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ENSC-230

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Heigh-Ho, They Blow, Husker Balloons Have Got to Go

One petition, one billboard, one lawsuit, and a 52% majority vote. Multiple attempts have been made to challenge the balloon releases at Memorial Stadium. Though there are mild surges of advocacy against this action during the football season and the annual spring semester vote, this issue, despite numerous attempts, continues to fall on deaf ears.

With each passing football season, the community continues to lose interest in pressing the issue of the 50 year tradition, leaving Nebraska stagnant in attempts to search for other environmental alternatives. In order to seek improvement, discussions over suitable substitutions must remain relevant among the University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, staff, and faculty.

Pressing awareness of the dangers behind the balloon releases will aid us in moving towards preserving the aesthetics of our environment, reallocating the usage of helium via higher-valued products, and allowing the Husker spirit to evolve in both a cleaner and safer tradition come gamedays.

For something that is free and provides a short-term entertainment value to Husker fans, people tend to forget the negative effects and costs balloons create once they are out of sight and out of mind. Balloons will land anywhere once enough helium is lost, resulting in an extreme risk to wildlife, such as starvation, strangulation, and possible drowning.

Though the school has mentioned that the Husker balloons are biodegradable latex, the degradation period is still slow enough for an animal to see it as food and consume it before it's too late (Strassburger. 2018).

A study done at Clemson University, another school with a previous balloon release tradition, discovered that balloons retain elasticity in water six times longer than the ones exposed to only air (Irwin. 2012). That means wildlife that relies on an open water source are at an even greater risk due to the longer degradation process. Keep in mind, this affects both marine and farm animals.

Frivolous actions like the releases also take away demands from crucial resources such as helium. What many don't know is that the buoyant gas goes beyond parties, weddings, and game days.

Not only is it an essential resource to cool down magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) magnets, it also helps improve welding productivity as well as makes our everyday devices functionable, according to Rocky Mountain Air Solutions. Though the United States is not under a current national shortage, waves of high demand and lack of supply are becoming more apparent in the helium market.

However, Husker nation acknowledges the pride it brings when they see the balloons float away from the stadium. 50 years worth of memories within this tradition is no easy thing to let go of for fans new and old. A UNL alumni stated clearly the personal benefits the balloons bring when they wrote to *The Daily Nebraskan*; complementing them as a staple for Husker events and contributing towards the game day experience (Pannirselvam. 2018). By taking away the balloons, it seems as if fans fear the loss of some form of identity.

Rather than stripping the tradition away completely from students and fans alike, the University needs to revamp it in a way that continues the Husker spirit while also creating less harmful impacts on the environment. One way of allowing students to voice their opinion on the matter was a survey regarding suitable alternatives from the school's environmental committee, UNL Sustain. The group's selections ranged from rally towels, to bubbles, to even powder sticks.

Drew Havens spoke with the Daily Nebraskan, stating the towels as the popular choice amongst the student body (Christensen. 2020). This particular substitute helps significantly because the towels are reusable for every touchdown instead of one while continuing to visually show support and excitement throughout the games. It also changes the product from a common resource into more of a private good. If the Pittsburgh Steelers fans are confident to use rally towels to celebrate their wins, the Cornhusker fan base can do the same.

This is an opportunity to remind the nation why the Cornhuskers have the greatest fans in all of college football. Not only do we come in a sea of red to support our team, we can also be green moving forward by acknowledging our actions during gametime. The situation at hand goes beyond the aesthetics of gameday so we must internalize and recognize the flaws of this tradition and revamp it into our own modern style. For the sake of Husker nation, plants, animals, and humans alike, the balloon releases have got to go.

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