60 of those endorsed candidates (72.3 percent) supported by Douglas County voters. Of the 23 ballot questions, 19 of the endorsed positions (82.6

percent) were approved by the Douglas County voters.

Looking at level of election, the World-Herald endorsements for state/national candidates and propositions more closely matched the voting results than the endorsements for local candidates and propositions. Almost 80 percent of the World-Herald's editorial endorsements were for local candidates and ballot questions, and 62 of those candidates and positions (about 74 percent) also were supported by the voters. Seventeen of the 22 endorsements for state/national candidates and propositions (more than 77 percent) were supported by county voters.

Cross tabulation chi square tests calculating the endorsement and vote results against the type of questions (candidate or proposition) and the level of election (local or state/national) also were conducted for the entire sample. None of the tests showed a significant difference between the types of questions or the level of election.

Two other aspects of editorial endorsement and voting research -- type of election and vote impact -- although not part of the formal comparison for this study were examined. Some differences -- in frequencies and simple percentages -- in the types of election were evident, but were not statistically significant. Of the 106 editorial endorsements, 33 endorsements were made prior to primary elections and 73 before the general elections.

Twenty-seven of the primary endorsements were made in

racers featuring multiple candidates, and 19 of those endorsed candidates -- more than 70 percent -- won the election. Six of the primary endorsements were in two-person or proposition races, and five of the endorsed candidates or positions (83.3 percent) were supported by the Douglas County voters. Just under 74 percent of the candidates or ballot questions endorsed for the general election -- 54 of 73 -- received the support of the voters.

The research has been less than clear on the impact of endorsements on vote totals, with vote differences of as little as 1 percent to more than 5 percent suggested by studies. To examine impact, this study considered races where vote total for the endorsed candidate or issue was 10 percent or more above the theoretical vote total -- 55 percent or more in a two-way race where the theoretical vote split is 50-50, 36 to 37 percent in a three-way race where the expected split would be 33-33-33, etc.

Sixty-six of the 79 (83.5 percent) World-Herald-endorsed candidates and positions supported by the voters of Douglas County received that plus-10 percent margin. Of 27 candidates and propositions winning at the ballot box but not endorsed by the Omaha newspaper, 17 (63 percent) had vote totals at least 10 percent above the theoretical split of the vote.

A chi square test of the plus-10 percent voting margin and whether the winner was endorsed (Table 2) showed a

significant difference between the actual and expected distributions, suggesting some predictable level of agreement between endorsements and vote margin (chi square = 4.749, df = 1, p = .05). The Yates formula was used to correct for discontinuity.

While the test results are significant, the frequencies of the relatively close races (where the margin was less than 10 percent) should be noted. Of those 23 races, endorsed candidates and propositions were supported by the voters just 13 times, about 57 percent.

TABLE 2  
 OMAHA WORLD-HERALD  
 WINNER ENDORSED/PLUS 10-PERCENT MARGIN

---

Winner's Percent of Vote Above Expected Split	Endorsed Candidate/Position:	
	Wins	Loses
Greater than 10%	66(83.5%)	17(63.0%)
Less than +10%	13(16.5%)	10(37.0%)

chi square = 4.749, df = 1, p = .05

---

Eighty percent (48 of 60) of the endorsed candidates supported by Douglas County voters had the plus-10 percent margin of the total vote. For propositions, that percentage was even higher -- 18 of 19, or 94.7 percent, were supported by the plus-10 percent margin of Douglas County voters. Although there was a sizeable difference in the percentages for candidate and proposition races, a chi square test showed that not to be a significant difference.



A chi square examination of the winning margin of endorsed candidates and issues by level of election also showed no significant difference, although the state/national percentage (16 of 17 or 94.1 percent) was considerably higher than the 80.6 percent (50 of 62) of the endorsed local candidates or propositions earning the plus-10 percent margin in Douglas County.

#### The Norfolk Newspaper

Twenty-six editorial endorsements were made by the Norfolk newspaper during the study period, and Madison County voters agreed with 22 of those endorsements. Based on a single-sample chi square, there is a significant difference between the expected number of times the endorsed candidates or positions won and the actual frequency (chi square = 12.46, df = 1, p = .01; see Table 3).

While the chi square suggests a strong overall relationship between the endorsements and the voting results, the small sample size creates a large standard error, which would suggest caution in using this sample to predict future relationships between the Norfolk newspaper's endorsements and voting results. But for the purposes of this comparative study, that sample -- complete for the three-year study period -- is adequate.

