

Opinion

Missing children 'crisis' reflects parental fear

My milk carton shows the picture of two kids. One is William Charles Cordes and the other is Rima Danette Traxler. The boy is now 18, the girl 10, both missing for more than a year — as is the missing children crisis that put their pictures on the container in the first place.



Richard Cohen

was hyped to the point that experts worried whether the cure was not worse than the disease. But the fear, if not the crisis, was genuine, and everyone got caught up in it. We're worried sick about our kids.

To a parent, the world seems to grow more and more menacing. Once, of course, the dangers to kids were both real and common: disease, famine and, always, war. Still earlier, we feared the forbidding forest at the edge of the village, a shadowy place of wild animals and mad hermits.

Paradoxically, the more we shrink the real forest, the more it stays with us. The fear remains what it always was — loss of control and the guilt that accompanies it. A mother who works cannot be with her kids. (What really goes on in that day-care center?) A father who commutes downtown hardly knows his own neighborhood. Grandparents live in another state. Parents are divorced. Siblings attend different schools with every whimsical boundary change and experts have supplanted parents at parenting itself. Where are our children? Who's enticing them and with what? Some of us would prefer the forest.

You can see the present-day forest in the controversy over busing, values in the school, school prayer, abortion, sex education, drugs, kidnappings, child molestation, day care, pornography and smutty rock lyrics. They all concern children and embody a yearning for those agents of control we call neighborhood, community and, especially, family.

Political parties or movements that fail to recognize this truth pay a penalty. The organized women's movement, perceived to be inhospitable to the concerns of mothers and indifferent to the demands of family, has suffered. The Democratic Party, perceived to be hostile to community and neighborhood, has likewise suffered.

Drugs — portable, mysterious, deadly — are the emblem of our times. They represent all that's frightening about our way of life and, when it comes to government, its refusal to deal, other than with nostrums from yesteryear, with a radically changed society.

To a parent — to most of us — drugs are scary and we fear them for good reason. We are scared of what they do. But we would fear them less if we did not fear something more: the people we've become.

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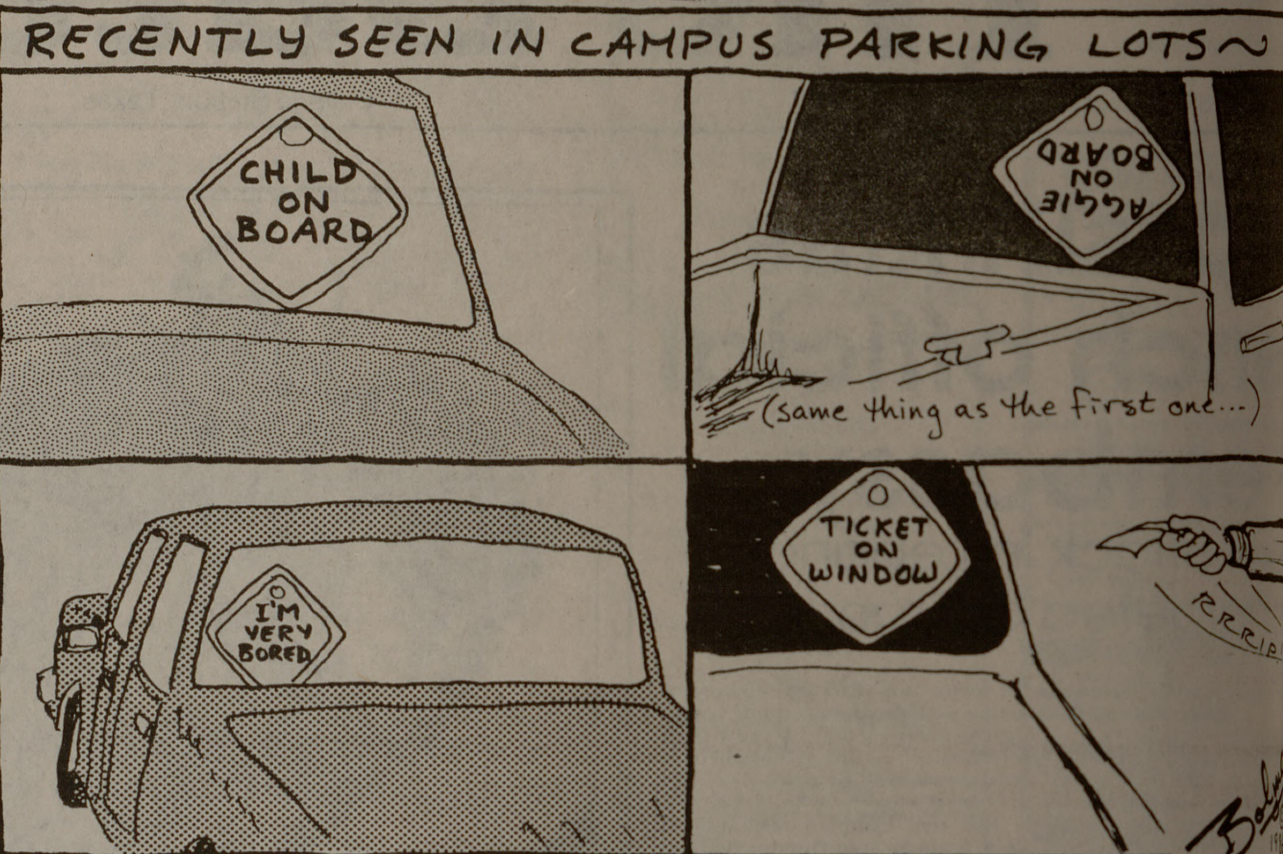
No matter. The crisis was never really about missing children. It was about all children and how we raise them. It is parents who are having the crisis.

