

opinion

Caffeine: Next illegal drug?

Choosing a soft drink can be a chore these days. In a market already glutted by a fantastic array of brands and flavors, with nearly every variety offering a sugar-free option, the powers-that-be have further confused shoppers with caffeine-free drinks.

It is now possible to get your favorite cola without sugar or caffeine. Or with sugar, but without the caffeine. And of course, you can still get soda with that old-fashioned dose of caffeine left in.

But not for long. Anti-caffeine sentiment is bound to spread — remember all the heat saccharin took a few years ago? Parents will begin to suspect that they are not responsible for their children's behavior — all that rowdiness could be due to one too many sodas.

Sooner or later, some research laboratory will declare that caffeine leads to an increased incidence of toenail tumors in white rats. Studies will be released, with graphs and charts to back them up, claiming that coffee-guzzling caffeine dependents are 14 percent less efficient than their straight co-workers.

Anti-caffeine sentiment will escalate into anti-caffeine paranoia.

Coalitions sporting colorful acronyms for names will set out to have the fiendish substance banned. Rallies will be held, bills will be drawn up and debates will take place. Eventually, the fanatics will have their way, and caffeine will take its



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place among the list of controlled substances in the United States.

Once the use of caffeine pills, or "feenies," becomes the hip thing to do among irresponsible young thrill-seekers, the law banning their use will become impossible to enforce. Busts will be made, and images of proud police officers next to small mounds of pills and mouldy coffee beans will crowd the evening news. People will rot in our already overcrowded prisons. But the large majority of users and dealers will remain free to continue their criminal way of life.

If all this triggers a backlash against the waste of public funds spent trying to enforce anti-caffeine laws, not to mention the growing numbers of people doing time for a relatively harmless crime, it will be quashed by the Texan's War on Drugs committee and groups like it in other states. Texas will maintain its reputation as a law-and-order state by leading the way with such legislation as legalized wiretapping of suspected "feenie" dealers and paraphernalia laws banning Mr. Coffee machines.

On the other hand, maybe this is all a little far fetched. After all, this is supposed to be the freest country in the world. They wouldn't throw someone in jail for something as harmless as using caffeine.

Would they?

This will not, however, stop people from using it. Desperate addicts will have to turn to the underground market to keep supplied. Illegal shipments of coffee from south of the border will have little trouble finding their way into Texas and Florida, where they will be divided into one-ounce baggies and distributed across the country.

Hidden drug laboratories will expand their facilities to begin manufacturing pure caffeine. Once the illicit stimulant is cut with a cheaper substance, such as



IT'S OK, ADAM, HE'S NOT REALLY A SNAKE... HE SAYS HE'S JUST A COVERT CIA OPERATIVE...



Follies on the Fourth could cause fireworks

by Beverly Hamilton

The excitement of seeing bursts of light and flare of sparks during Fourth of July celebrations is not difficult to forget. But what many of us forget is the hazards involved with fireworks.

People have damaged property, lost their sight, or been seriously burned from firecrackers.

Seeing the rocket's red glare in your front yard is not recommended in Bryan or College Station because it is illegal to buy, sell, possess or set off fireworks within the city limits.

The consequences of being discovered with fireworks do not appeal to me. Being cited or arrested would sure spoil my holiday. Especially since citations range from \$20 to \$100. Who can afford it?

But there are people who insist on shooting fireworks, and it is legal for them to do so within Brazos County — such as on county roads. This, however, is not necessarily a smart idea.

Around this time of year, open fields in the county become potential fire hazards because the summer heat dries them out, says County Sheriff Bobby Yeager.

"The grass is dry, so go to an area with barren ground," he says. "What we want to stress is be careful."

Misguided fireworks that land in these fields could result in serious damage. It's certainly not something in which I would want to be involved for the sake of a few pretty sparks.

Instead of igniting the fuses yourself, why not attend one or both of the Fourth of July fireworks displays in College Station?

Post Oak Mall is sponsoring a display at 9 p.m. Saturday in the parking area of the mall. The City of College Station and



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the Noon Lion's Club are sponsoring a display Monday at A&M Junior High in Anderson. The display will begin around dark.

Displays have been popular throughout the years and are an alternative for parents who prefer not to purchase fireworks.

If, however, you decide to perform your own fireworks display outside the city limits, remember these safety tips from the National Safety Council:

— Buy fireworks from a reliable vendor, read the directions and ignite them outdoors.

— Keep water handy, light the rockets one at a time and never re-ignite malfunctioning fireworks.