An examination of the type of question (candidate or proposition) saw 12 of the candidates endorsed by the

TABLE 3  
 THE DAILY NEWS  
 ENDORSEMENT FREQUENCIES  
 ELECTION RESULTS FOR ENDORSED CANDIDATE/POSITION

Category	Frequencies	Endorsed Candidate/Position:	
		Wins	Loses
Overall*	26	22(84.6%)	4(15.4%)
Type of Election			
Primary-multiple	5(19.2%)	5(100.0%)	0(0.00%)
Primary-two	3(11.5%)	2(66.6%)	1(33.3%)
General	18(69.3%)	15(83.3%)	3(16.7%)
Type of Question			
Candidate	13(50.0%)	12(92.3%)	1(7.7%)
Proposition	13(50.0%)	10(76.9%)	3(23.1%)
Level of Election			
Local	7(26.9%)	5(71.4%)	2(28.6%)
State/National	19(73.1%)	17(89.5%)	2(10.5%)

\* chi square = 12.46, df = 1, p = .01

Note: Statistical analysis used only for comparison with three research-based conclusions -- overall agreement, type of question and level of election.

Norfolk newspaper receive the support of Madison County voters (92.3 percent). That compares to the 10 of the 13 newspaper-endorsed propositions backed by the voters (about 77 percent).

Endorsed state/national candidates and issues met with more success at the ballot box than did endorsed local candidates and issues. Of the seven local candidates or propositions endorsed, five (71.4 percent) received the support of the voters. About 90 percent of the

state/national candidates and propositions -- 17 of 19 -- receiving Daily News endorsements had voter support.

Chi square cross tabulations showed no significant differences in endorsement and voting relationships based on type of question or level of election.

Type of election also showed some frequency and percentage differences, but none that are statistically significant. Five of five endorsed candidates in primary elections with more than two candidates were supported by the voters. In the two-person or one-issue primary ballot questions, two of three endorsed candidates or positions were supported by the voters. For the general elections, 15 of the 18 Daily News-endorsed candidates and propositions were supported by the voters -- more than 83 percent.

The Norfolk newspaper did show a significant relationship between endorsed candidates and propositions and the plus-10 percent vote margin used for this study. All 22 of the winning endorsed candidates or propositions

TABLE 4  
THE DAILY NEWS  
 WINNER ENDORSED/PERCENT OF VOTE

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Winner's Percent of Vote Above Expected Split	Endorsed Candidate/Position:	
	Wins	Loses
> +10%	22(100.0%)	2(50.0%)
< +10%	0(0%)	2(50.0%)

chi square = 12.29, df = 1, p = .05

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had the plus-10 percent margin.

Based on a cross tabulation chi square test using Yates correction formula, there is a significant difference between the actual and theoretical distribution of whether the winning candidate or position was endorsed and the voting percentages for Madison County (chi square = 5.129, df = 1, p = .05).

The impact was no different for candidates (12 of 12) or propositions (10 of 10), or for local candidates/issues (5 of 5) or state/national races (17 of 17).

## DISCUSSION

Both of the studied newspapers, as noted in the "Results" chapter, show an obvious and high level of agreement between endorsed candidates and propositions and voting results (based on the significant differences shown in the chi square testing), thus matching the first general finding of the research literature used in this comparative study. That high level of agreement between endorsements and voting results is also apparent even when the newspapers differed somewhat from the other research-based conclusions relating to type of questions (candidate or proposition) and level of election (local or state/national) used as the basis of comparison for this study.

The research has shown -- according to the second general conclusion used for comparison -- a stronger relationship between voting results and endorsements on proposition ballot questions than on candidate races. The Omaha World-Herald falls in line with that research -- at least in terms of the percentages reported for the study period, with almost 83 percent of the endorsed propositions backed by the voters, compared to about 72 percent of the endorsed candidates.

The Daily News, however, differed from the general direction of the research on the type of question, with more

than 92 percent of the endorsed candidates receiving the support of the Madison County voters, compared to 77 percent of the propositions.

The Daily News also differed from the third research-based conclusion that suggests a stronger relationship or correlation between endorsements and local candidates/issues than between editorial endorsements and state/national candidates or ballot propositions. More than 90 percent of the state/national candidates endorsed by the Norfolk newspaper were supported at the Madison County polls, compared to about 71 percent of the local candidates and issues receiving the endorsement of the newspaper.