Since the missing children crisis, we have proceeded to others: child abuse, teen-age pregnancy and, more recently, drugs. To each and every crisis, politicians react with rhetoric and, occasionally, programs, but their task is hopeless. Their enemy, after all, is anxiety and guilt over the way we raise children. The anxiety cannot be exaggerated; the "crisis" almost always is.

Take missing children. At the height of that panic, their number was said to be about 1.5 million. Television dramas were aired on the subject and the faces of the missing kids showed up on milk cartons. The presumption was that most of the 1.5 million were kidnapped by strangers, some of them almost certainly sexually abused and then killed. Yet for 1984, the FBI reported only 68 kidnappings by strangers. The rest were either "abducted" by a divorced or separated parent or were runaways — kids who had taken off on their own accord. The vast majority of them come home.

Statistics are less firm when it comes to drugs, but once again it seems the extent of the problem has been exaggerated. The same stories that did so much to create the media (as opposed to the real) drug crisis, often stated almost in passing that cocaine usage has leveled off. That fact, relevant though it was, hardly seemed to matter. "Crack" was yet another threat to our children — a real one, for sure — and we seemed to be in no mood for qualifiers.

No qualifiers were welcome, either, when it came to that other recent crisis — the sexual abuse of children by strangers. The real abusers are usually parents, yet toddlers were instructed how to defend themselves against strangers. The fear of stranger-abuse



Drug abusers solely to blame for their 'despicable' condition

In fiscal 1987, the U.S. budget deficit will be about \$230 billion.

Alan Sembera
Guest Columnist

Family farms are going under at an astounding rate. Defense budget requests cannot be met because of spending cuts. Slumping oil prices have led to a sharp increase in unemployment in the South. What is the federal government doing? It's busy making plans to spend \$2 billion to 3 billion per year to save drug addicts from their own depravity.

American taxpayers will be forced to pay for the habits of drug users. President Reagan wants us to spend our money on people who obviously have no respect for the values of ordinary citizens.

Drug abusers should receive no sympathy from those of us who have strong American values. Although one must feel some Christian compassion toward those who have ruined their own lives, we must be strong and realize that they have made their own choice and are solely responsible for their despicable state.

Instead of spending our money on

the impossible task of trying to stop the flow of drugs, we should use this money for educating our young against the dangers of drugs.

We also should increase funds for drug treatment and make this treatment available for addicts who want to clean up their lives. Unfortunately, our misguided but well-meaning government has cut off block grants to states for drug education and treatment by 40 percent since 1982.

The effort to stop the flow of drugs, besides being futile, causes many major problems. By cracking down on smuggling, the small-time crooks are put out of business, and drug prices go up. This means higher profits for the professional operations, such as organized crime. Also, by increasing penalties for peddling dope, the government will make it more appealing for pushers to shoot it out with police rather than spend their lives in prison without a fix.

By trying to stop the demand for drugs, the government is encouraging private companies to engage in expensive drug testing for their employees. Besides driving up companies' over-

head, this will make management spend more time looking for users while neglecting the basic tenet of the capitalist economy: The harder you work, the more you are rewarded.

If employers spend all their money looking for drug use, the non-drug users will think that it is safe to work efficiently. If all drug users are employed, they will be unable to find their habits and resort to stealing or robbing from us.

In 1984, the American people gave the federal government a mandate to get the government off our backs and to cut spending. To remind our representatives of their obligation, every one should let them know that we care what drug addicts do to themselves as long as we aren't forced to give our standard of living.

The drug problem will take care of itself because of its own self-destructive nature, and normal citizens, who take the advantage, will be able to live their lives knowing that they are drug-free because of their own free will.

