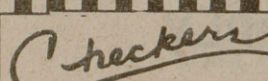


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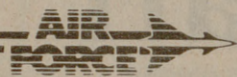
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TV characters enter fight against DWI

BOSTON (AP) — J.R. Ewing slept off a night on the town before heading for the ranch. And Alex Keaton agreed to be "designated driver" as prime-time stars took on new roles this season in a campaign against driving drunk.

The message — that drinking and driving is socially unacceptable — has been written into 32 television programs since the season began last fall, including an entire episode of ABC's top-rated "Growing Pains" to be broadcast Wednesday night, Jay Winsten of the Harvard Alcohol Project said.

"You don't change social norms overnight, but we're off to a good start," he said.

The Harvard Alcohol Project, begun in late 1987, is trying to harness the influence of Hollywood and Madison Avenue in making drinking and driving as socially passe as smoking cigarettes.

Last year, Harvard researchers targeted the small screen, making a low-key appeal to television executives to write in occasional references to designated drivers. The proposal was endorsed in April by the board of the Writer's Guild of America-West.

"One of our goals was to increase public awareness just of the concept of designated driver to introduce it into the American lexicon," said Winsten, assistant dean of Harvard's School of Public Health and director of its Center for Health Communication.

Having characters casually refer to picking a designated driver, someone who stays sober to drive the drinkers home, reinforces what is already becoming accepted partying behavior, Winsten said.

"Our role really is as a catalyst," he said. "Producers, like the public, are primed and ready to respond to this issue."

The message was broadcast in various ways this season.

On one episode of CBS' "Dallas," a bedraggled J.R. Ewing arrives at the family ranch one morning and explains to his young son that he couldn't drive home the night before because he'd been drinking. Of course, J.R. isn't telling the whole truth about his nocturnal adventures, but the message is clear.

On NBC's "Family Ties," Alex Keaton, the character played by Michael J. Fox, visits a restaurant featuring a tank of live fish.

When a member of the group is soaked in a mishap in the tank, Fox is asked to take her home. He responds by saying he is the designated driver, but he had expected to drive home someone who drank like a fish, not someone who was hit by a fish.

National Briefs

Weather changes help fight against oil spill

VALDEZ, Alaska (AP) — Rough seas that helped stall and break up some of the giant oil spill from the Exxon Valdez became calmer Tuesday and winds shifted away from fish-rich Kodiak Island, the Coast Guard said.

"Kodiak still seems to be saved," said Jim Hayden, the state of Alaska's cleanup coordinator.

Coast Guard spokesman Ken Freeze said the spill appears to have stalled and is breaking into tar balls. "That's better than ooey, goopy oil," he said.

Equipment continued to pour into the area aboard military transports. About 67 tons of material, everything from containment booms to absorbent

pads, were scheduled to arrive Tuesday.

A huge Soviet oil-skimming vessel, the Vay Dagersky, was expected to arrive Saturday, state officials said. The ship can skim 200,000 gallons an hour and store 2 million gallons of oil on board, according to the officials. But it remains unclear how effective it might be against the Alaska spill.

Despite the favorable weather, a light sheen of oil seeped into the Kenai Fjords National Park at scattered inlets and fjords, Freeze said. With a thickness measured in molecules, the sheen does not threaten serious environmental damage, he said.

House panel votes to stop gas price regulation

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House panel approved legislation Tuesday to end 35 years of federal control of natural gas prices, a step cheered by the energy industry but criticized by some consumer groups even though decontrol could mean slightly cheaper gas for the nation's consumers.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee, on a voice vote without dissent, sent the measure to the full House, where even its

strongest critics say approval is likely.

A similar measure has been introduced but has not yet been acted on in the Senate.

The legislation would complete a price decontrol process that began in 1978 with the Natural Gas Policy Act, which removed price limits on certain kinds of gas while also establishing two dozen categories of gas, each with a ceiling price.

Bush S&L reform meets stiff opposition

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House banking panel voted Tuesday to gut the key reform of the Bush administration's savings and loan proposal but then rolled back in several follow-up votes on some of the changes that most

weakened the plan.

By a 24-23 vote, the House Banking subcommittee on financial institutions diluted a requirement to force S&L owners to back loans with more of their own capital.

Cornell group tackles summit as class activity

Try this for your next college outing: the summit of Chimborazo in the Ecuadorian Andes, at 20,703 feet the highest peak in North America.

A Cornell University group made a successful ascent of Chimborazo in December as part of the school's outdoor education program.

Led by Dan Tillemans, director of Cornell's outdoor education program, the group's four rope teams climbed the summit in nine hours, starting from a base camp at 15,000 feet.

Adjusting to thinning oxygen above 18,000 feet was the most difficult part, the climbers say.

"Some people took one step for every three breaths because there's so little oxygen up there," Tillemans says. "When we got there, some people were too tired

even to take pictures." Tillemans planted a red and white Cornell banner at the summit.

The group made three ascents during their trip. Ruminahui, at 15,455 feet, was regarded as a "practice" climb. It also climbed Cotapaxi, 19,348 feet, before taking on Chimborazo.

The climb to Chimborazo began at midnight to take advantage of calmer conditions though temperatures dropped to about 20 degrees at night. During the day, temperatures warmed to about 50 degrees, and the most serious risk wasn't frostbite but sunburn. The wind blew fiercely at the summits, the climbers say.

Tillemans says the Andes views are breathtaking. While climbing over the Cotapaxi glacier at night, he watched lightning storms in the clouds below him.

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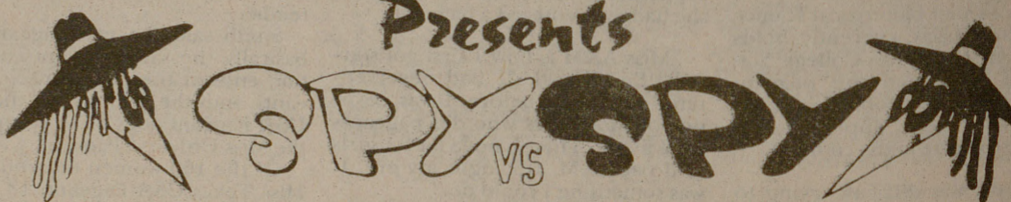


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