The Omaha newspaper also differed from the general research on the level of election question, although the difference was not as great as for the Norfolk newspaper (77.3 percent of the state/national endorsed positions and candidates were backed by the voters, compared to 73.8 percent of the local ballot questions).

#### Common Factors for Specific Situations

As might be expected, the results for the two newspapers have some commonality with the three research-based conclusions used for comparison, but not in all cases. Why did the two newspapers show some differences -- even if based on nothing more than straight percentages -- from the general research conclusions? The answer to that question

could be as varied as the factors that have been considered in previous studies of the relationship between editorial endorsements and voting results...factors such as campaign spending, incumbency, party line voting, traditions or patterns in voting, voter turnout, the issues or races themselves or the competitive position of the newspaper in the community. These and many other factors have the potential to emphasize, minimize, create or eliminate any level of agreement between editorial endorsements and voting results. But an examination of the data suggests that two factors may have had a strong impact on the elections and newspapers reviewed for this research.

The power of incumbency -- a phrase heard more and more, especially in analyses of national elections -- is very evident in the balloting. Incumbents' advantages in name recognition, positioning through being in office and in fund-raising are major obstacles for any challenger to overcome.

Party line voting -- at least for some elected positions -- as part of historical voting patterns, also is a factor that can impact the apparent relationship between endorsements and voting results. In The Daily News' Madison County, Republicans traditionally have outnumbered Democrats, and support for GOP candidates has been firmly established in most partisan races, especially those at the state/national level. Madison County voters supported a

Democratic presidential candidate only once from 1960 through the 1984 elections (Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964), have favored only two Democratic U.S. Senate candidates (popular former Governor J. James Exon in 1978 and incumbent Ed Zorinsky in 1982), and have not supported any Democratic House of Representatives candidates over that same period of time. Even when Nebraskans send Democrats to the governor's mansion, Madison County voters have lined up behind the Republican candidate, supporting Democrats only twice (Exon in his bid to unseat Republican Norbert Tiemann in 1970, and in his re-election effort in 1974).

Democrats hold a voter registration edge in Douglas County, but tradition has been with the Republican Party at the state/national level. Douglas County voters supported only one Democratic presidential candidate from 1960 through 1984 (Johnson in 1964), and the voter registration edge has enabled the Democratic Party to send a Democrat to the House of Representatives only three times since 1960 (the two terms of John Cavanaugh, elected in 1976 and 1978; and the 1988 election of Peter Hoagland). Democratic U.S. Senate candidates have been successful in Douglas County (and statewide) -- Zorinsky, a former Omaha mayor, in 1976 and 1982, Exon in 1978 and 1984, and former Governor Bob Kerrey in 1988. Former State Senator Terry Carpenter, although not successful statewide, started the swing to Democratic senators in 1972, managing a majority of



the Douglas County vote in his campaign against incumbent Carl Curtis. Until that election and Zorinsky's campaign success in 1976, long-time Republican Senators Curtis and Roman Hruska held a virtual stranglehold on the state's two U.S. Senate seats.

Like voters in much of the rest of Nebraska, Douglas County voters have supported Democratic gubernatorial candidates, voting with the Republican candidate only once from 1960 through 1986 -- supporting Tiemann in his 1966 campaign for the governor's seat being vacated by three-term Democratic Governor Frank Morrison.

Those historical voting trends -- in some instances not matching party registration totals -- along with the power of incumbency, may be among the reasons both newspapers showed a higher percent of agreement between the endorsed state/national candidates and propositions than between the endorsements and voting for local candidate and proposition races.

Of the 15 state/national candidates endorsed by the World-Herald, 11 were supported by the voters. Those 11 winners included five who were Republican incumbents (Ronald Reagan for president, Hal Daub in two House of Representatives races and two elected statehouse positions, which Republicans and incumbents have dominated from 1960 through 1986), three incumbents in primary or nonpartisan races and one Republican in a race without an incumbent.

Voter agreement with seven of eight ballot propositions endorsed by the Omaha newspaper increased the percent of agreement between endorsed positions and voting results. The four races where the World-Herald endorsement did not match the voting totals were in primary election contests without incumbents.

