

OPINION

Raising drinking age won't solve problem

The Texas Senate last week voted to approve a bill that would raise the legal drinking age in Texas to 21. If the bill is passed by the House and the governor, it will go into effect Sept. 1, 1986.

There isn't much the legislators or the governor can do to fight this bill, unless they're willing to lose millions of dollars in highway funds. Texas, like all the other states in which the drinking age is below 21, is being blackmailed by the federal government with the threat of losing 5 percent of federal highway funds next year and 10 percent the next. If Texas does not raise its legal drinking age to 21 by Oct. 1, 1986, it will lose \$107 million in federal highway funds.

Quite a heavy-handed threat coming from an administration that claims it wants to get the government off people's backs. This is the same administration that says it wants to give local governments more control.

So why doesn't each state have control over its own drunk driving laws?

If the administration really wants to solve the horrifying problem of alcohol abuse and drunk driving in this country, it's going to have to do more than simply forbid people under 21 to drink alcohol.

Trying to control who can and who can't drink alcohol without emphasizing alcohol education and prevention of alcohol abuse is ineffective.

Raising the drinking age to 21 will not solve America's drinking problem, especially since the highest number of drunk driving fatalities — and convictions — today occur among males aged 21 to 25. No one thing can make the difference.

We need a combination of reasonable laws dealing with drunk driving, swift and tough punishments dealt out to drunk drivers and good alcohol education programs starting in elementary schools.

Treatment and rehabilitation of alcoholics is vital. But equally important is the prevention of future alcoholism, the prevention of the spread of this disease and its grisly consequences.

Raising the drinking age to 21 may be a step in the right direction, but only through increased awareness and enforcement will drunk driving ever become socially unacceptable.

The Battalion Editorial Board

Congress really not to blame for deficits and national debt

Someone should silence naughty Norman Ornstein before he spoils the sport of Congress-bashing. He demonstrates that congressional irresponsibility has not been the primary cause of the many deficits that have produced our national debt.



George Will

committees and took other measures to restrain spending. Thanks to that and economic growth, the national debt as a percentage of GNP shrank to 98 percent by 1949, 56 percent by 1961.

But in the next quarter-century there was just one small surplus (\$3.2 billion in 1969). From 1960 to 1980 the debt grew from \$293 billion to \$993 billion. In Reagan's first term it nearly doubled, as did the clamor against Congress and four proposed constitutional amendments (to restrain Congress).

Although Congress has been, in Ornstein's word, an "accomplice" it has been less important as a deficit-maker than Presidents, from Lyndon Johnson with a guns-and-butter policy through Reagan's gamble that the stimulative effect of his tax cuts would make the cuts virtually self-financing, eliminating the need for politically hazardous cuts in spending on middle-class programs.

Ornstein acknowledges that Congress has contributed to the deficit problem by the decline of its institutional toughness and the rise of "subcommittee government" which has weakened the central control of spending through appropriations committees. And Congress has mastered the art of bestowing blessings by tax breaks rather than appropriations.

But Congress has reduced politically profitable discretionary domestic spending by reducing the amount (as a percentage of the budget) and the discretion (adopting formula programs). Congress indexed entitlement programs, thereby stopping the politically advantageous but fiscally irresponsible process of voting ad hoc increases every few years.

In 1982 Congress, dragging a reluctant President, attacked the deficit by raising taxes in an election year. In 1983 it attacked the deficit by initiating an en-

ergy-tax increase. In 1984 there was something like congressional government, with another attempt to reduce the deficit by raising taxes in election year, with an essentially passive President acquiescing.

Today there are reports that Reagan will go barnstorming to rally support for substantial cuts in middle-class programs. I, for one, will believe it when I see it from the man who, as Ornstein notes, has supported almost all the water projects President Carter tried to kill, has supported swollen farm subsidies and generous farm-loan guarantees, has supported subsidized electric power and grazing fees for his Western friends, has pledged to "stand for" cuts in the biggest social program (Social Security), and wants some new deficit-enlarging programs, such as tuition tax credits. "The se," says Ornstein dryly, "are not the habits of a President who would use the line-item veto pen mercifully."

The proposed item veto would cover only appropriations bills, and only a small portion of spending is controlled by such bills. In the \$925 billion fiscal 1985 budget there is just \$81 billion in non-defense discretionary spending. And Ornstein thinks an item veto might increase spending because presidents would use it as a club to threaten legislators who oppose spending the President favors. For example, he says, Reagan's hands the item veto could be used to threaten dams and federal buildings desired by legislators opposed to MX. We would wind up buying the dams and buildings — and the large number of MX's.

Ornstein, you see, is doubly insufferable. He robs us of two comforts: the image of Congress as a convenient villain, and the hope that constitutional tinkering can be a panacea.

George Will is a columnist for the Washington Post.

