

Editorial

Alcohol problem begins with society's perception

Any skilled bartender who can whip up the most outlandish concoctions will tell you there are two ingredients that just won't mix: drinking and driving.

In recent months, that knowledge has moved out of the barrooms and into legislatures across this country, where representatives are proposing stricter measures for dealing with drunken drivers.

That movement is especially strong in our own state. According to state law, a first offender can receive up to seven days in jail and/or a fine up to \$500. For a third offense, a driver can receive up to five years in the penitentiary and/or a fine up to \$10,000. A judge can suspend a driver's license for six months to a year. However, several senators want those penalties stiffened, and five bills are before the Nebraska Legislature to do just that.

The proposed changes range from requiring minimum driver's license suspensions of two months to one year to requiring mandatory 48-hour jail sentences for the first offense and up to one year in the state penitentiary for the third offense.

Several of the bills would eliminate probation as an option for punishment.

Reagan's new song has lame-duck tune

It seems that Ronald Reagan's theme song is quickly changing from "Happy Days are Here Again" to "The Party's Over."

Across the country, and particularly in Washington, D.C., people and politicians alike are finding that Reagan is not afflicted with personal likeability so much as political leprosy.

Even the president's own party members are adopting a "hands-off" attitude toward his policies. They want him to bend his position enough so the American public will be appeased, if not pleased.

Newspapers are filled to the brim with comment regarding Reagan's problems. Richard Reeves says Ronald



Reid Warren

Reagan has a good chance to emerge as a lame-duck president. The probable loss of 38 Republican seats in the House of Representatives, says Reeves, is going to lead to a Democratic resurgence in November's elections.

Garry Wills says Ronald Reagan's policies are unraveling into a string of failure. Methodically, Wills goes down a list of trouble spots which include virtually every aspect of Reagan's presidency. And, yes, Wills also calls Reagan a lame-duck president in only his second year of office.

Now, Reeves and Wills are not, needless to say, big Reagan fans. Any casual observer is hard-pressed, in fact, to name any person, outside the Reagan administration who is in complete accord with Reagan's policies.

The president must change his position. Political necessity dictates such a maneuver. The American public and Washington's officialdom totally will disown Reagan if he doesn't add some stretch to his apparent inelasticity.

But, in the words of singer David Bromberg, "Don't let false estimation rule ya," which is from a song entitled, accurately, "Demon in Disguise."

If Reagan changes his position, which he will, don't be misled. Most observers on the Washington scene know that any change Reagan makes is not likely to be a big one.

When Reagan makes his concessions, the feeling is that such changes will make only a small, barely noticeable dent in the overall schism of the Reagan philosophy.

Maybe he will make a \$10 billion cut from the defense budget, maybe some relinquishing on his tax program, and maybe a few other bones thrown to Congress, but that'll be it.

Most unfortunately, the main reason Reagan can afford such stagnation with his proposals is the fact that, despite public opinion, there are no alternatives. The Democratic Congress has done everything to discredit Reagan's policies but absolutely nothing to effectively counter-attack them.

Simply put, the only game in town is Reagan's. Right now all the Democrats have are reactionary policies; nothing original, nothing on their own.

Maybe it's because of the November elections that the Democrats figure they can sit back and relax while Reagan hangs his own party.

And the Democrats, in all probability, will gain some House seats in November. But the way they will have done it does not bode well for their party.

Too often politics is based on reaction, rather than action. The Democrats may find that they played their cards wrong; by not taking positive action now, they have left the door open for the Republicans to take action in the future, before Reagan's term expires.

In the next two years, anyone who makes any kind of clear, bold conscientious political decision-making will be seen as rising above the political quagmire. The only question is, will anyone be confident enough to make such a move.

Figures published last week in *The Lincoln Star* show these efforts are not ill-timed. Lincoln police arrested 1,886 drunk drivers in 1981; Lancaster County deputies arrested 112. Alcohol was involved in 147, or 46 percent, of the 321 fatal accidents in Nebraska in 1981.

But those concerned about these figures can't agree on how to attack the problem. Some, like the senators proposing bills, call for stiffer penalties. Others, like Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice Norman Krivosha, say stiffer penalties won't deter drunk drivers as well as the knowledge that offenders will be arrested and dealt with swiftly within the judicial system.