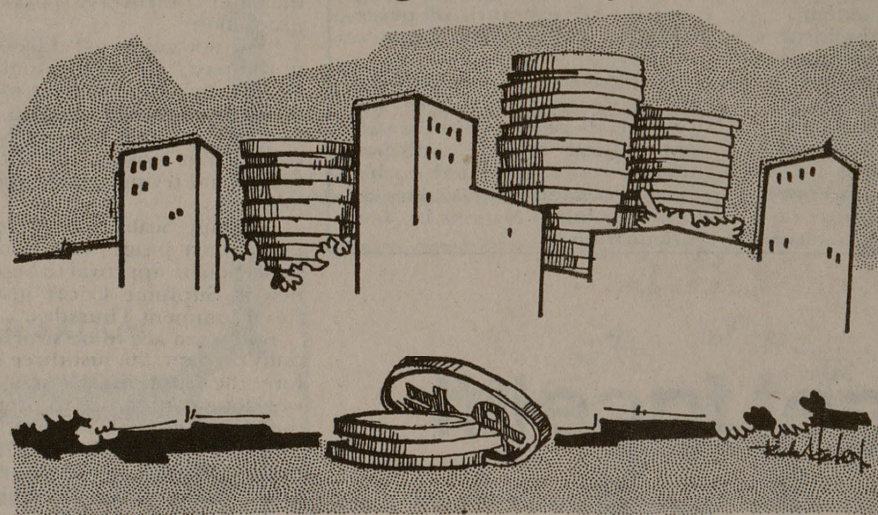
Alan Sembera is a junior journalism major.

Texas' future threatened by higher education cuts

A&M having to cut classes, losing faculty members to other higher-paying universities

As a Texan, I deplore my state for mortgaging its future by defaulting on its promise — the promise to educate the people of Texas.

Frank E. Vandiver
Guest Columnist



The fundamental purpose of a university is to bring new knowledge into the world and to disseminate that knowledge for the good of humanity. New knowledge is discovered by the faculty of an institution of higher learning, and the recipients of that knowledge are students, business, industry and the general public. The students benefit from gaining educated minds. Our economy benefits from the goods and services created from the advances in what we know.

All this is now in jeopardy because the state of Texas is facing a fiscal crisis unlike any since the Great Depression. Our economy, which was largely based on oil and gas, has declined markedly. As a result, revenues have shrunk, and we are facing an unacceptable deficit. So far, the only response from some people is to reduce the budget, with a major share of the cut coming from higher education.

But what price will Texas pay for cutting higher education?

We did not get our previous burgeoning economy without the educated minds of Texans. Geologists found the oil and gas that paid our way, and these men and women received their education at places like Texas A&M. The teachers who educated our youth in grammar schools and high schools received their degrees at universities like A&M. Many of our most successful leaders were educated in Texas universities, and their corporations provide jobs for

thousands of Texans either directly or through related companies.

Thousands of young people have "gotten out of the cotton patch" thanks to higher education.

All this is now at risk. At A&M we are losing faculty — all too often the best and the brightest. Why? Because other states, other universities, are luring them away with better salaries and offers of support. And on top of that, we are having great trouble hiring replacements. Why? The budget cuts that we already have taken and those that are threatened. The result? We are having to cancel classes. We are having to increase class size, and that means fewer well-educated students.

Note, please, that I have not said what will happen. I am telling you what is happening.

Long-term effects are starting right now at all of our colleges and universities.

The freshman who is lucky enough to

get into college will be less well-educated than the senior who is now job hunting. Fifteen years down the road, when today's freshman is being considered for a middle-management position, will it go to a Texan or to someone brought in from out of state?

Last year, the state of Texas invested \$54 million to support research at A&M. That investment brought \$470 million directly into our economy. That's income for the citizens of the state and tax dollars in return. And some of that research may help Texas build an economy not dominated by oil prices dictated by foreign nations.

On top of that, we need desperately to attract new industry to Texas — companies that will employ our citizens. And just what will tip the scales to Texas when a firm is trying to decide whether to put a new plant here or in some other state, say Massachusetts? The answer is quite simple: educated minds, workers who can work in the increasingly sophisticated plants with top-dollar payrolls and able scientists and engineers in the universities of our state.

Silicon Valley brought millions of dollars to California not because California had the raw materials for computer chips, but because California had the educated minds produced by the money that state spent on education. Massachusetts reversed a creaking economy — attracted high-tech industry — because it had an educational community that brought industry to the state.

Educated minds are an investment for our future, and they cost money, big money. It costs tax dollars to employ a faculty that can teach our young people and discover new ways to produce. Do we really want our youngsters to be under-educated in Texas or to have to go to other states to learn? Do we want our productive faculty to go to Massachusetts or California? Do we want new industry to pass us by?

Our public colleges and universities already have cut their budgets to the bone.

Even before Gov. Mark White called for a return of 13 percent of our appropriated funds, we had started paring back. Now the House wants to cut another 13 percent from the budgets to avoid a tax increase. If we want Texas to be an underdeveloped state that exports

its raw materials — its oil and gas — youth — that stagnates while other states grow, then we should cut and cut. The alternative is to raise already low taxes and invest in educated minds that will bring prosperity to Texas.

I can understand why some legislators are cranky, weary and bored. Special sessions are no fun, especially an election year. Will a vote to increase taxes start a voter rebellion?

Futures depend upon the answer to that question.

There is bipartisan support by incumbents and candidates for a tax increase to fund higher education. Many are waiting to hear from the voters. Research and educated minds are an American on the moon. Research and educated minds made America an industrial giant. Research and educated minds provided us an agricultural second to none.

Do we want Texas to continue to play a vital role in all that? As one Texan vote yes!

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