The Norfolk newspaper's endorsed state and national candidates were backed by the voters 100 percent of the time over the three-year study period. Of those 11 winners, one was an incumbent Democrat in a primary race, three were GOP candidates in races without incumbents and four were Republican incumbents (Reagan for president, Doug Bereuter in two House elections and one statehouse incumbent). With voting results matching the editorial endorsements in six of eight state/national propositions, the overall percentage was dropped to 89.5 percent.

The perfect match between voting results and The Daily News' endorsed state/national candidates was also a factor in why the Norfolk newspaper differed from the research conclusion suggesting a stronger relationship between voting results and endorsed propositions.

In local races, one of two candidates endorsed by the Norfolk newspaper received the support of the voters, putting the total for candidate races at 12 of 13 (92.3 percent). Endorsed local propositions matched voting totals on four of five issues. Combined with the state/national

propositions, where endorsements matched voting on six of eight issues, the newspaper's percentage for propositions was 76.9 percent.

Incumbency and voting patterns were among probable factors pushing the endorsed candidate percentage past the percentage of agreement between endorsements and ballot propositions. Republican Party support and incumbency were noted in the discussion of the state/national races. The one endorsed local candidate winning was an incumbent state legislator.

The research has shown editorials are one source of information -- in some cases often the only print media source in monopolistic situations such as those for the two studied newspapers -- voters use on ballot propositions, especially on issues gaining little or no media mention or attention. While that can be a factor, it probably was limited in the case of The Daily News, and suggests a reason why the Norfolk newspaper was not as successful with its proposition endorsements as in candidate races. Several of the ballot questions endorsed over the three-year study period were highly visible, and often highly controversial issues. Voters agreed with the newspaper endorsements on questions relating to valuation of agricultural land (not surprising in a rural, agricultural county), drug enforcement program, the discipline of judges and changes in impeachment proceedings. But on two of the highly

publicized issues --a referendum on a state law requiring the use of seat belts and an amendment calling for the Nebraska Unicameral to begin its sessions in December rather than January -- the voters did not follow the advice of the newspaper.

Norfolk voters agreed with four of five endorsed positions on local ballot propositions -- including two editorials supporting a city sales tax and use of the tax for property tax relief and two advocating support for a new public safety building. Those issues drew considerable media attention, as did the question of partisan races for the airport authority and city council. But on that issue, voters were at odds with the editorial stand of The Daily News.

#### One Best Candidate

Factors such as the power of incumbency and voting trends may be reasons for the differences between the three general research conclusions and the study results for these newspapers. But those same factors also may have been keys in an important area common to both newspapers and the first general research conclusion used for this comparative study -- a high level of agreement between endorsements and voting results.

Based on the examination of these two newspapers, a match between voting results and endorsed incumbent

candidates would hardly seem to be a surprise.

For the Omaha World-Herald, 53 endorsed candidates were incumbents and 49 of those incumbents (92.5 percent) were returned to office. A single-sample chi square shows the distribution of winners to have a significant difference from the expected distribution (chi square = 38.2, df = 1, p = .001). The Omaha paper was much less successful with endorsements in races without an incumbent, matching voting results in just 11 of 27 races. That relatively low percentage somewhat diminishes the significance of the relationship between endorsements and voting results, but may also suggest even more weight be given to the power of incumbency.

Of the four losing incumbents receiving endorsements, all were in local races -- one a hotly-contested county attorney race where the challenger built momentum as a successful write-in candidate in the primary election. Others included a race for a community college board position, a city council race where a former council member upset an incumbent and a school board race where the endorsed incumbent was actually a write-in candidate.

In three cases where incumbents were not endorsed, two won -- one for a legislative seat and a second for the U.S. Senate. The person considered the incumbent, the sitting mayor, lost in Omaha's recall election in early 1987.

The Daily News endorsed just six incumbents among its

13 candidate endorsements...and all of those incumbents were re-elected. Only once did the Norfolk newspaper choose not to endorse the incumbent, and that was in the 1984 U.S. Senate race between Exon and challenger Nancy Hoch. Hoch lost the race statewide but carried Madison County with the plus-10 percent factor considered in the study. Even given the strong GOP traditions in the county, the endorsement and especially the voting results are surprising in light of Exon's popularity there as a candidate for governor.

Unlike the Omaha newspaper, The Daily News also was successful in races without an incumbent. In those races, voters supported five of the six candidates endorsed by the Norfolk paper.

