

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Cancer shtick

Cigarette tax increase won't solve problem

OK, smoking is bad. After the thousands of warning labels, public service announcements and testimonials berating cigarettes, it's hard to imagine a living person who doesn't know that smoking is an unhealthy pastime.

But in the rapid ascension of anti-smoking hysteria, the clean-air-and-body lobby has lost sight of a number of issues that are even more important than a smoke-free hotel lobby.

Personal freedom, to name one.

Anti-smoking sentiment has been directed not only at the menacing, faceless cigarette companies, but also at the individual citizens who choose to partake in tobacco despite countless warnings.

Attacking smokers is a foolproof political asset, and Nebraska's Legislature has not surprisingly jumped into the fray. Sen. David Landis of Lincoln is sponsoring LB505, an amendment-riddled bill that would increase the cigarette tax in Nebraska from 34 cents to one dollar.

Landis and the bill's supporters want to dissuade their fellow Nebraskans from lighting up, and they think taxation is just the answer. And as long as you're not a smoker, the tax increase does sound like a pretty good idea, at first.

But before rushing to judgment on this bill, Nebraskans and their lawmakers should take another look at what they're doing.

If keeping people away from cigarettes is the true goal of this bill, it is flawed from the start. Anyone who has felt the tingling rush of the day's first cigarette and the gnawing urge of nicotine withdrawal will tell you that a 64-cent price increase is nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

Birds will fly. The sun will rise and set. And smokers will smoke - no matter the cost.

Another flaw in this bill is that it is an unfair tax. It will place a large burden on low-income Nebraskans, and it will scarcely affect those with more money in the bank.

But the biggest defect of LB505 is its intent.

This bill is an unmotivated attack on a shrinking minority - albeit a voluntary one - and an attempt to legislate behavior in the name of saving public health.

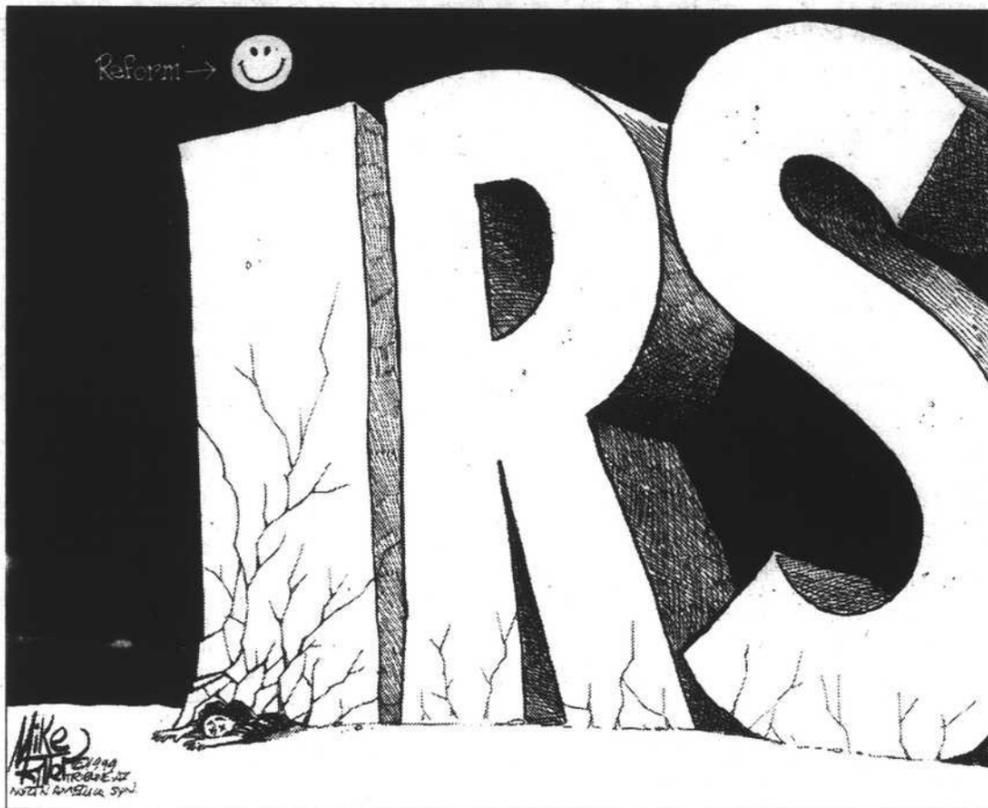
In the United States, government's purpose is to serve its people, not tell its people what's best for them. Our senators are not our parents.

But as long as they continue to swing away at the unpopular and unfashionable habits, public officials unfortunately will be able to get away with it.

So look out, Nebraskans. That fat-packed, artery-clogging hamburger you're eating could be the next taxable item put on the legislative chopping block.

Maybe then you'll do something about it.

Ritter's VIEW



Marital bliss

Sister's wedding becomes experience to remember



ERIN REITZ is a senior theater performance major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Bells were ringing, birds were singing, and the tears were flowing. Man, oh man, were they flowing.

