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Our
VIEW

Smoke and mirrors

Tobacco suit displays government's hypocrisy

In a landmark action, the U.S. government has filed a mammoth civil lawsuit against the major tobacco companies.

Inspired by similar states' lawsuits, this case represents an attempt to recover billions of federal dollars that have been used to cover the health costs of smokers.

The lawsuit charges that cigarette smoking causes cancer (well, duh) and other diseases that have resulted in \$25 billion annually in health claims paid to veterans, military personnel, federal employees and the elderly through Medicare payments.

Nothing frivolous about those numbers, but one wonders where a government that has failed to regulate an industry responsible for \$25 billion in health costs gets off suing the companies involved.

That cigarettes do irreparable damage to the health of Americans has been known for years, nevertheless tobacco companies (along with, for some reason, beer makers — makes you wonder what's in that stuff) have been exempted from placing content labels on their products.

Formaldehyde, as an ingredient in the modern cigarette, might have looked a little too shocking on a product meant to be ingested, don't you think?

So cigarette-makers simply didn't mention it.

The industry, with its powerful and wealthy lobby, bought special treatment in smoke-filled rooms — talk about the dangers of smoking! It was fat cigars that sealed the deals, and the tobacco industry has reason to cry, "Foul! An honest senator stays bought!"

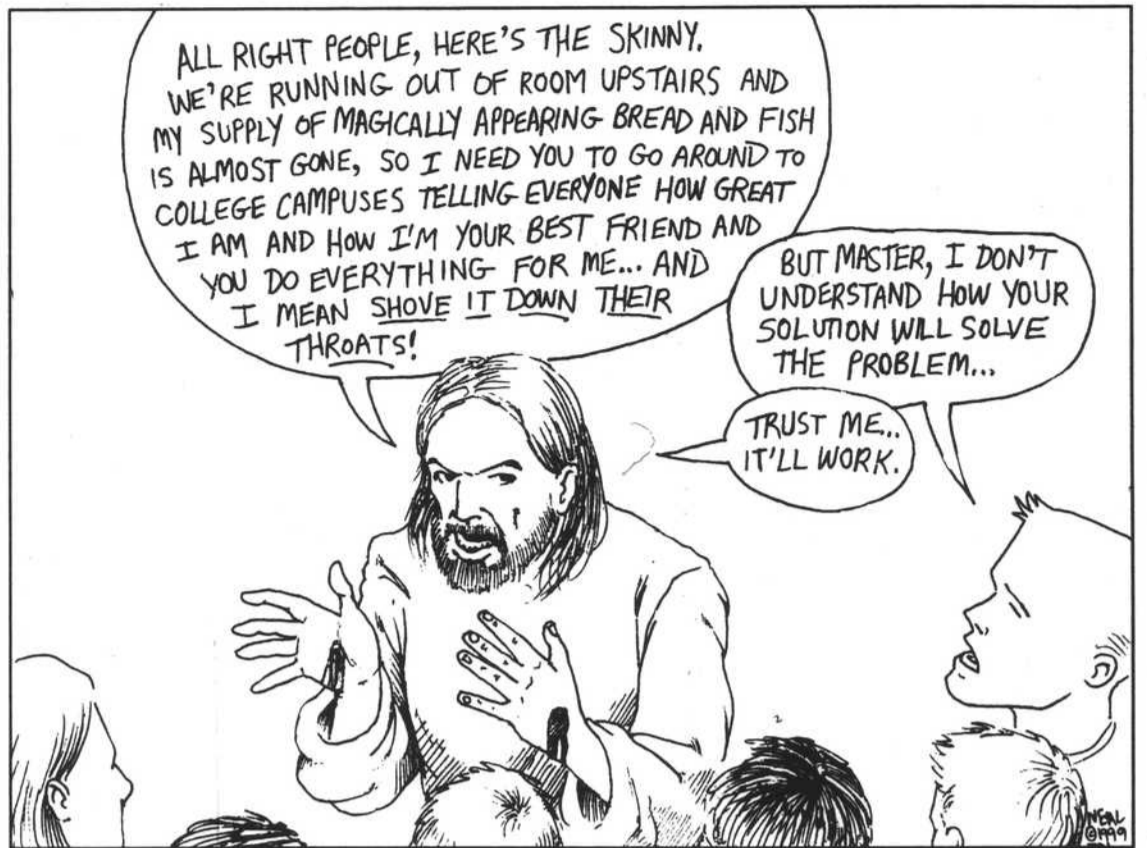
Only after evidence began to appear that the industry had suppressed scientific information, rigged experiments, bought scientists and lied to the public about smoking risks did the tide turn, forcing Congress to abandon its favorite bed partner.

Complaints about advertisements targeting minors, rising medical costs and research demonstrating mild risks to "second-hand smokers" ended in the states' lawsuits with which our papers have been reverberating for the last few years.

If the government can win such a suit, more power to it, we suppose, but would it be too idealistic to prefer a government that did not sell out the health of its citizens and then sue to recoup its losses?

“*The industry, with its powerful and wealthy lobby, bought special treatment in smoke-filled rooms — talk about the dangers of smoking!*”

Obermeyer's
VIEW



DN
LETTERS

Latin Lesson

Amen, J.J. (DN, Wednesday) When will we learn to tell the government how to work for us instead of the other way around?

