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"TRICK OR TREAT, MISTER?"

BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

■ In my opinion

Ban it or cram it

Smoking represents one of the largest hypocrisies in the United States: Although cigarettes are toxic, carcinogenic, addictive, harmful to fetuses, and heavily regulated, they are most certainly still legal.

I find it interesting that when it comes to the U.S. government and drugs, the legality of a substance is determined not by its effect on the user's health but on the drug's alteration of the user's mental state. The main aspect separating cigarette smoke and marijuana smoke is that one produces the desire to look like a haughty French supermodel, whereas the other produces the desire to eat copious amounts of generic chocolate breakfast cereal straight from the bag. Of course, it also doesn't hurt that Big Tobacco puts a nice padding in the pockets of the U.S. government.

According to The Third World Network, "U.S. trade officials ... have led a sustained campaign to open markets in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand among the Asian nations. In 1995, for example, the U.S. embassy in Thailand intervened on behalf of U.S. tobacco companies when the government of Thailand proposed regulations that required the disclosure of ingredients of all brand-name cigarettes sold in Thailand." This certainly explains why the United States could not ban tobacco within its own borders, the main goal being to keep up the façade



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

in other nations that cigarettes are an acceptable product to use or trade.

However, this column is not about banning tobacco. As a proponent of ending the drug war, I don't think cigarettes should be illegal any more than I think it should be illegal to do what I will with my evenings — even if that means waking up surrounded by crumbs of orange munchies. I believe the government should certainly work to protect minors from making dangerous decisions to their developing brains and bodies, but I remain skeptical of the government as a regulator of what type of mental alteration I can and can't achieve.

Still, as long as the U.S. government is in the habit of criminalizing substances, it seems to me the time has either come to ban it or cram it. A slew of new regulatory measures have popped up here and around the world, including one U.S. workplace policy prohibiting cigarette smoking, even if that smoking occurs outside of the workplace. A Michigan company, Weyco Inc., has reasoned that

since smokers require higher health insurance coverage, the company shouldn't be required to pay for their carcinogenic hobby. An interesting argument; however, does Weyco also plan to ban the consumption of refined sugar by employees with a precedent for diabetes? How about prohibiting workers from drinking alcohol, which could be slowly destroying their livers? I remain surprised that no civil rights group has intervened on behalf of the 4th Amendment's guarantee to privacy.

All of these policies are built around the base of former laws, such as some states' ban on smoking in public buildings, restaurants, some number of feet from public property, and so on. Although I agree that reducing second-hand smoke is important, I can't help but note the hypocrisy in enforcing smoking bans, while at the same time conveniently overlooking toxic fuel emissions from nuclear power plants and even automobiles.

It seems much easier for the government to persecute personal choices rather than big business choices. Until the U.S. government is ready to take a true stand against the harmful impacts of products, a stand that is regulated by science rather than social choices, I find it difficult to be in favor of these harsh tobacco regulations.

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INBOX

Greenspan's 'value' tax only benefits the rich

Alan Greenspan has offered a bogus solution to tax simplification and economic growth by proposing a national sales tax and a devious "value added tax," or VAT. VAT taxes are imposed in Europe, New Zealand and Australia, and are despised by the people and manufacturers because they add paperwork, make everything more expensive, and do not add "value" to anything.

By taxing consumption rather than income, Bush and Greenspan want to protect their wealthy clan, while making ordinary people who struggle just to survive pay even more. People on fixed incomes, the retired and the disabled will pay more in taxes, while Bush, Cheney and Greenspan will pay far less as a percentage of their income. Consumption taxes are inherently regressive!

Consumption taxes hurt business because when consumers buy less, companies sell less, and this lowers profits.

Greenspan says taxing consumption will "encourage saving and investment," but if you can barely pay for your food, housing and health care now, how are you going to "save" if you have even less money in your wallet? All their proposal will do is lower the standard of living of the average American, while giving the rich extra money to invest in luxury items and the Asian stock market.

Christopher Calder
Eugene

■ Editorial

Conservative appointees drive wedge in Congress

President Bush refuses to compromise so much as one inch on his nominees for the federal appeals courts. Rather than working with Senate Democrats to find judges whose experience and moderation would appease both sides of the aisle, as did the more than 200 Bush nominees who have already been confirmed, Bush has decided to continue to engage in divisive partisan politics by resubmitting 12 already rejected nominees. He didn't even have the common courtesy to find new radical conservatives completely unqualified to be on the bench. How rude.

Ideologues like to play dress up these days: Some dress up like journalists and take money from the government; Bush's 12 nominees are ideologues dressed up in black gowns. They were rejected or obstructed due to serious concerns about their capacity to fairly adjudicate the law. The Democrats were right to use everything in their power to oppose these lifetime appointments, and they should continue to do so. Nothing short of our future liberties are at stake.

Here are two examples, using information compiled by the People for the American Way:

Priscilla Owen, re-nominated to the Fifth Circuit, has been criticized by her then-Texas Supreme Court colleague and current U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales for several of her dissents, who called one an "unconscionable act of judicial activism" and described another as "nothing more than inflammatory rhetoric ... based on a flawed premise." When the man who found justifications for U.S. torture calls your actions "unconscionable," you know you have a problem. Owen is rabidly anti-worker and anti-consumer, consistently ruling for corporate interests in cases involving civil rights, worker compensation and environmental violations.

William Pryor, re-nominated to the Eleventh Circuit, has argued that it is constitutional to arrest gays and lesbians if they are sexually active. He is also a crusader against abortion, calling *Roe v. Wade* "the worst abomination of constitutional law in our history."

We had hoped that President Bush would use his precious "political capital," which he claims to have earned after the last election, to heal divisions in this country and spread a bipartisan ethic in Congress. But he apparently has sold whatever soul he once had to the evangelical community who will stop at nothing to use the courts to roll back social progress.

With the threat of Senate Republicans dismantling filibustering, using the so-called "nuclear option" to force votes on these nominees, and with the very real possibility of a Supreme Court vacancy in the next few years, this is the most significant threat facing liberals today. It is incumbent for Democrats and moderate conservatives to take a stand here and now, no matter what the consequences.

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