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What's the answer?

Stiffer laws won't solve drug problem

Everyone has something to say but no one has an answer.

That's what the debate sounded like Monday on the floor of the Nebraska Legislature.

Senators passed -- after several hours of discussion -- LB592, a bill to set mandatory minimum prison sentences of three and five years for people who manufacture or are in possession with the intent to deliver crack or cocaine.

Consternation over the drug problem is understandable, considering how overwhelming the issue is. The bill is a good one for showing the public that legislators recognize the fact that Nebraska has a drug problem.

OK, the problem is recognized. But when will they do something that will begin to solve it?

The penalties awarded under LB592 are stiffer than current laws -- they add the word "mandatory" and will keep convicted drug dealers in prison longer.

But it doesn't do much good to set longer prison sentences if police can't catch the real criminals.

The bill doesn't address the heart of the real problem.

The key word Monday in support of the bill was "deterrent." Senators said drug traffickers would be less likely to bring their business to Nebraska if they knew the penalties would be stiffer.

That's bull.

The chances of getting caught selling crack or cocaine are slim, and the allure of earning several thousand dollars for one-half hour's work outweighs those chances.

Sens. Ernie Chambers of Omaha and David Landis of Lincoln are to be commended. Speaking against a bill to crack down on drugs is political suicide in almost every community.

Also to be commended are Sens. Frank Korshoj of Herman, Jennie Robak of Columbus, Dianna Schimek of Lincoln and Loran Schmit of Bellwood.

But voting against LB592 does not mean those senators are soft on drugs. They voted against the ineffectiveness of the bill.

The rest of the Legislature -- while showing a concern for the drug problem -- also showed that they did not understand the crux of it.

Sen. Chris Abboud of Omaha, who drafted the bill, said that 26 other states have similar legislation. But that still doesn't mean that the bill will help solve the drug problem in Nebraska.

Abboud said that under current law, first offenders of possession with intent to sell might get off on probation. So now, first offenders could be put in jail and kept there longer.

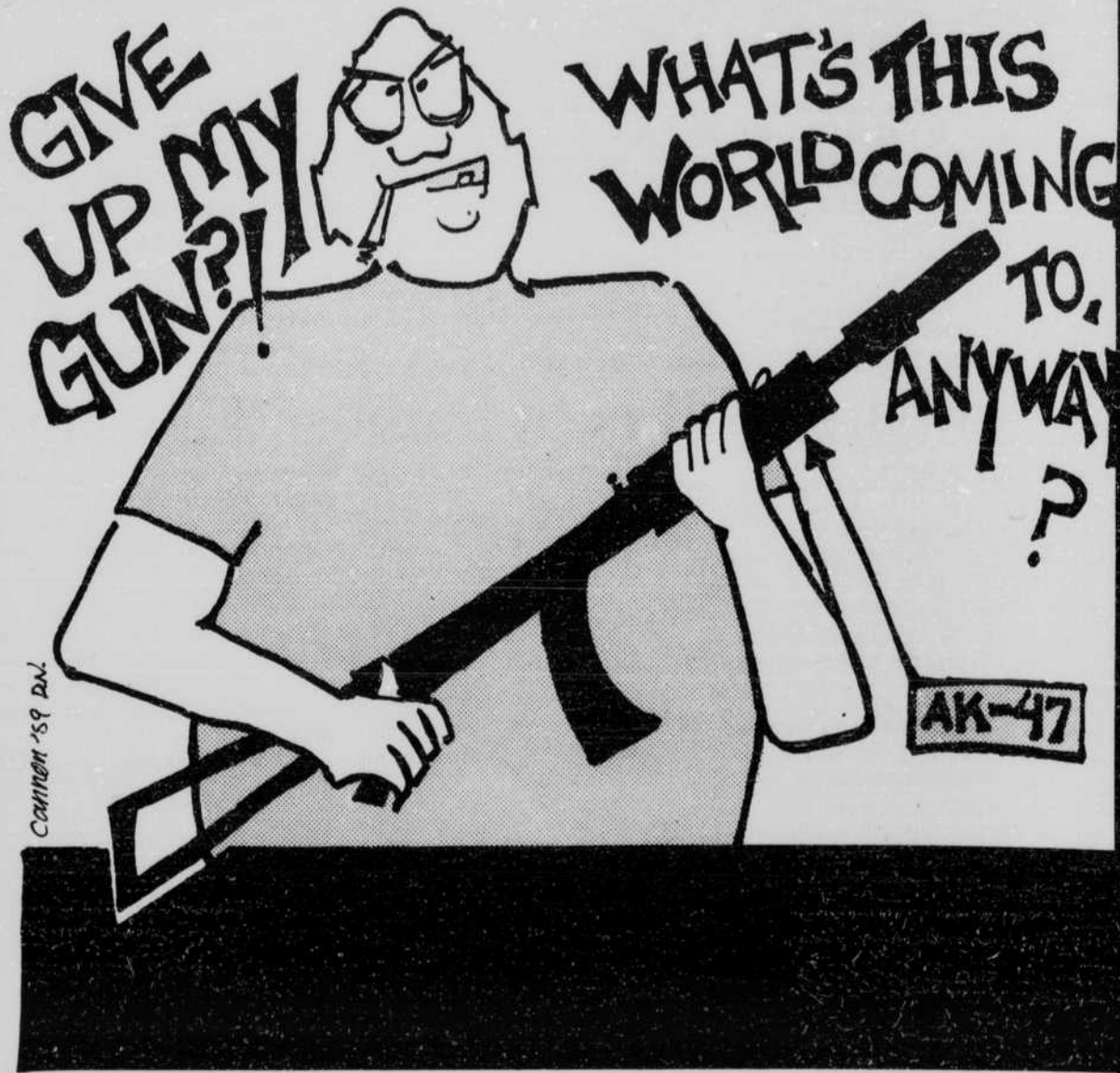
If they can be caught.