Statistics previously reviewed show the impact of party-line voting and/or voting trends in the two counties. Those statistics suggested a level of agreement between voting results and endorsements should be expected when newspapers endorse candidates of one particular political party in counties where that party enjoys a large voter registration edge or where that party has historically done well, or where a candidate of a particular party is endorsed for certain offices regardless of the party registration breakdown.

The party-line voting in Madison County is so strong that even though The Daily News did not endorse the incumbent in the Exon-Hoch U.S. Senate race -- as has been

noted -- the endorsement of the Republican challenger matched up with the vote total in the county. Voting trends based on political party in Douglas County can be seen in the traditional success of Republican U.S. House of Representatives candidates, Democratic candidates for governor and GOP presidential candidates. The trend for Senate races has switched from solidly Republican through 1972 to Democrats in every election since that time.

Those examples of voting trends and the impact of party-line voting, along with the statistical look at the World-Herald's endorsed incumbents, would suggest a basis for some predictability in such races. But is the predictability in the apparent agreement between the endorsed candidates and the voting results or that the candidates of certain political parties (historically strong at the ballot box or running for certain officers) and/or incumbents will be endorsed?

That leads to what might be considered another factor in what appear to be strong relationships -- high levels of agreement -- between editorial endorsements and voting results, a concept combining a variety of other factors, even including voting trends and incumbency. And that factor, that concept, could be called "one best candidate."

Industrial psychologist Frederick W. Taylor advocated what he called the "one best way" method of doing any given procedure in a set manufacturing environment. That "one

best way" might be considered the easiest, most efficient, most obvious and sometimes the only alternative for a given procedure.

"One best candidate" (used only as an adaptation of Taylor's phraseology) suggests that those same types of qualities are sometimes evident in newspapers' endorsed positions, especially of candidates, but also of propositions. In many races -- and the circumstances will vary with the local situation -- almost anyone could endorse a given candidate or position and that candidate or position will be supported by the voters. That support is not necessarily related or unrelated to the endorsement, but possibly could be explained through the "one best candidate" concept.

The "one best candidate" could be the candidate enjoying wielding the power of incumbency, the candidate of the political party riding the wave of historic voting trends or simply the obvious choice for the voters in a no-contest race. That obvious-choice situation could develop when the other candidate or candidates may have filed as paupers, may not have any campaign organization, may not have been recognized by the media as (a) serious candidate(s) or may represent such an extreme point on the political spectrum that running for office, rather than being elected, is the political statement he or she wants to make.



The "one best candidate" concept can be seen in the two newspapers' endorsements of Reagan (GOP incumbent) for President in 1984, support for incumbent state legislators, U.S. Congressmen Hal Daub (World-Herald) and Doug Bereuter (The Daily News), both GOP incumbents, and proposition questions such as the valuation of agricultural land, drug enforcement programs and several others. Endorsements of such candidates or propositions will lead to a high level of agreement with voting results, but should anything less be expected?

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study used three general research findings on newspaper editorial endorsements as a basis for comparison in examining the endorsements of two newspapers and the voting results in the counties where those newspapers are located. Those general research findings suggested:

- a level of agreement between endorsed candidates and propositions, and voting results;
- a higher level of agreement between the voting results and endorsed propositions than results and endorsed candidates; and
- a higher level of agreement between voting results and endorsed local candidates and propositions than results and endorsed state/national candidates and propositions.

As was noted in the "Discussion" chapter, the study shows a significant relationship between the editorial endorsements of both newspapers and the voting results, which is consistent with the first general finding. The Omaha World-Herald also matched the second finding relating to type of question, but differed from the third general research conclusion regarding level of election, while the Norfolk newspaper differed from both the second and third findings. Where the studied newspapers did not match the

general research conclusions, differences were only in the percentages of candidate or ballot questions or local or state/national elections, and none of the differences were statistically significant. But whether the newspapers matched the second or third general research conclusions, the overall strong level of agreement between endorsements and voting results remained relatively constant.

The study results provide an adequate review of endorsements by the selected newspapers over the three-year study period, but an expanded time period for the study would have added data and strengthened the overall statistical analysis for the World-Herald and provided a more adequate sample size for The Daily News. That lack of statistical significance is a limitation but is not a major problem for this comparative type of research effort.