In an essay for American Enterprise Institute, he notes that the \$80 million Revolutionary War debt was cut in half by 1811. The War of 1812 tripled the debt, but it was almost eliminated in the 1830s. It rose as a result of the Mexican War, but then declined until the Civil War produced a \$2.6 billion national debt. That caused Congress to centralize spending, resulting in two powerful appropriations committees. In 31 years (1867-1897), there were 27 surpluses. In 13 years revenues exceeded expenditures by more than 25 percent.

The Spanish-American War, combined with the 1896 recession, initiated 20 years with 11 deficits, but in 1916 the national debt was approximately what it had been in 1896. After 127 years the Republic's debt was \$1.23 billion. But 1919, modern war, the foremost shaper of the modern world, had increased the debt 20-fold, to \$25.8 billion. Then Congress again tightened budget procedures and the debt again shrank, to \$16 billion by 1930.

Depression deficits were almost trivial compared to those of World War II — \$211 billion. The national debt as a percentage of GNP was 33 percent on the eve of the Depression, 43 percent in 1940, 128 percent in 1946.

In 1946 Congress cut the number of

LETTERS:

Career opportunities day helps students

EDITOR:

Each year, the Placement Center hosts thousands of employment interviews, which serve the needs of many students seeking employment in business and engineering. There are many fields, however, which are not represented through the interviews that we

provide. Health Care is an example of a growing, dynamic field that has limited representation through campus employment interviews.

Another need which is not met through any one office is information on educational opportunities in health care, such as dentistry, health administration, social work, pharmacy, nursing, etc.

Each year the Placement Center hosts a Health Career Opportunities Day which brings to campus representatives from both employing and educational institutions. These representatives are here to talk to students about opportunities in the health care field, and provide information to those students looking for employment as well as those looking into educational programs that are health related.

This year Health Career Opportunities Day will be on Tuesday, February 12 in the MSC Ballroom (Room 225) all day. So far we have close to 30 participants, and it promises to be a very beneficial program for all.

Judy Vulliet Assistant Director Texas A&M Placement Center

Being close-minded can be admirable

EDITOR:

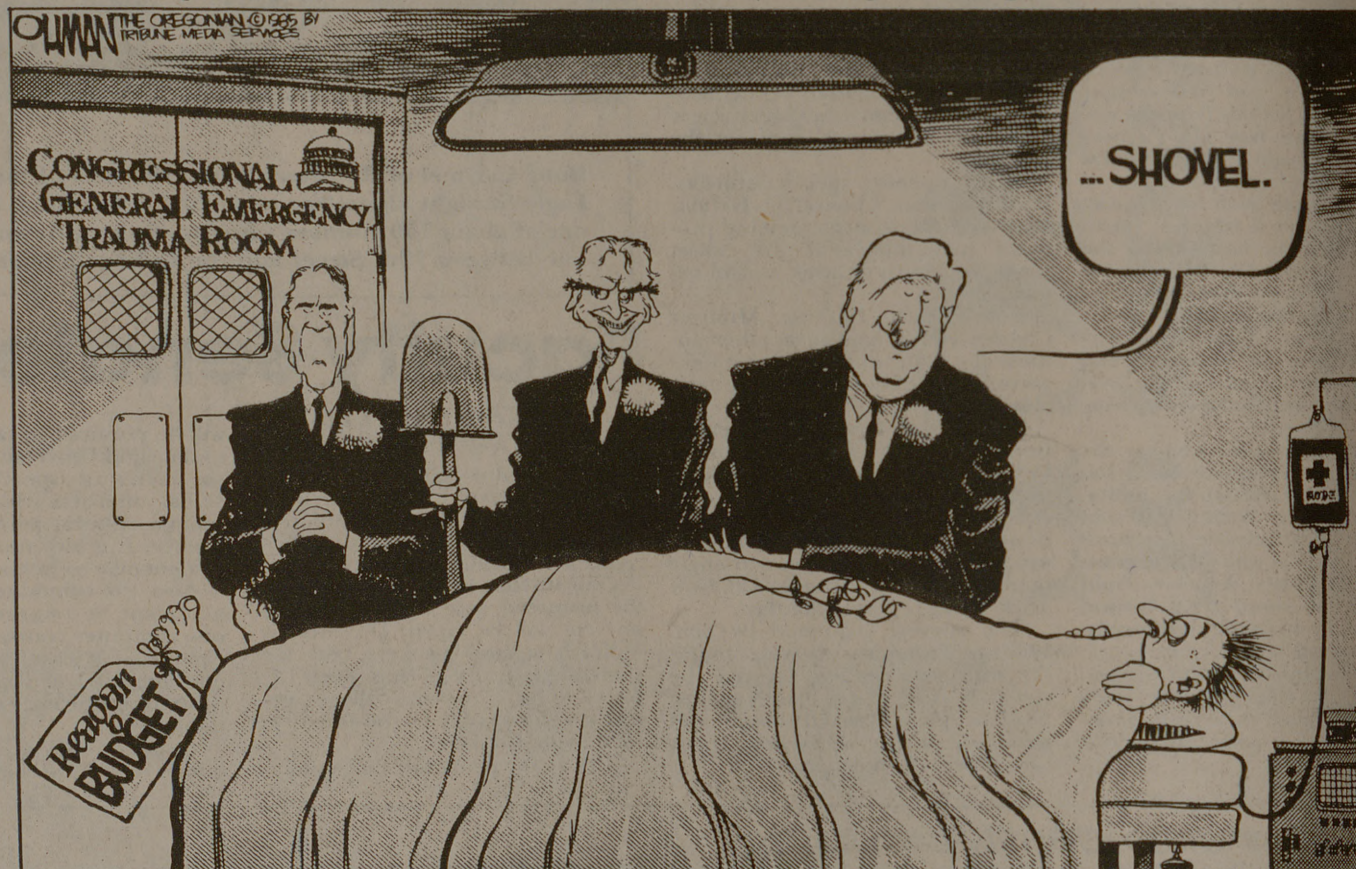
I direct this letter to Darby Paige Sykin in response to her letter in The Battalion.