The Nebraska Legislature must deal with drug traffickers first by passing legislation that would equip police with the means and might to cut off the drug supply. Senators need to start stronger drug education programs, and penalize the people who use cocaine and crack.

They also need to pass legislation to give people a viable alternative to dealing. If people can't afford to feed their families, selling drugs for money may be the most attractive job around -- no matter what the penalty.

Until that is done, harsher penalties won't even begin to help the problem.

-- Amy Edwards
for the Daily Nebraskan



Allowing freedom of expression

Columnist contemplates how much should be shown and told

When one of my sons was in kindergarten many years ago, the class did something called "Show and Tell."

The kids would have to bring something to school and talk about it. They would put on a performance of some sort.

One day, without our knowing it, my boy took one of my records to school with him. He was going to play a few songs from it and join in on the words.

It was a fine piece of music, the score from the movie "Zorba the Greek." The movie was one of my favorites, and I frequently played the record.

I played it so often that apparently my son was familiar with every song and every word.

So he put on an excellent performance. However, it was cut short. The teacher gave him the hook. Later, she called my wife and was quite upset.

If you've ever heard this record, you know that almost all the songs are instrumental Greek music. There is little singing.

But there are words. Before each song, you hear Anthony Quinn speaking some of the more memorable lines from the movie.

As the teacher explained it, my son got through two of them before she sat him down and switched off the turntable.

The first one went something like: "You ask me why I love women so. How can I not love them? They are such weak creatures, and they give you all they've got."

But it was the next one that ended the show. That's when my son, shoulders back, speaking in a loud voice, joined in with Zorba as he said something like:

"There is only one sin God will not forgive. When a woman asks a man to her bed, and he does not go. I know that, because an old Turk told me."

The teacher was understandably upset. That was rather risqué stuff for a kindergarten class. Or even a 5th-grade class. And she asked that if our son brought any more music to Show and Tell, it be something less ad-

vanced.

So the next time my boy did a Show and Tell, it was with the music from Mary Poppins.

At the time, I agreed with the teacher's judgment. But now I wonder if I had made a mistake by not standing up for my son's right to express himself creatively.

The reason I've had second thoughts after all these years is because of the fracas that has just ended at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Mike
Royko



As everybody in Chicago, and much of America, now knows, an art student at the institute has achieved great notoriety simply by spreading an American flag on the floor.

His creation, part of a student exhibit, was called "What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?"

The exhibit included a couple of ledgers on a shelf in which people could write their responses. Spectators had the option of walking around the flag or walking on it to get to the ledgers.

This has enraged veterans, who have marched and protested, and given politicians a chance to voice their patriotism and get on television.

It has also delighted the student, who says he is a revolutionary communist and considers this the most terrible, oppressive country in the world.

Despite all the protests and threats to cut off tax grants, the people who run the Art Institute have stood firm in defending the student's right to express himself. So have most of the city's intellectuals, civil libertarians and, of course, artists.

So I wonder if I did the right thing many years ago, when I didn't stand up for my student-son's right to chant along with Zorba.

Think about it: If a student can toss a flag on the floor and call it art, ain't Zorba art?

At the time, however, I was under the impression that students do not have 100 percent freedom of expression. Being students, I thought, they had to abide by rules of taste and judgment.

For example, if I was the dean of a journalism school and someone came to me and said, "In the next issue of our student paper, George, our columnist, is going to write a piece about how he would like to have sex with little boys. And he is going to describe the acts he would like to perform," how would I react?

My first response would be to say "No he's not. I'm going to toss that piece into the wastebasket. If George wants to express those weird thoughts, he should find a mimeograph machine and go stand on the street corner and hand them out like self-respecting nut. But we're not printing them in this institution's paper."

But maybe that would be wrong. I follow the example of the Art Institute, I would be suppressing this student's need to express himself.

Or if I were running a medical school and a student wanted to perform brain surgery on a patient would I be right in saying, "Young fellow, you are not a physician, you are only a student. Just watch and listen. When you are qualified, you can do such things. Not yet."

Would I be doing the right thing? You bet I would be. And maybe one of these days the people who run the Art Institute's school are going to say:

"Look, kid, you are not an artist yet. You are only a student. And what you have created is trash. Now, when you are an artist, you can display your trash in a gallery, if they will have you, or on your front lawn. But while you are a student in this institution you are going to have to conform to standards of quality and decency and judgment."

My kid's kindergarten teacher was right. If she's still around, the Art Institute might consider hiring her. It appears that they have students in the grade level.

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editorial

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