Although not a part of the study for comparison purposes, the plus-10 percent margin of victory review indicated a strong level of agreement between margin of victory and endorsements. Nonendorsed candidates who won also often claimed victory by substantial margins, but the level of agreement between margin and no endorsement was much less than that for endorsed candidates and propositions. For these two newspapers, endorsed candidates or propositions can be predicted to win in convincing style.

The narrow focus of this research -- the very nature of this type of comparative study -- prevents any

generalization to the newspaper population of the United States, or even of Nebraska. But the consideration of other factors -- factors observed in the process of completing this research -- more than compensates for the lack of any broad, sweeping statements about newspaper editorial endorsements and voting results.

The two factors observed in this study -- incumbency and voting trends -- provide another perspective for additional research on the question.

The "Purpose of the Study" chapter suggested that the more general studies examining a random sample of newspapers or elections can tend to dilute the impact of certain factors, making them less obvious or not obvious at all. Taken as part of an extensive study examining a large number of newspapers and elections, a particular voting trend in a given area would not be evident. Levels of agreement between voting results and endorsements would be accepted as indicative of a variety of relationships, possibly including causal.

But perhaps the studies -- in many cases -- should go one step beyond a simple examination of the level of agreement between endorsements and voting results, or even beyond looking at differences in that agreement based on the type of question, level of election or type of election. Perhaps a certain level of agreement or correlation should be expected, and studies should focus on various "keys" to

those strong correlations. In cases where voting trends offer a sound basis for predicting a winner or where the power of incumbency is a traditionally strong factor in election results, studies should examine correlations between the editorial endorsements and the expected winners (based on voting trends) or between endorsements and incumbents.

Those types of studies would be the basis for a broader look at the "one best candidate" concept. While that concept cannot immediately be generalized to the newspaper universe, it does offer opportunity for examination.

Some basis for that research potential can be seen the plus-10 percent margin in voting results considered in this thesis. Of 106 winners reported for the Omaha newspaper, 83 (79 percent) -- endorsed and not endorsed -- won by comfortable margins. The frequencies were greater for endorsed candidates, but the plus-10 percent margin also was very much apparent for those winning and not endorsed. For the Norfolk paper, the numbers were even higher, with 24 of 26 winners (92 percent -- endorsed and nonendorsed) claiming wins by the plus-10 percent margin. While not relating directly to endorsements, the large percentage of "comfortable" winners might suggest the voters' perception of an obvious choice or "one best candidate."

But that concept (one best candidate) must first, however, be clarified, possibly even to determine some

definitional structure beyond the broad concept presented here. Are political parties, incumbency, finances and other factors all a part of "one best candidate"? Is it a combination of those factors, depending on the local circumstances? Or is it only simple logic, the obvious choice in any election? Do political polls have a role in determining or even predetermining an election and anointing the "one best candidate"? No doubt the concept, perhaps even the definition, would vary with the locations from newspaper to newspaper, but this concept does have the potential effect of diluting the significance of any perceived relationship between editorial endorsements and voting results.

With that type of focused clarification, "one best candidate" studies could be undertaken as comparative studies similar to this project, as case studies or a random sample of newspapers in a state or across the country. The case-study approach would appear to be the best alternative because of the likelihood of varying definitions of "one best candidate." Series of case studies could then be analyzed as a block to provide some basis for generalization to the entire newspaper universe.

In addition to the studies examining the "one best candidate" concept, other studies could look at some of the individual features of "one best candidate" or factors that might be considered important in certain areas. Researchers

might also opt for going to the key variable in the entire process -- the voter, surveying voters on their awareness and reading of endorsements, and how they view the relationship between endorsements and voting results.

Any of these suggested studies, as already noted, could take a look at the question of newspaper editorial endorsements and voting results from a perspective that is somewhat different from much of the previous research.

In the past, the ultimate question -- the ultimate goal -- appeared to be an examination of endorsements in terms of a relationship to the voting results. The numerous outside influences involved in any election often negate that type of research effort. But through the perspective being suggested here, the question becomes, "What influences editorial endorsements?" Rather than attempting to isolate any outside factors from the endorsement-voting result relationship, this study considered those factors individually or as part of the "one best candidate" approach and focused more on how those factors related to the endorsements than on how the endorsements related to the voting results.

## APPENDIX A

THE OMAHA WORLD-HERALD AND THE 1988 GENERAL ELECTION

Not originally included as part of this thesis project, the 1988 general election adds interesting data to the study, reinforcing some of the information already presented and adding some depth to the World-Herald portion of the study.

