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Kill this petition

The approach outside an Omaha drug-store seemed simple enough. It started with two questions:

"Excuse me, sir, are you a registered voter?"

"Yes."

"Would you sign a petition to eliminate all gender and race discrimination in Nebraska?"

Wow.

The approach was from a paid petition-gatherer for the "American Civil Rights Institute," a California organization seeking to eliminate affirmative action in states across the country.

Certainly, the notion of eliminating "all gender and race discrimination in Nebraska" is quite desirable. But that is not at all what this effort is about.

The petition seeks to amend Nebraska's Constitution so that it prohibits all consideration of race, ethnicity and gender in hiring, scholarship or contracting decisions made by public agencies, including the University of Nebraska system.

That means it would be forbidden to provide scholarships to benefit African-American students. Or women.

It also means it would be prohibited to promote the growth of minority-owned or female-owned businesses through the awarding of contracts for that purpose.

Such prohibitions would be bad for Nebraska and bad for the university system.

The petition-gatherers now have resorted to a radio commercial that features controversial rhetoric from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright (of Barack Obama fame) and refers to the "bitter rhetoric" of State Sen. Ernie Chambers.

Whether or not you agree with the

Radio ad is odious; Connerly petition effort deserves defeat.

positions of Sen. Chambers (the only African-American member of the Nebraska Legislature), the focal point of debate should be policy,

not the Omaha senator. And Wright, a Chicagoan, has no relevance at all to this Nebraska debate.

How ironic that the ad, which calls for Nebraskans to "reject the politics of race and hate," itself shamelessly stokes racial resentment. Meanwhile, the outsiders who have made high-dollar contributions to the promotional campaign can blithely walk away, having done their best to work Nebraskans into a frenzy along racial lines.

If ever there was a petition effort that disgraced itself with its own words, this is it. The radio ad doesn't merely take the low road. It takes the lowest road.

What is happening is that California businessman Ward Connerly is attempting to foist his will on the people of Nebraska with a race-fixated drive to change *our* constitution.

With the unveiling of this remarkably ugly ad, one would hope the scales would fall from Nebraskans' eyes about the nature of the outside interests involved in the circulation campaign. These outsiders have now made clear to which lengths they're willing to go in whipping up racial tension and anger.

The radio ad is vile, and the petition drive is wrong. It doesn't "eliminate" discrimination; it enables discrimination. The Nebraska Legislature saw through this and rejected putting this on the ballot via the legislative process.

Don't buy into this garbage. Don't sign the petition. It's bad for Nebraska.