

Inhale reality

Smokers should accept responsibility

In 40 years as a tobacco user, Rose Cipollone must have noticed that the cigarettes she smoked caused her to cough and gasp for breath a few times.

It should have been no shock when the New Jersey woman contracted lung cancer in 1981. And yet, in a lawsuit filed by Cipollone and her husband in 1983, she maintained that the fatal diagnosis was just that — a surprise because of her assumption that cigarettes were safe to use.

Cipollone and her husband are both dead, but their son is continuing to press the case. And the Supreme Court has agreed to hear it.

The ramifications of the lawsuit go beyond the family tragedy, however. Lung cancer could become profitable for the victims, deadly to the manufacturers.

If the Supreme Court agreed with Cipollone that tobacco companies are liable for the cancer their products caused, it could start a rash of copycat lawsuits. The price of cigarettes could more than double if the industry sought to protect itself against cancer claims.

The Daily Nebraskan has no interest in keeping the price of cigarettes low, but Cipollone's lawsuit — and the chain reaction it could start — are ridiculous.

The only way a smoker possibly could be unaware of the dangers of lighting up is if he or she chose to blow smoke in the face of constant warnings and studies revealing the dangers of tobacco.

What more can be done to inform smokers?

Cigarette packages already contain warnings. And if smokers don't believe the surgeon general, they can always listen to the nagging and needling of parents, spouses and friends. Or even to their own lungs.

Consumers in a free society are bombarded with all sorts of false claims and advertising. The government plays a limited role in policing those claims. In the case of cigarettes, its hand has been fairly heavy: The warning labels are not exactly Prohibition, but they are a caution.

If the high court agreed with Cipollone, it would be duty-bound to do similarly for other dangerous items of consumption. That would mean more litigation and more labels. For example:

"The surgeon general has determined that this cheeseburger will make you fat and will clog your arteries."

And those who ate the cheeseburgers despite the warning could sue.

Consumers should be made aware of the risks of using products. But the court must not let bad habits be an excuse for avoiding responsibility.

—E.F.P.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter misrepresented homophobia

In response to Rodney Bell's letter regarding homophobia on campus, I would like to question some of the points he made, as well as make one or two of my own, and perhaps view the subject from a different perspective.

First of all, there is the way "homophobic" has become a catchall word for anybody who does not agree that homosexuality is a normal and legitimate expression of human sexuality. Mr. Bell has taken this even further to suggest that Paul Domeier's article (which never claimed to "represent the entire view of the gay/lesbian community") was homophobic simply because it acknowledged that one person's experience was something short of sunshine and rainbows.

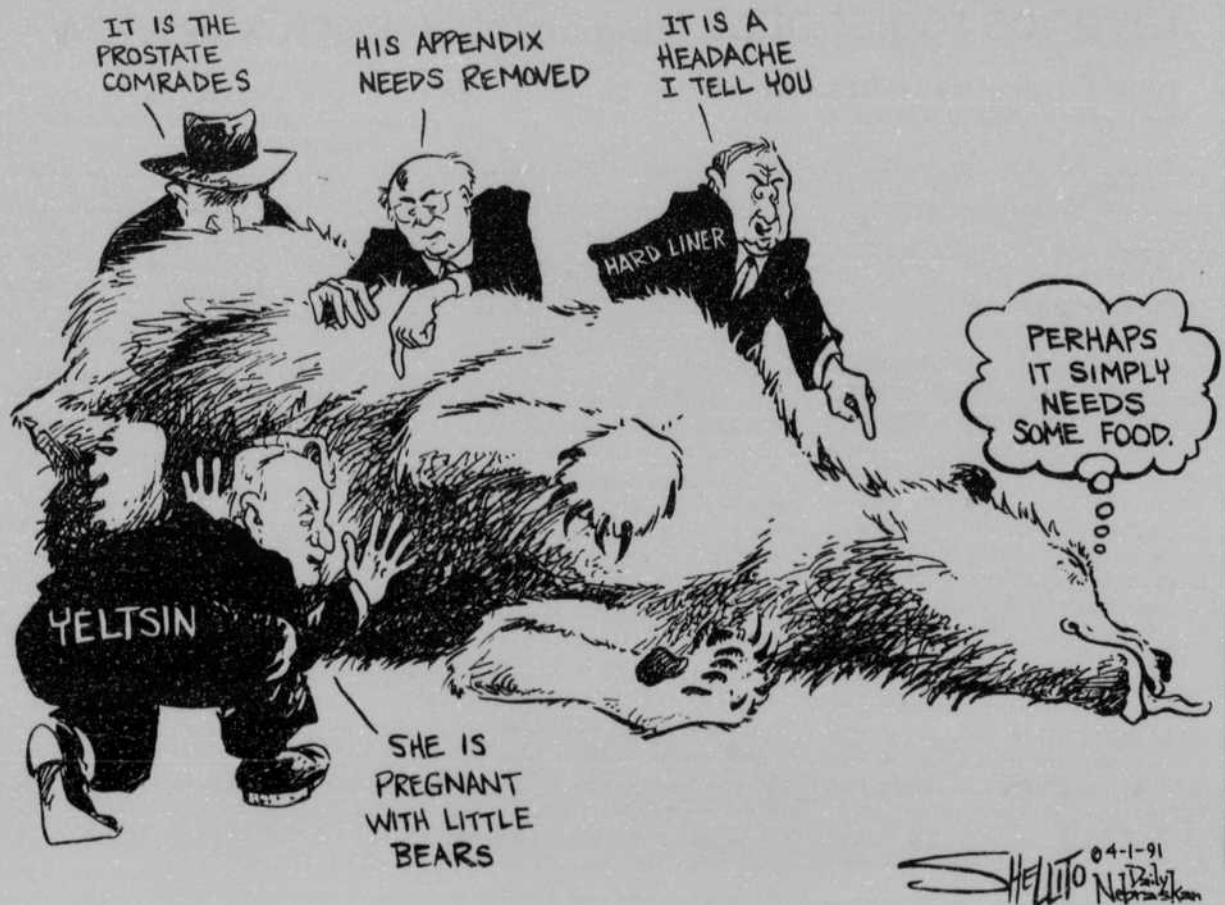
Let me point out that disagreement and hatred are not the same thing and just because someone doesn't happen to agree doesn't necessarily mean that the person either hates or fears homosexuals. It could simply mean that they have come to a different conclusion, and it would seem to be the height of arrogance to suggest that the only way a person could come to this different conclusion is if they suffer from a phobia of some sort.