In the months before the 1988 general election, the Omaha newspaper made a total of 40 endorsements. Twenty-nine of those endorsed candidates and propositions were supported by the voters of Douglas County, and the 72.5 percent agreement rate compares favorably to the 74.5 percent for the endorsements during the three-year study period. A single-sample chi square test (using the Yates Correction formula) shows the distribution of matching endorsements and voting results is significant and, like the base study, matches the first research-based conclusion, suggesting some predictable level of agreement (chi square = 7.85, df = 1, p = .01).

Unlike the totals for the three years included in the study, which showed the World-Herald matching one of the two other research-based conclusions used for comparison, the 1988 general election review finds the Omaha newspaper matching both the conclusion on type of question (candidate



or proposition) and conclusion on level of election (local or state/national).

On type of question, Douglas County voters matched the endorsed position 11 of 13 times (84.6 percent) on propositions and 18 of 27 times (66.6 percent) on candidates. That compares to percentages of 72.3 on candidates and 82.6 on propositions from the elections selected for the base study period.

Regarding level of election, voters agreed with the newspaper's endorsements on 23 of 31 local races (74.2 percent), compared to six of nine state/national races (66.6 percent). Those figures compare with 72.3 percent for local candidates and 77.3 percent on state/national candidates from the main three-year study period.

As noted, the differences in percentages match the general research-based conclusions used for comparison, but none of the differences were statistically significant.

In terms of the plus-10 percent vote margin examined in the base study, the 1988 general election results very closely match the totals for the three election years. Of the 29 endorsed candidates or propositions that were supported by Douglas County voters, 25 (86.2 percent) were supported by that plus-10 margin outlined in the "Results" chapter. For the base period, that percentage was 83.5.

Incumbents also proved to be popular recipients of endorsements in 1988, with 18 receiving the support of the

World-Herald. Thirteen of those incumbents (72.2 percent) received the support of Douglas County voters. That percentage is down considerably from the 92.5 percent reported for the base study period. Of the incumbents losing, one was GOP U.S. Senator Dave Karnes, appointed to the seat in early 1987. Karnes lost to a popular former governor, Bob Kerrey.

Other losing incumbents who were endorsed included one running as a write-in candidate for the Omaha School Board, a University of Nebraska Board of Regents candidate, and two candidates for positions on two lower-profile boards -- Metro Technical Community College Board of Governors and the Papio Natural Resources District Board. The school board candidate running as a write-in was David Wilken. He was forced into that role after running for Congress and losing in the May primary election.

While the World-Herald matched the research findings used in the comparative study for the 1988 election, the newspaper showed a slight shift from the 1984-1986 elections in one area -- level of election. The level of agreement between endorsements and state/national candidates dropped to 66.6 percent, compared to 77.3 percent for the base study period.

Some of that difference might be attributed to the absence of incumbents (at least elected incumbents) for two positions. Karnes, the newspaper's choice in the Senate

race, was an appointed incumbent, and although a Republican with the advantage of incumbency, he lost, battling the trend started in 1976 of Democratic U.S. Senators from Nebraska. In the U.S. House of Representatives race, Democrat Peter Hoagland narrowly won over GOP candidate Jerry Schenken, who had the support of the World-Herald. The Democratic victory should not have been considered a complete surprise since the only time the Democrats have claimed that seat is when a Republican incumbent has voluntarily stepped aside.

Douglas County voters also opposed the World-Herald on a statewide ballot question on the right to bear arms. The highly publicized and emotional question, though opposed by most newspapers and law enforcement people in the state, was overwhelmingly approved by the voters.

The Senate and House races and the right-to-bear-arms amendment question are the types of ballot questions that probably offer the best perspective for measuring the true impact of editorial endorsements. In such cases, there is no "one best candidate," the concept outlined in both the "Discussion" and "Conclusion" chapters. The candidate races limited the impact of such factors as incumbency and voting trends, and the amendment was highly visible, with plenty of sources other than the newspaper for information.

Overall, the 1988 general election endorsements and voting results showed some differences from the three-year

period reviewed for this study. But even with the differences, the same general conclusion can be applied: editorial endorsements and voting results appear to have some agreement, but some level of agreement may be the norm, and that relationship may be as much the result of other factors, which could potentially offer as much predictability about endorsements as the endorsements do about voting results.

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