Some argue that by eliminating probation, the state would be taking away the only opportunity some offenders have to get the alcoholism counseling they need.

But perhaps our scrutiny of the drunken driving problem should go deeper. Society encourages drinking. As children, most of us learn that drinking is an "adult" activity. We either eagerly await our 20th birthday and the legal opportunity to imbibe or we begin drinking

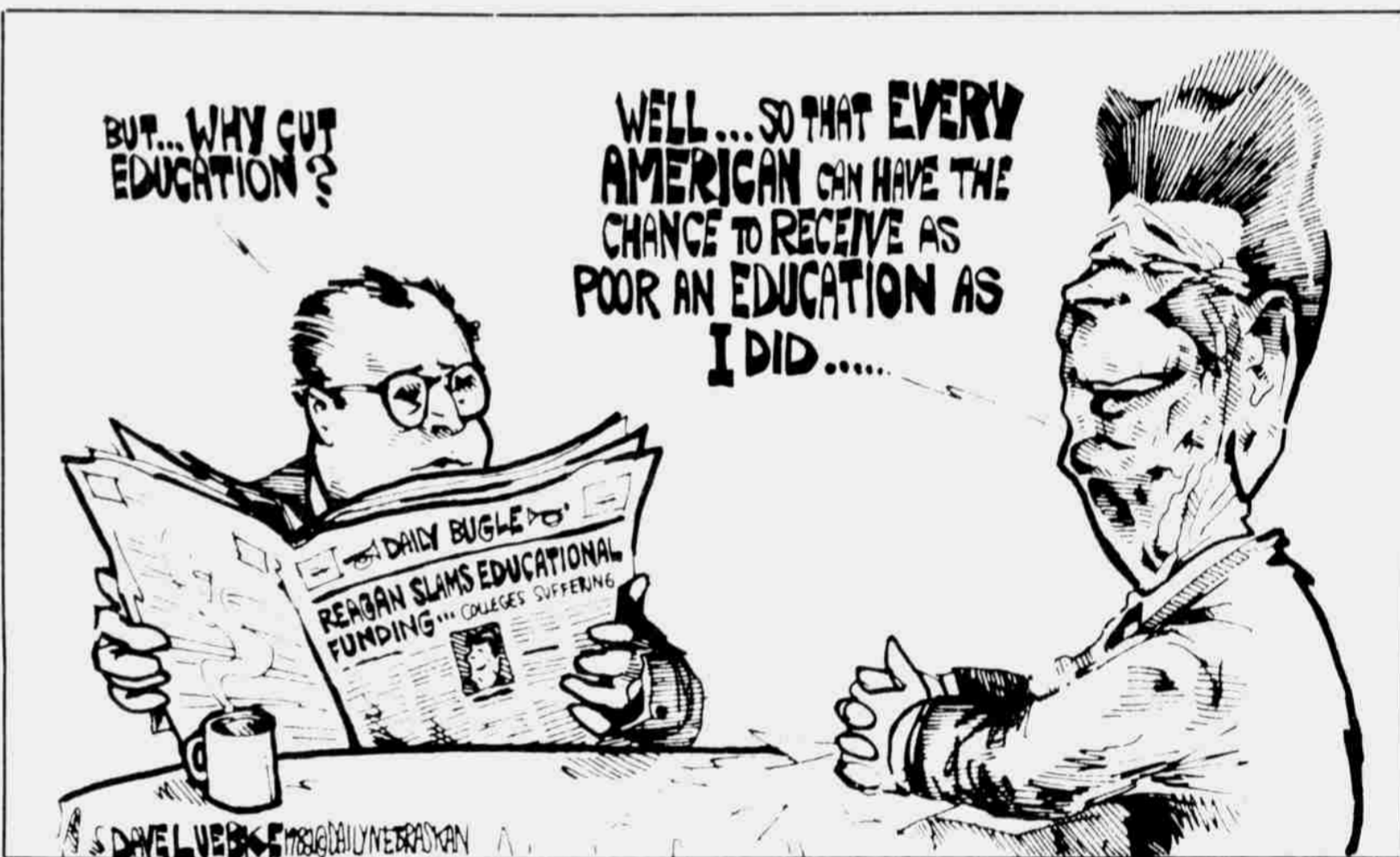
illegally before we have reached that magic age. We drink to feel grown up.