Yes ladies and gentlemen, my beautiful sister Kristen got married this past weekend, and I was right in the thick of it.

And thank God I was, because I would have missed some pretty hilarious stuff if I hadn't been.

My sis got engaged last January, and shortly after asked her nutty sisters (that would be Amy and me) to be her maids of honor. (Two of us! She's so darn creative, that Krissy.) Needless to say, I was just thrilled and couldn't wait to see what our dresses would look like, so I could immediately start hunting for matching shoes.

Well, the year and a few months flew by, and it was finally time for the big weekend o' marital delight. Everything was panning out just as my frantic, fabulous mother and Kris had planned.

It all began with the rehearsal. With much help, I figured out what I was supposed to do with the ring, flowers, small children, my history book, that little thingy on my toaster, etc., and all was well. We headed to the rehearsal dinner.

Now, I was expecting a smallish gathering of family to officially get the ball rolling. My expectation turned out to be so incredibly wack, because there were close to 3,412 people at the restaurant, all of whom made toasts.

(You must realize that the above was a disgusting exaggeration. If 3,412 people made toasts at the dinner, Kris and Mike wouldn't have been able to get married until July of 2002. Plus they never would have been able to find that much prime rib.)

After dinner was when the hilari-

ty really began. My parents set up a hospitality suite at the hotel where the reception was and everyone was staying, and I'll tell you that there was some major hospitality goin' on.

I never knew that watching (present and future) in-laws getting tipsy was so much fun! Case in point, my cousin Schmiddy*.

*Some names have been changed out of the author's courtesy to her family. By the way, his name is really David.

Schmiddy consumed many beers and proceeded to tell me how to get around the pornography-blocking system on UNL computers.

Apparently all you have to do is sweet talk the lab aid in computerese, and it's all good. Too bad I forgot what I was supposed to say.

Also having consumed many beers, my Uncle Fester* came to the conclusion that it must have been toenail jam lending to the "nutty, musty flavor thing" in some 20-year-old peach liqueur my parents tried to get rid of. Toenail jam. Yummy.

*Fester's real name may be Terry, but we don't know for sure. I think he may have been someone else's uncle.

Once the hoo-rah of the after-hours shindig ended, it was time for the actual wedding on Saturday. Everything was turning out to be absolutely picture-perfect.

Except for one slightly huge detail: We were missing a bridesmaid's dress.

No kidding. It belonged to Bridesmaid Consuelo who had sent it from Texas via UPS, with guaranteed overnight delivery on Tuesday morning. The dress never showed up.

Here's the real kicker of it, though: Her original dress got lost, too.

Yup, she was sending the second one to my mom. Someone jerked around and lost her first dress in December. (The poor girl was cursed, I think.) Luckily, she had a similar dress and wore that instead. By the way, the dress showed up this Monday. As in two days ago. Convenient, huh? I thought so, too.

Oh, did I mention that Consuelo's plane got to North Platte about two hours before the wedding? Yup, that whole thing was a big wad of fun.

Once she got to the wedding, though, everything went just as

planned. It was a lovely ceremony.

(Side note: When you get married, you'll be able to tell if you've had a "lovely ceremony" if all of your relatives are bawling their eyes out. It's the one true tell-tale sign.)

After enough Kleenexes to fill a Volkswagen were used, it was time for the real fun: the reception.

Kris and Mike were taken there by a wickedly rad horse and carriage, while the rest of us were transported by the ever-romantic four-door sedan. Everyone arrived safely, and the party began.

The bar was open from about 5 until 9, and I was informed by my wise-cracking dad to "Hit it hard," because he wasn't paying for it.

(Don't worry, I didn't end up face-down in the lawn the next morning, but I do think I was in charge of drinking for the other three bridesmaids. When I do something, I really give it my all.)

The cake was cut, toasts were made, and we all danced like loonies late into the night to music spun by the deputy sheriff. (Only in western Nebraska, you know?) It was a rollicking good time, especially when DJ Jazzy Lonnie broke out the Chicken Dance. And who doesn't love the Chicken Dance, huh?

We got everything cleaned up and hit the hay. I am not ashamed to admit that I crashed harder than my mom on a snowboard right around midnight.

The next morning we had brunch and saw the happy couple off. Those crazy kids are going to the Cayman Islands for the honeymoon (lucky punks), where they will finally be free of wedding mayhem. I know they enjoyed it, though. We all did.

A lot of magic happened last weekend. Kris and Mike entered wedded bliss, it was actually sunny in North Platte and I finally fulfilled my lifelong dream of do-si-doing with my dad. It just goes to show that dreams really do come true.

Even with all of the little crises, the wedding was a great success. We'd all like to do it again soon, but the truth is it would probably kill us.

Oh wait, Schmiddy's gettin' hitched on the 8th of May! I tell you, the fun never ends with my family.

Best wishes for a fabulous life together, Krissy and Mikey. I know it'll be wonderful (Just stay the heck away from UPS).

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