

Daily Nebraskan

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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No new tax (system)

Budget plan is start, but overhaul is answer

The party's over. Congress and President Bush have sent that message to the electorate with their budget compromise. The plan shoots for a deficit reduction of \$40.1 billion by 1991.

The goal appears to be ambitious, and taxpayers have heard the message before. But this time negotiators seem to have the plan to back it up.

And, this time, they've seemingly tried not to play favorites. Specific taxes target the higher-income bracket. A 10 percent luxury tax would be applied to expensive cars, boats, jewelry and furs. And taxpayers with incomes over \$100,000 would lose some deductions.

Another specific source of increased revenue would be excise taxes: on gasoline, cigarettes and alcohol, products bought by all income brackets.

That sounds fair. Unfortunately, statistics from the Congressional Budget Office show that such taxes have a greater impact on lower-income people.

The poorest 20 percent of U.S. families, with an average after-tax income of \$8,200, spend 14.6 percent on fuel, alcohol and tobacco. The 20 percent of American families just below the richest, with an income averaging \$38,000, spend 6.2 percent on the same commodities.

The discrepancy speaks for itself. Once again, the people who could afford it least would be forced to pay.

The plan itself is an admirable start. The \$40.1 billion reduction goal would dent the projected deficit of \$293 billion, leaving the U.S. with a \$254 billion deficit in 1991.

But that's not the answer. The government can't continue to close its eyes and nibble at the deficit by raising taxes on luxury items. Delaying a restructuring of the tax system is not going to make the deficit disappear.

Before a real impact can be made on the federal deficit, the whole income tax system will have to be restructured. The current proposal only lessens the projected deficit. But the \$254 billion deficit still would set a record. And that means the overall debt will grow by another \$1 trillion, the government estimates.

Only one group of people can afford higher taxes, and only one group should have to. The wealthy.

The move may appear drastic. But every year the government delays such a move, it slides deeper into debt.

-- Diane Brayton
for the Daily Nebraskan

White unions seek to divide

I have a question for Andy Galbraith, whose letter referred to white student unions on university campuses (DN, Sept. 25): Do you really think that white people and people of color are "reversing roles" in American society today? At a panel discussion in the Crib Sept. 26, faculty member Helen Longsoldier said that not a day goes by that a student doesn't come into the Multicultural Affairs Office and reports a racist remark, action or attitude that student had experienced. How often do you suppose a white student goes to the Student Affairs Office and reports racist treatment by other students and professors?

Andy's assumption that ethnic student unions and white unions can be judged on the same level indicates he believes both kinds of unions serve equal purposes on college campuses. This is obviously not the case.

Ethnic student unions and white student unions are formed under completely different circumstances and for completely different reasons. Ethnic unions are formed because people of a certain background have no other way on a campus to learn about, experience and develop their cultural heritage. White people, on the other hand, experience our cultural heritage everyday, every minute, on the UNL campus. We read textbooks in class by white authors, we are taught by white teachers, we learn about white leaders who formed this white nation. We have to take certain "special" classes to even be exposed to the contributions people of color

have made to this country and the world. It should be obvious that people of color, when growing up in a white-dominated educational system, know far more about our culture than we know about theirs.

Ethnic student unions, unlike white unions, do not intend to separate people from each other. White people, as far as I know, are welcome to attend any ethnic student association meetings, and their public events are always well advertised. The article about white student unions (DN, Sept. 19) reported that at the University of Florida, "any group that doesn't benefit under affirmative action is free to join the white union," meaning, of course, white males only. Whereas ethnic unions are for the purposes of diversifying the campus and increasing awareness of various cultural backgrounds, white unions are xenophobic enclaves designed to shut out anything "different" and prevent the new experiences that are what education is all about.

Like it or not, people of color have been essential to making this country what it is today. White people didn't, and could not have, done it alone. We stand to lose nothing by respecting and, more importantly, actively learning about cultures that are not familiar to us. Ethnic student unions encourage growth and education. White student unions only encourage divisiveness and mistrust. Grow up!

Ginger Dzerk
junior
English



Fault not cut and dry in court

One drink too many leads to a \$9.3 million reward for New Yorker

Francisco Merino was drunk. He admitted it under oath. He says he got drunk on his own, pouring down several beers after a hard evening of work.

That doesn't make Francisco Merino unusual. Every day, when people leave their jobs, a certain number of them stop for drinks to unwind or socialize. Some overindulge, as Francisco says he did.

And of those who have a few too many, some will get into trouble. There's no end to the variety of foolish things they do. The cops will pinch some for drunken driving or brawling. Others will get off easier, with a lecture by an angry wife. An unlucky few will run their cars into light poles or trees and end up in hospitals or hearses.

Francisco was one of the unlucky ones, although he didn't quite make it to a hearse.

The night he got sloshed, Francisco intended to go home by way of the New York subway. He says he stumbled or lurched and somehow fell off the platform as a train was pulling into the station.

The train hit him and the doctors had to remove one of his arms.

So whose fault was that? While one can sympathize with Francisco for losing an arm, I think most people in our society would say that he brought it on himself.

But that's because most people aren't lawyers. Or members of the jury that heard Francisco's case.

You see, after Francisco got drunk, fell off a subway platform, and lost an arm, he did what most people in our society do when they have a problem -- he looked around for somebody to sue.

Actually, his lawyers did the looking, since Francisco, 31, is a Mexican

who was working as a dishwasher, and wouldn't have had the legal scholarship to reason that his getting drunk and falling off a subway platform was somebody else's fault.

Most of us would wake up in the hospital and moan: "Oh boy, I got



Mike Royko

drunk, fell off a subway platform, and now I only have one arm. Am I stupid or am I stupid?"

So that's why we need lawyers -- to explain to us that what we did wasn't really our fault. And to find those who really were to blame for what we did and to make them take responsibility.

That's what Francisco's lawyers accomplished. And a splendid job they did. A jury recently awarded Francisco \$9.3 million for his pain, suffering, loss of wages, medical expenses and so on.

And who is to pay the \$9.3 million to Francisco? It is to come from the New York Transit Authority, which operates the subway system. Or, presumably, from the insurance companies they pay to protect them when people get drunk and fall in front of trains.

If you're asking why the New York Transit Authority should have to pay Francisco anything, that proves one thing: you aren't a lawyer, or you wouldn't task foolish questions. Lacking a keen legal mind, you would probably say that if a guy gets loaded and falls off a subway platform, tough

luck pal, but next time stick to club soda.

But that isn't the way it is in the World of Law.

There's a rule at the New York Transit Authority that says that if a transit employee sees someone drunk or otherwise messed up, they are supposed to call the transit cops.

As it turned out, the token clerk at the station did notice that Francisco was unsteady and the clerk made a call. But Francisco fell off the platform before anybody could come and get him. Timing is everything, I guess.

So the jury decided the transit system had failed in its responsibility to protect Francisco.

Or, as one of his lawyers put it: "They should have looked out for this guy, because the danger was very great, and (they should have) moved him off the platform."

Of course. What kind of cruel society are we, to let someone like Francisco get himself drunk, buy a subway token, then fall in front of a train? Where were the transit police when Francisco needed them? Or, for that matter, where were you? Where was I? How indifferent can we get?

The transit authority's lawyers were upset by the size of the award. They say it is an outrageous sum for an unskilled dishwasher and will be appealed.

Of course they'd say that. It's obvious that none of the transit lawyers ever tried to get a job as a one-armed dishwasher.

And this should serve as another lesson in why we should never drink and drive.

Nobody ever made \$9.3 million by putting his head through his own windshield.

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letter

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ation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted.

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editorial

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