Ironically, once we are grown up, many of us drink to feel like children again — carefree and uninhibited.

Drinking alcohol is fine when done in moderation, but too many of us ignore the signs that tell us we've had enough. We get in our cars and tell ourselves we'll make it home. But too many of us don't.

Perhaps the best way to deal with this problem is to change the way our society looks at alcohol and its use. We successfully altered society's perception of tobacco. Why can't we do that with alcohol? If we begin training our children now, in 20 years the problem could be less severe.

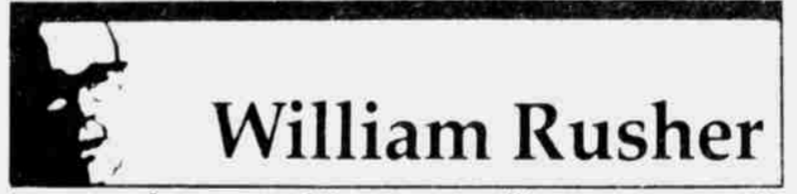
No, the alcohol problem will never completely go away, but we can temper it. Alcohol is a drug, not a harmless elixir. People die because of its overuse. People need to keep that fact in mind every time they get in their cars, every time they take a drink.



Nuclear disarmament provokes war

The various attempts — in Vermont town meetings, by a referendum in California, etc. — to whip up public sentiment for a mutual freeze on nuclear weapons by the United States and the Soviet Union will of course attract the usual crazies. But more sensible people, who simply want to express concern over the dangers of nuclear war and think this is a harmless way to do it, should be warned that such pressures play right into the hands of the Russians.

In the first place, just suppose the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to destroy every last nuclear weapon in their arsenals, along with all means of producing them. The sole immediate result would be that the relative strength of the Soviet Union — relative, that is, to the strength of the United States and its allies, measured



William Rusher

in terms of troops and "conventional" weapons — would increase dramatically.

In other words, like it or not, the existence of nuclear weapons in U.S. hands has long been the only effective deterrent to Soviet global hegemony. We have never tried to compete with the Soviet Union in terms of numbers of men under arms, or numbers of rifles or tanks. Without tactical nuclear weapons such as the neutron artillery warhead, any attempt to defend Western Europe against Soviet attack would be downright laughable.

Advocates of mutual nuclear disarmament should explain how they would propose to maintain peace without the threat to use nuclear weapons if necessary. Is the sheer utterance of such a threat really so dreadful? It has been 37 years, more than a third of a century, since the end of World War II, and in all that time Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, has never known a war. Why is this? Is it because the Russians are so sweet-tempered and un-aggressive?

No; it is precisely because of the existence of those awesome weapons, which mindless peaceniks are so eager to abolish. Destroy them, and you will see just how rapidly war will descend upon Europe — and then the world.

In the second place, the whole mutual-freeze movement is not in fact "mutual" at all. Ostensibly it is aimed equally at the United States and the Soviet Union, but its practical effects will be confined wholly to the United

States. The peoples of the Soviet Union will never hear about it, and the leaders in the Kremlin are hardly likely to be impressed. For one thing, as already pointed out, they would only benefit if the campaign succeeded. But actually they assume the West is too sensible to throw away its ace in the hole, so the whole maneuver becomes in their eyes merely an exercise in pacifist propaganda, useful for softening up the West.

Not long ago, in Communist-controlled East Berlin, a man who took seriously the need for mutual arms reductions and troop withdrawal was ill-advised enough to call for it publicly; he was promptly hustled off to jail.

What about the contention that most of the pressure is not for mutual destruction of existing nuclear weapons, but only for a mutual freeze on future production, testing and use? Such careful distinctions may rope in a few more supporters, but they scarcely affect the impact of the agitation at all. The whole beneficial effect of a credible nuclear capability in American hands depends upon the Soviet Union believing that it will be used if necessary.

A solemn undertaking never to use nuclear weapons of any kind, or never to be the first to use them, would be the equivalent of the destruction of existing nuclear stockpiles, and would have precisely the same effect: vastly to increase, overnight, the relative strength of the Soviet Union.

It is ironic that the people who are agitating most energetically for an end to the threat of war are exactly the people who, by encouraging the Soviet leaders to think they could win it, make war more likely. In this as in other respects, our era is determining whether democracy is a practical technique for survival in a world that dreamers never made.

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