Secondly, there are in fact people who have turned away from homosexuality, and there are in fact ministries that have assisted them. These are facts, not "incredulous desecrations of truth." I can understand why

Mr. Bell would be troubled by this. After all, if people have been able to go from being gay or lesbian to being heterosexual, that would take away from the credibility of his claim that they are "inherently created the way they are — gay or lesbian." The fact remains, however, that people DO in fact choose to make that change. (Note: Mr. Bell clearly seems to disagree with the University Lutheran Chapel, which seems to indicate that he is allowed to disagree with a position without suffering from any phobias. One wonders why this applies to Mr. Bell and not to those with whom he disagrees).

Finally, I am sure that Mr. Bell's convictions are sincere and his intentions honorable. Assuming that this is the case, is it unreasonable to ask Mr. Bell to get rid of the emotionally charged rhetoric and replace it with a rational, intelligent defense of his position? If his views are as valid as he claims them to be, surely they do not need the support of needlessly inflammatory phrases such as "spewed forth buckets of venom," "incredulous desecrations of the truth" and "the ugly little head and venomous buckets of homophobia." Perhaps one who is so ready to accuse others of hatred should be a bit more thoughtful in his own writings.

Brad Pardee
staff member
Love Library



JANA PEDERSEN

Anti-crime answers complex

While the Bush administration pushed Congress to pass anti-crime legislation dealing mainly with spying and treason last week, the Justice Department made its own announcements about crime.

Although the overall crime rate in America fell 3 percent last year, violent crime rose 3.4 percent, according to the Justice Department. There were 2.3 million violent crimes in America last year, and 11.2 of every 1,000 citizens aged 12 and older were victims of violent crime.

But none of the anti-crime bills currently in Congress propose effective means of combatting violent crime. Ironically, the best of the bad anti-crime bills before Congress is one that Bush doesn't support.

The bill, which would require a seven-day waiting period for gun purchases, did receive support last week from former President Ronald Reagan, a National Rifle Association member.

During his administration, Reagan was opposed to such legislation, but he changed his mind to back this year's "Brady Bill," named after his former press secretary, who was permanently disabled during an assassination attempt in March 1981.

NRA officials claim that the only reason Reagan supports the bill is because of loyalty to James Brady. But because Reagan isn't the one who would sign the bill, the reasons for his support don't really matter much unless he can use them to influence his former vice president.

Although Reagan promised that he's trying to convince Bush to sign the waiting-period bill, the Bush administration said the bill's only chance is if Congress approves other anti-crime proposals sponsored by the president, whose main anti-crime goal calls for the death penalty for spying and treason.

The White House maintains that the best way to combat criminal use of guns is tougher sentencing, not a waiting period.

Yet John Hinckley Jr., the man who shot Reagan 10 years ago, said in a 1989 court document that a waiting period — not tougher penalties — might have kept him from going through with the assassination attempt. Hinckley, who still is incarcerated



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in a mental hospital near Washington, D.C., hasn't said considerations of stiff penalties made him think twice about his actions.

The waiting period would give law enforcement officials time to do a background check on prospective buyers. The NRA prefers an immediate background check by phone, through technology that hasn't even become available yet.

The waiting period also would give prospective criminals extra time to consider the tougher sentences the Bush administration wants. And it would not, as the NRA claims, deny honest, decent Americans their Second Amendment right to bear arms; it would just make them wait a little while to do so.

Both the Brady Bill and the Bush bills may pass. Both may affect crime. But none of the anti-crime bills cur-

rently before Congress address the most important issue behind violent crime — its unnatural relation to young black men.

The National Center for Health Statistics also released a study recently that found that in 1988 America, 48 percent of young black men who died between 15 and 19 were killed by guns. That was an increase from 35 percent in 1987 and 24 percent in 1984 and was three times the number of white American men the same age killed by guns in 1988.

Tougher penalties and waiting periods aren't going to change that statistic. What would change it is comprehensive education and housing development programs for inner cities to give young African Americans attractive alternatives to crime.

The one thing about young, male African Americans that makes them different from young, male Caucasian Americans is that a greater percentage of them live in poor, urban areas with typically substandard housing and education systems.

Unfortunately, housing development and education are items the federal government has increasingly left to states. And states can't afford to pick up the giant tab needed to change inner-city school and housing systems.

The Bush crime plan doesn't propose anything to combat violent crime realistically in inner cities. Spying and treason aren't big crimes there.

Instead, Bush and Congress should be more concerned with what's going on in their own backyard. Washington is one of the nation's violent-crime hotbeds.

Members of Congress, who earn six-digit incomes, should not forget those less fortunate when talk of anti-crime bills come up. And they should not forget which crimes deserve the most attention.

At this time of high patriotism, spying and treason can easily appear the worst crimes in America. But everyday violent crime is much more terrible. And the worst crime of all would be if Congress couldn't even find the best solution for dealing with it.

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