— Keep a safe distance from the rockets, store them in a cool, dry place and dispose of them properly.

Enjoy the razzle and dazzle of the fireworks and have a safe, fun holiday weekend.

The Battalion

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Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

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Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed and show the address and telephone number of the writer.

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Robot-politician on horizon

by Dick West
United Press International

WASHINGTON — As the Senate was again wrestling with the question of whether to impose moratoriums on honoraria, or maybe it was moratoria on honorariums, the ultimate answer may have been testifying at a subcommittee hearing.

I refer to the maiden appearance of a robot as a congressional witness.

Already this spring, we have been treated to the spectacle of a robot delivering a college commencement address.

If these electronic marvels can be programmed to accept honorary degrees, it should be no sweat at all to have them collecting fees for after-dinner speeches.

However, the debut of Hero I as a congressional witness does invite debate over whether robots are included in the First Amendment's "Free Speech" guarantee.

Senators, as we know from the honorarium issue, make very few free speeches. Some of them collected up to six figures in lecture fees last year.

But the application of the Constitution to robots may have to be decided by the Supreme Court.

If the justices decide in the affirmative, should robots subpoenaed to testify before congressional committees be programmed to take the Fifth Amendment?

I certainly would advise any robot not to answer questions that might tend to incriminate him. If that means a contempt of Congress citation, well it's back to the Supreme Court again.

It is, however, on the banquet circuit that robotics may come into full flower. Given a choice between a senator and a robot as the featured speaker at a convention banquet, how many dinner chairmen will opt for the former?

The reason I see robots replacing senators at the head table is because they can provide an extra entertainment dimension.

Hero I nicely made that point by singing a chorus of "Happy Birthday" during

his subcommittee appearance. Most senators can't carry a tune.

The day when robots will have a hand on the legislative machinery may not be far off. Certainly it is not too farfetched to imagine them as political candidates.

As Hero I demonstrated, robots already are adept at shaking hands, which is at least 60 percent of the campaign trail activity.

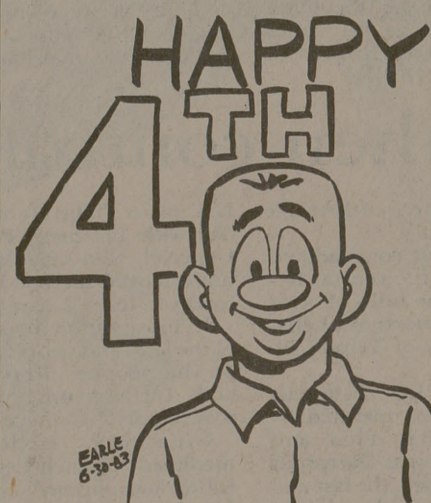
With only minor soft-ware modifications, they undoubtedly could be programmed to kiss babies as well.

If Yasser Arafat can do it, why not Hero I?

From that point, it is only a short step to victory at the ballot box.

Meanwhile, the arm that handed out printed copies of congressional testimony could easily be made to reach out for an honorarium.

Slouch By Jim Earle



"To the remaining six of you who haven't left for the holiday yet, drive safely."

Merit pay drawbacks

by Jordan McMorrough
Workshop Reporter

Educators in the United States have been complaining recently about the rising tide of "mediocrity" in our schools. It is estimated that about half of college freshmen students fail their first year of English.

President Ronald Reagan has come up with a solution to this problem — a way to revamp the public school system in America. The President has proposed to Congress a way to pay teachers more without a significant raise in taxes. Reagan has proposed that teachers be paid on a "merit" system, which would reward "outstanding" teachers in education.

Reagan said a system that judges the students of America can surely judge those in the profession who merit a pay raise. Congress, on the other hand, has proposed a plan on a seniority basis. Con-

gress wants to pay higher salaries to teachers who have taught the most years. This proposal would cost more to implement than the President's plan.

Both proposals have drawbacks and advantages. Under Reagan's merit system, most of the teachers who would get raises would be those on good terms with panel members who make "merit" decisions. Many qualified and outstanding teachers might not be considered for raises and/or additional benefits.

Under the Congressional plan, teachers who have been in the profession longest would get raises. But, as Secretary of Education T. H. Bell has said, just because a teacher has been in one place for a long time doesn't mean that he's good at his job. There might be younger, more qualified teachers who are more deserving of pay raises. The merit plan would at the least give all teachers chances for raises and is a valid alternative to the traditional "seniority" plan.

But unless an effective way of evaluating teachers is developed, the educational process will continue to be in a state of limbo, and the quality of our graduates will suffer.