Maintaining the status quo (Latin for "the mess we've gotten ourselves into") means big bucks for insurance companies, HMOs and trial lawyers.

Passing a "patients' Bill of Rights" is simply double talk for the right to sue the very insurance companies that insure us.

I've never heard of a business that is willing to take a cut in its profit margin just to help a lower class family get better health care.

Steve Forbes' Medical Savings Accounts prove yet again that the best ideas in this country have been born in the private sector.

Andrew M. Strnad
UNL alumnus
Milwaukee

Dung, On The Other Hand

I ask Mr. Gaskill (DN, Wednesday) where he would stand on the elephant-dung-on-Mary exhibit if, instead, it were pasted on a bust of Mohammed or caked around the beltline of Buddha or in mounds on the multiple hands of Shiva?

What if a representation of Gaia had its continents painted in elephant dung? What sort of outcry would come from the Jewish community if its tax dollars were paying for a Star of David molded with kiln-baked elephant dung?

Yet that's beside the point. If, as Gaskill states, we support the arts so much, why must its funding be drawn involuntarily from our pay? If we support something, shouldn't we pay for it voluntarily?

This circumstance cannot by a reasonable mind be construed as censorship.

Censorship is when the government says, "No, you can't do that." The issue here is a government saying, "No, my taxpayers won't pay for that." There is a

difference.

I can sell Gutenberg presses all I want, but if nobody buys them, I don't have the right to beg the government for help. Unless Mr. Gaskill wants to pay for them himself.

Bryan Gordon
visiting student

Outta My Way, Slowpoke!

Hey Jessica Eckstein, (DN, Wednesday) we, as "ozone-depleting hate machine" drivers don't want to run you off the road and kill you, we just don't want you there at all.

It's two-wheelers like you who, I swear, bike in the middle of the lane just because you "can."

I don't want to hear all that "I have every legal right to be there" crap. You do. I know that. It doesn't make me want you to get out of my way any less.

You don't like the way I drive? Bike path, babe.

Or better yet, ever hear of a sidewalk? It seems to me that that would be a lot safer than the 20 cars backed up behind you, all trying to make lane changes during 5 o'clock traffic while you're scooting along at .05 miles an hour.

Hey, I own a bike, too. Love to ride it. I'm just not trying to overcompensate my lack of acceleration by holding up the rest of the world.

I actually have consideration for others.

Brian O'Grady
interlibrary loan
Love Library

Crumbling Graham's Cracker

Graham Johnson (DN, Sept. 10) believes that the American farmer should switch to organic production methods and return to the "methods of his ancestors."

I have compiled some numbers on what actual output might be with the technology of our ancestors.

I used data from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to arrive at these numbers.

I used the yield data from 1920 and 1997 and acreage from 1997. Using this data, corn production would decrease by 75 percent per acre, wheat by 55 percent, oats by 50 percent, barley by 51 percent, potatoes by 86 percent and dry beans by 76 percent.

Taken on a nation-wide basis, this drop in production would be astronomical.

One other area that must be considered is the amount of labor that would have to be reinvested in agriculture if organic methods are used. Currently, about 2 percent of the United States labor force is involved in production agriculture.

According to U.S. Department of Labor statistics, about 13.2 percent of the U.S. labor force was involved in agriculture in 1947. I suspect that if a person could find data farther back, this percentage would continue to grow.

Admittedly, if the United States were to go to organic production methods with modern implements, this number would not go as high as in the past, but it would still grow.

Labor would probably have to be taken away from other industries, and I will not even hazard a guess at what this would do to the economy. But it would most likely reduce output.

One closing note: there is the matter of money. Currently the U.S. consumer spends very little of his or her disposable income on food. Basic economics teaches us that as supplies decrease, prices will generally increase.

I will go out on a limb now and say that, when faced with higher food prices, the U.S. consumer in general will choose the cheap, mass produced, chemically treated, genetically modified, but still high quality food item over a much more expensive and probably lower quality organic product.

Phillip Anthony
senior
agricultural business

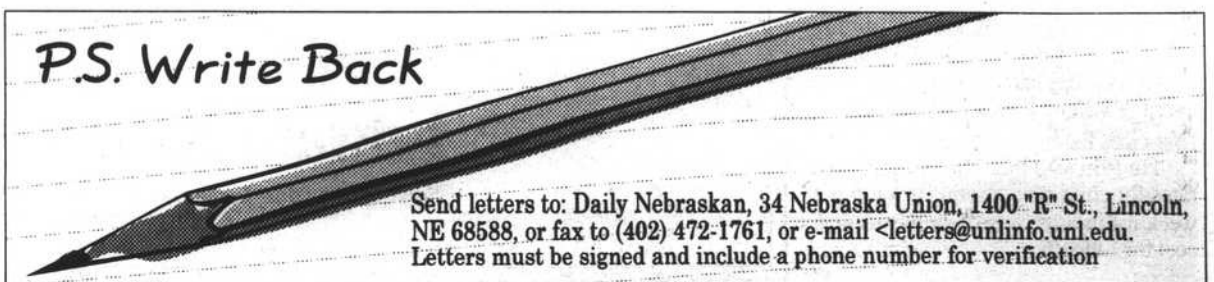
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