

Tobacco industry renders Congress powerless

It's not fair. You plan a picnic with your girlfriend or boyfriend, and I mean you go all out. None of this, taking a package of Lunchables. Oh no, you make egg salad sandwiches, you pack the red and white-checked ground spread and the wicker basket, and you find a serene place away from everybody else near the lake.



KYLE LITTLEFIELD
ASST. OPINION EDITOR

Everything is perfect, and then from out of nowhere, the sky turns an ominous gray, and before you now it, you are frantically gathering all the goods up and running for the car to get out of the rain.

It's not fair. It is times like these that you feel hopeless, after all, you can't do anything about the rain.

There are countless occurrences such as this in life.

You believe something should be a certain way - that it would be beneficial for you or for others if it was - but somehow things just don't work out. Many times, frustration sets in.

Congress is a good example. Needed legislation is introduced that the majority of constituents support. For a minute, the constituents are actually being represented. But then something goes wrong. The bottom drops out on the push to get the legislation passed. The greater good proposed by the legislation

loses its appeal to the members of Congress.

What is happening? Well, a large chunk of the blame should be placed in the hands of interest groups and their lobbyists.

If they can "persuade" one member of Congress, then he or she might nudge a fellow legislator and whisper, "hey, if you don't vote this way, you might not be able to count on my vote for the legislation that you are supporting."

The most likely reply is, "sure, count me in." Before you know it, amidst all of the back-scratching, the "greater good" legislation which had so much promise, is forgotten.

And who can blame the Congress members? That's the way the system works.

But there should be exceptions. Especially in situations where the public health is at risk.

Tobacco accounts for more than 400,000 deaths each year in the United States alone, according to an article in JAMA.

The article also states that "tobacco is responsible for more deaths than alcohol consumption, illicit drug use, violence, automobile crashes, unintentional injuries and the human immunodeficiency virus epidemic combined."

In simpler terms, it's bad stuff. But what happens when legislation, such as

tax increases on cigarettes, is introduced that would decrease tobacco-related deaths?

The tobacco industry calls up its most accomplished schmoozers and tells them to get to work.

Lobbyists are paid to give cop-out excuses like justifying cigarettes and alcohol as a "cultural thing" - that the government is out to take away the only pleasures the common man has.

And then lobbyists feed on Congress members like parasites, telling them that if they support anti-tobacco legislation, they will lose the vote of the grass-roots farmer, the small business owner and the areas where tobacco is grown.

And if that is not enough to make a legislator change his or her mind, extra dollars are always lying around in the form of PAC contributions.

Lobbyists are paid to give cop-out excuses like justifying cigarettes and alcohol as a "cultural thing."

In fact, the JAMA article details a direct relationship between Congress members who received PAC dollars and the way they voted on anti-tobacco legislation. No surprises here.

And although that the FDA now officially recognizes nicotine as a drug, and the push to pass anti-tobacco legislation through once more has found wind, we shouldn't get our hopes up.

The tobacco industry, which continues to deny that nicotine is addictive, that smoking causes cancer and that cigarette ads featuring cartoons such as camels are appealing to children, will gear up to fight, and because of its stronghold on the political system, will probably win once again.

There are two main problems which keep anti-tobacco legislation from passing.

The tobacco industry has legislators convinced that they would lose constituent votes if they supported anti-tobacco legislation. This is a realistic threat - legislators must look out for themselves, too.

Also, political campaigns have to be funded by someone, the tobacco industry is usually delighted to donate money to a campaign for a few favors in return. In 1991 alone, the tobacco industry donated \$2.4 million to members of Congress.

Yes, it's not fair. The way the system operates, Congress members are silly to turn this money away.

Until our representatives start refusing this money with the "greater good" in mind, we are left with a political system which only supports those who have financial gain at stake, not those who have a life to lose.

And, yes, it's frustrating when things don't go the way they should.

Kyle Littlefield is a senior journalism major



Lost Generation faces long, rough road

Every generation has a label. My grandparents are members of the Depression Generation, a group of people who were labeled because of the tough economic times during their youth.



STERLING HAYMAN
OPINION EDITOR

Next came the Silent Generation, those who spent their youth around the time of World War I and spent a lot of time practicing reproduction.

The Baby Boomer Generation followed, exploring free love, hallucinogens and folk music. And then, of course, our generation... the infamous Generation X. The slackers who can't seem to buy clothes that fit, who seem to be apathetic about most everything, and whose behavior cannot be expressed by a word, but a variable.

However, despite all of the criticism that Generation X has been given recently, we are not the ones to worry about.

The tail end of our generation graduated from high school last year, and the generation we left behind seems to be much more troublesome.

Although a generation usually isn't officially named until the majority of its members reach adulthood, this generation is already defining itself as the Lost Generation.

Sure, our generation has had its share of ups and down, but the rocky road that the Lost Generation is travelling down seems to be leading nowhere, fast.

The fact that the only major crime category to increase in Texas last year was juvenile crime is testimony to that.

