

Battle lines

Money needed at home to fight drugs

In a city far, far away, the latest installment of "Drug Wars" concluded Thursday. An apt title for President George Bush's so-called drug summit would be "Empty Rhetoric Strikes Back."

Bush met with six Latin American leaders this week in San Antonio to renew pledges to combat narcotics, a problem very much on U.S. voters' minds this election year.

"Make no mistake — defeat the traffickers, we will," Bush said in a Yoda-esque grammatical style.

But so far, Bush appears to have been able to do little to stop those evil drug lords, who, much like American tobacco growers, make their living by producing addictive substances others choose to use.

The president said there had been significant progress on the drug problem during his administration. He claimed drug use among young people was down 60 percent and cocaine use had declined 35 percent.

We're not sure where Bush got his figures, but looking at the alarming rise in drug-related crime over the past few years, it's difficult to believe that any substantial gains have been made. Even if his numbers are right, obviously the drug-use decline isn't enough.

Bush apparently agrees, although the Yale graduate put it better than we ever could.

"We've got lots to do," he told reporters.

Bush said that he and the other leaders talked about improving their efforts to develop alternative crops to give Latin American coca growers an economic incentive to stop growing drug-related crops.

"Farmers who once grew coca in Bolivia are exporting pineapples and bananas," Bush said.

While this may be true for a few model citizens, pineapples and bananas just don't have the street value in America that crack enjoys. As long as that is the case, the coca fields will continue to dot the landscape in Bolivia and elsewhere.

What Bush seems to neglect while he fights the drug problem on other continents is that the people who use the drugs are right here in America. Voters may like the idea of passing the blame to some faceless Columbian, but as long as Americans are willing to pay the outrageous amounts of money they waste on drugs, little will change.

Instead of giving more money to Latin American governments such as Peru, whose human rights record is far from perfect, efforts should center on this country.

Education and money should be spent on groups most likely to fall to the temptation of drugs back home. When drugs aren't profitable to raise, they won't be grown.

Meanwhile, Bush has people such as Ecuadorian President Rodrigo Borja lining up for funds America simply can't afford to waste. In what almost sounds like a threat, Borja said his country did not produce coca but he must have additional U.S. funds to keep his country from becoming a drug producer.

Instead of focusing voters' attentions on the trafficking he calls "a new kind of transnational enemy," Bush should face up to the true enemy and use the force he commands here at home.

Saved life worth less freedom

As a father, I feel I must respond to Brian Allen's column on the mandatory seat belt law ("State tries again to strap us in," DN, Feb. 25). While acknowledging that seat belts make a driver safer (i.e. save lives), Mr. Allen considers seat belts an "inconvenience" and believes he should be able to make the choice to wear or not to wear seat belts.

What is a life worth? Is the "slight decrease in the highway death toll" worth the mandated seat belt law? How about if that life is one of your future children? My wife and I have chosen to wear seat belts our entire adult lives. By setting the example, my teenage daughters now automatically wear theirs when they drive. They are not sheep, but they have formed a life-saving habit over the past 17 years. Adults who "choose" not to wear seat belts set a life-threat-

ening example for their children. Mr. Allen states that people are supposed to follow their own preferences as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others. The state has a right to protect our children — no one argues with child abuse legislation. Those who do not use seat belts and teach their children not to use seat belts fall in the same category.

I couldn't care less whether insurance rates change because of this law, if the end result is one less death. Mr. Allen would have all Nebraskans held up as freedom-loving and the consequences be damned. This is one personal freedom I would happily see eroded in the name of our future generations.

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graduate student
education

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MARK FAHLESON

Federal funding of arts lunacy

Chalk one up for the American taxpayer.

Last Friday, thanks in part to the prodding of Republican patriot Patrick Buchanan, John E. Frohnmayer was sacked as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. In a tear-jerking ceremony, Frohnmayer announced his involuntary resignation to his staff by singing the old Shaker song "Simple Gifts" and reciting poetry.

"I leave with the belief that this eclipse of the soul will soon pass and with it the lunacy that sees artists as enemies and ideas as demons," Frohnmayer said.

"Lunacy" is correct. However, not with regard to this so-called hatred towards artists and the avant-garde, but rather the lunacy in how far our federal government will stretch the Constitution's mandate of providing for the "general welfare."

Thanks to Frohnmayer's belated removal, the time has come once again to debate the lunacy of government funding of the "arts."