Dear Darby, In the fourth and fifth paragraphs of your letter, you left me with the impression that anyone who believes homosexuality or abortion to be wrong, is close-minded.

I ask you, if I wholeheartedly asserted that two plus two was five would you be open-minded? I would assume not. Why? Because two plus two equals four is an established fact. Regardless of what you've been taught, there is absolute truth in this universe. There is right and there is wrong. No in-between for situational ethics. The fact is, homosexuality and abortion are wrong. To be close-minded about false assertions or wrong thinking would seem to me to be admirable. Now, you might ask, "How do you know if you're right or wrong?" Very simply, the revealed word of God will let you know what is absolutely right and what is absolutely wrong.

To entertain wrong ideas invites destruction. Just imagine if you put two plus two equals five on your next math test. You see, ideas have consequences.

Michael Bastian Senior



Falling asleep at black-tie affairs okay, but not on the floor please

By ART BUCHWALD Columnist for The Los Angeles Times Syndicate

The big story in Washington last week was not the president's budget or the Ed Meese hearings, but the nap John Riggins took at a Washington Press Club black-tie affair honoring new members of Congress.

It seems that the Redskin running back was sitting at the same table with Justice Sandra O'Connor, Virginia Gov. Chuck Robb and staffers of People magazine. When the politicians started making speeches, John just stretched out on the floor and went to sleep, not even waking up in time to hear Vice President George Bush.

Waiters stepped over him gingerly as they poured coffee and Justice O'Connor excused herself from the table, explaining she had an early day at the court.

After the speeches were concluded Riggins woke up, thanked everyone for the wonderful evening and was driven home.

The capital's social arbiters have been discussing the incident ever since.

Many people have fallen asleep during speeches at large black-tie functions

in Washington, but this is the first time anyone can recall someone actually sacking out on the floor.

To put the incident into perspective you have to understand the 1984 Washington Redskins game plan. Riggins was the only running back the team had. For 16 games he was asked to pick up four or five yards with 300-pound guards, tackles and linebackers trying to pull him down. He did the job manfully and without complaint, despite the fact that the Redskin offensive line wasn't what it used to be.

Therefore, friends say, Riggins came off the season very tired and he's been trying to catch up on his sleep ever since. Since the majority of the people in the ballroom were Redskin fans, they saw nothing wrong with the running back taking a catnap.

As one loyal rooster put it, "As long as he didn't do it during a game."

But there are people in Washington who still have a problem with it.

A senator said, "I have no quarrel with Riggins' behavior, but he may have started a dangerous precedent for political dinners. What happens if every guest decides to sack out on the floor when one of us gets up to speak? We

could face a sea of empty tables."

A check with the hotel brought the response, "We have rules about people sleeping in the lobby, but to my knowledge we don't have any concerning people sleeping next to their tables. We'll probably have to look into it, as we've had several complaints from the waiters."

Because Washington is so protocol-minded, I called an expert on etiquette to find out if Mr. Riggins had made a boo-boo.

She gave me her ruling. "You can only go to sleep on the floor during dinner if the highest-ranking official at the table decides to do so first. Since Justice O'Connor did not stretch out, Mr. Riggins committed a serious faux pas. Lying down at the table after coffee is a no-no and the hostess should have insisted that Riggins be placed back in his chair."

"Do you think when the word goes out, John may not be invited to Washington's better parties?"

"Not necessarily. Mr. Riggins is still a social catch. I know one hostess who is entertaining him next week and to make him more comfortable she is putting a sleeping bag on the floor, next to his place card."

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