Public schools have always been breeding grounds for trouble. When we went through school, sure, we got in trouble too. The weapons of choice were straws that shot spit wads across the room. We rebelled against so-

ciety by wearing shoes without socks and keeping our shirt-tails untucked. Hell, we even lit up cigarettes and guzzled a few beers occasionally. And we thought we were tough.

However, school grounds today are filled with guns, drugs and sexual promiscuity.

I remember in 5th grade when a friend showed me a condom - the technical term was "rubber" in those days. I thought to myself, "What is that? I wonder when I'll get to use one of those?"

Today, many 5th graders find themselves thinking, "What is that? Damn, I wish I would have used one of those."

When I return home ever so often to visit my family, I always see people I once thought of as kids, walking around with their own children.

Each week, my hometown newspaper features the arrests made by the city police department. Younger brothers and sisters of friends I graduated with are being arrested for crack possession, armed robbery, attempted rape, burglary and attempted murder.

The biggest trouble my friends and I had was forgetting to fill the liquor bottles with water after we had "skimmed" from our parents.

Yes, the generational gap definitely exists. Where we once sported colorful "friendship pins," members of the Lost Generation are now sporting gang symbols.

What happened? How can people only a few years younger than us seem like they are members of an entirely different species? Why is it that we cannot effectively communicate with today's youth because the English they speak has been mutated to such an extent that it's barely even recognizable?

Things only seem to be getting worse.

Rather than attempting to help the youth, we have adopted an "every man for himself" attitude.

Politicians find it more important to buy votes from the Depression Generation than to buy time for the Lost Generation.

Rather than seeking solutions to the problem of crime, we just want to toughen the penalties.

Rather than providing financial assistance to young, accidental families, we insist that they have made their beds, and "now, they must lie in them."

While we may not be responsible for these wayward members of the Lost Generation, we are doing little to change their course.

Rather than attempting to help the youth, we have adopted an "every man for himself" attitude.

Instead of defining society for them, we are letting them define society.

Robert F. Kennedy once said, "The task of leadership, the first task of concerned people, is not to condemn or castigate or deplore; it is to search out the reason for disillusionment and alienation, the rationale of protest and dissent - perhaps, indeed, to learn from it."

It is time for our generation, and all the ones before us, to start helping instead of harping.

Unless we start to steer their ship in a different direction, the Lost Generation may very well be the Last Generation.

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THE BATTALION

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BAD BUZZ

Aggies should act more responsibly when they drink.

The Harvard School of Public Health recently released survey results from its latest study of college alcohol consumption, and the results for Texas A&M were far from flattering.

The survey found that last year, 35.4 percent of Texas A&M students have become so intoxicated they forgot where they were or what they were doing.

The statistic for other large colleges - those colleges and universities with populations of 10,000 or more - was 27.4 percent.

Over the same year, 29.5 percent of these surveyed intoxicated Aggies "engage(d) in unplanned sexual activity."

Of these unplanned sexual encounters, 13.3 percent were unprotected.

Translated into simpler terms, this study shows that approximately one in three A&M students is accustomed to abusing alcohol on a regular basis, and that abuse may be connected to other dangerous behavior.

For a university that seems to be obsessed with projecting a polished and pristine image, being nationally infamous for drunkenness and irresponsibility does not contribute to the desired effect.

Gen. George Patton once made a comment about being able to win a war with only a handful of Texas Aggies. This may seem an impossible feat if the Harvard survey is correct in reporting that 24.8 percent of

those Aggies are getting drunk at least once a week. Alcohol is a powerful drug that should be consumed in moderation and with much responsibility.

On several Friday nights during the Fall semester, a great many Ags can be found marching down to Kyle Field to participate in Midnight Yell.

And while this excitement is all well and good, the fact that quite a few of these participants are nearly "falling-down drunk" is not exactly a good thing.

And then, as an added bonus, after Midnight Yell, many of these intoxicated individuals attempt to drive home.

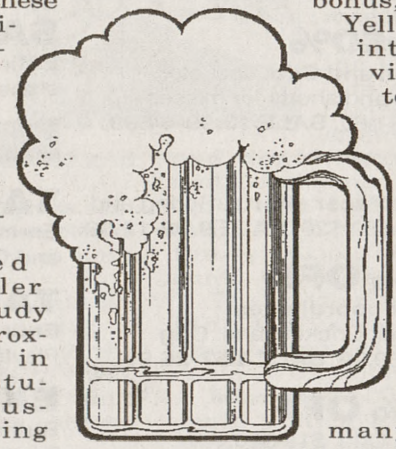
The Harvard survey reported an overwhelming 41.9 percent of Aggies have driven drunk at least once within a period of 30 days.

Aggies have a great many things to be proud of - a nationally competitive number of National Merit Scholars, an extremely successful sports program, a world-renowned academic program and a proud heritage of honor and tradition.

However, Aggies should not take pride in their ability to consume vast quantities of alcohol and then hit the road.

Texas A&M is a world-class university. The students here represent the finest that our state and country have to offer.

Perhaps it is time to act that way.



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