The Endowment was created during Lyndon Johnson's free-lunch "Great Society" as a way of paying homage to that exalted patron of the arts, John F. Kennedy. Its stated goal is to educate and foster an appreciation for the arts. Since its inception, the NEA budget has grown exponentially, now hovering at more than \$170 million annually.

For years, the NEA survived with little or no scrutiny, quietly going about its business of doling out tax dollars to innocuous arts such as symphonies and operas.

However, as the NEA began devoting greater amounts of attention, and with it, cash, to "performance art" and photography, cries of indignation spewed forth as the taxpayer-funded projects began trampling upon the religious, moral and cultural convictions of Americans. That is, the NEA's patrons.

The endowment has come a long way in how far it would go to provoke anger. Originally, those projects deemed "controversial" were, although wasteful, relatively harmless.

In 1977, for example, Sen. William Proxmire gave one of his famed Golden Fleece awards to an NEA-sponsored event in which artist Le Anne Wilchusky went up in an airplane, threw out colored streamers of crepe paper and filmed them as they gravitated to earth.

Such "art" pales in comparison to the garbage that is given governmental sanction today.

Recent NEA disbursements include the now-infamous homo-erotic, bull-whip-up-the-anus photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, the urine-sub-



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merged crucifix of Andres Serrano and the porn star who inserted the speculum into her vagina for the audience's viewing pleasure.

Whatever happened to Norman Rockwell?

There are some other real doozies as well. Little of what our state-appointed connoisseurs have chosen on our behalf with our money has to do with art as much as it does with politics and the deconstruction of the Western, Judeo-Christian values upon which this country was founded.

Some funding is purely political.

The Dance Theater Workshop in New York City received \$530,700 in NEA funding last year. It ended the year with a display by artist Lee Brozgold.

His show, entitled "40 Patriots/Countless Americans," consisted of skull-like "death masks" of such conservatives as George and Barbara Bush, Cardinal John O'Connor, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Justice Clarence Thomas and even Bob Hope.

Behind each mask hung the flags of groups such as Queer Nation, the Green Party and the Prisoner Rights Union to represent "the countless Americans offended or maligned by the particular patriot."

Said Brozgold to the Washington Times, "They represent the old order. ... They're outdated. ... They should be dead."

Some funding is plainly profane. Here at the University of Nebraska's Sheldon Art Gallery, one could view "Tongues Untied," part of the "Point of View" series that received \$250,000 in taxpayer funding.

I wasted a Friday evening watching this stomach-wrenching pornography about the "African-American gay community." The film featured such sordid topics as homosexual sodomy, buggery and the joys of cross-dressing.

Other funding is simply racist. The

straw that broke Frohnmayer's back came in the form of "Queer City," a magazine that recently received a \$5,000 NEA grant. Within this federally subsidized publication was a rap poem celebrating a black gang rape of a white woman in Central Park.

Any challenge to NEA funding evokes the fallacious cry of censorship. As far as I know, no constitutional right exists for artists to have their work paid for out of the public kitty. Where critics fail is in their inability to recognize the gargantuan difference between censorship and sponsorship.

Censorship is when the government says, "You can't say that," not, "We won't pay for that."

As author Tom Wolfe has observed, "I think the National Endowment for the Arts is one of the great comic spectacles of our time. You only have to imagine some poor, rejected former NEA artist going to Voltaire or Solzhenitsyn, and saying, 'They're attaching strings to my money! I went to the government for money for my art and they're attaching strings to it!' The horse laugh that even Solzhenitsyn — who is not given to horse laughs — would have given them would be marvelous to hear."

The problem goes far beyond the fact that such "art" can be considered racist, profane and pure political propaganda. Art has become whatever anyone calling himself an artist wants it to be.

I could take off my clothes, rub chocolate all over my body, run around naked and sing "I Am Woman" and declare that I am an "artist" deserving of NEA funding. And that, my friends, is ludicrous.

Recently, with the predictable bellowing of censorship, the NEA actually began scrutinizing its applications.

The Endowment killed a \$25,000 grant to Franklin Furnace, a New York performance group. Franklin's application included a videotape of one of its performers, Scarlet O, whose performance opens with a discussion of gender, followed by a disrobing and an invitation to the audience to rub lotion on her.

Art critics such as Christopher Knight have warned that the NEA, by delving into the validity of grant applications, is evolving into a U.S. version of a Ministry of Culture, a parochial instrument of government policy.

He suggested that if artists could not exert greater control over the public purse, then the government should put an end to the National Endowment for the Arts as we know it.

So be it.
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