

Free Press Viewpoint

Most common drug tops 'dangerous' list

A British research team has quantified what should have been obvious by now: The most dangerous drug, the most costly to society from abuse, is the one that's legal nearly everywhere and can be bought at the corner store.

Not heroin. Not crack cocaine. Not methamphetamine.

But booze, good ol' alcohol.

In a study published online Monday, the team of experts evaluated how addictive each drug is and how it harms the human body, plus the environmental damage it causes, the cost to society and the harm it does to families.

And alcohol won, hands down.

It might not be as addictive as heroin or as bad for you as crack, but alcohol is everywhere, easy to buy and cheap, and nearly impossible to eradicate. Its damage to families is legend; its cost to society enormous.

The research team admitted that it's alcohol's widespread use that makes it the worst of the nasty three, all considered quite deadly.

"When drunk in excess," one report said, "alcohol damages nearly all organ systems. It is also connected to higher death rates and is involved in a greater percentage of crime than most other drugs, including heroin."

So what do we do now? Return to prohibition?

The experts says no.

"Alcohol is too embedded in our culture and it won't go away," one said. He advised targeting problem drinkers, much as successful drunk-driving programs have done.

And the lower-ranking drugs, including marijuana and LSD?

One of the report's authors was fired from a British government job after he criticized an increase in penalties for marijuana violators, but opposition to legalization seems to be fading, at least in the U.S.

Already, many states have legalized "medicinal" use of pot, which harkens back to the widespread use of "medicinal" alcohol during our failed fling with prohibition. A headache or a bad cough seems to qualify most users.

True, federal law has not changed, but it is not being enforced and seems to be unlikely to hold back the tides of change for long.

Then maybe society, here and abroad, can focus on the real issues: people with a drug problem of any kind. Maybe we can find a way to save at least some of them, to help them help themselves and put some pressure on those who won't.

The sooner society recognizes the truth and changes the law and government policy to address the real issues, the sooner we can do something about rampant drug abuse. This is an issue whose time has come. — Steve Haynes

Write us

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Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

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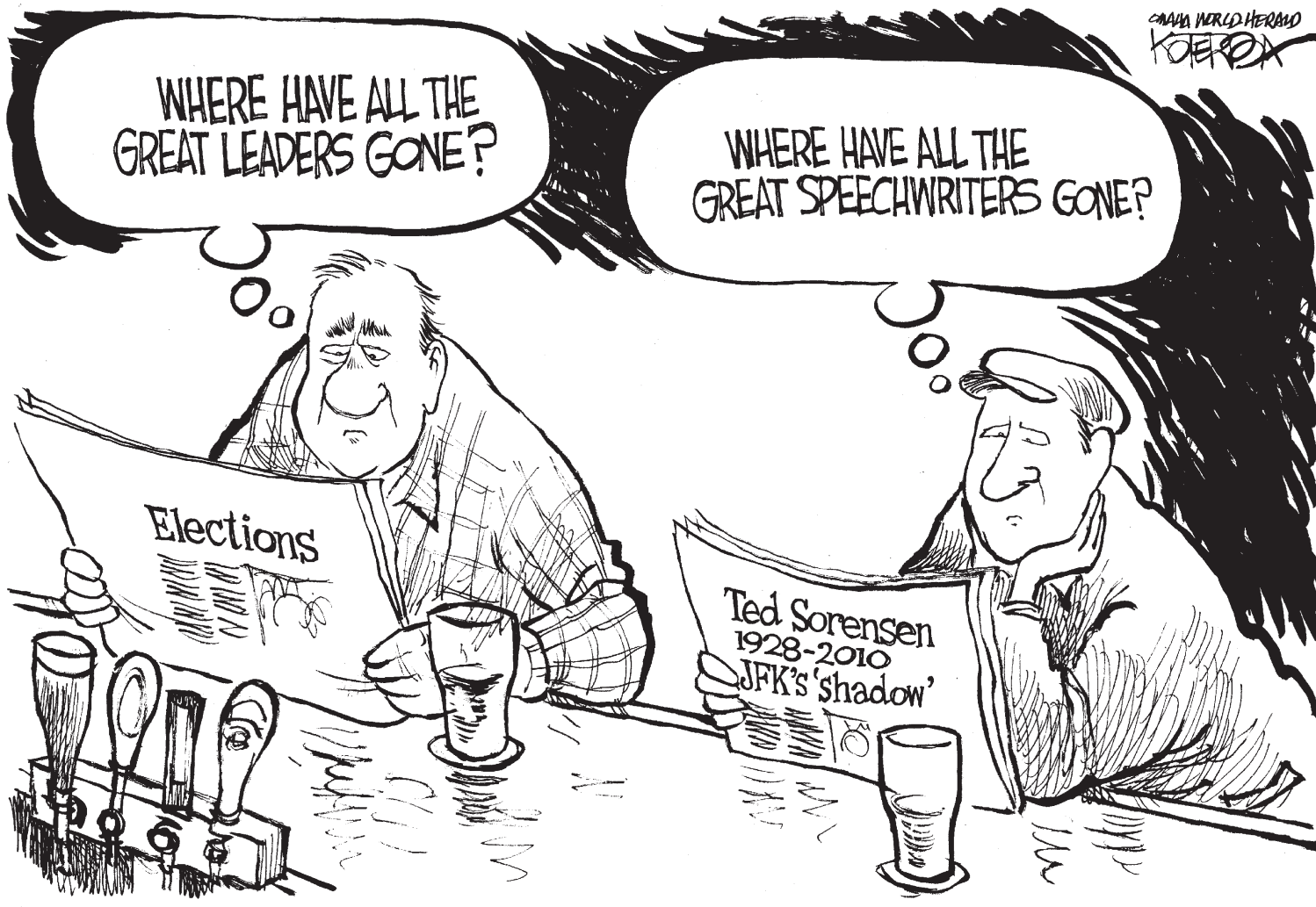
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Campaign costs take the cake

I've lived through many political campaigns in my years — I'll be 76 on Thanksgiving Day — and this campaign season takes the cake.

I read a couple of days ago where the money being poured into the campaigns nationwide has moved from millions of dollars to billions. Billions!

Does it not bother you that we, as a country, will pour this kind of money into political campaigns and think nothing of it, but at the same time make our economy the issue? Maybe we need to use those political dollars to help pay down the debt. Has anyone ever thought about that?

Of course, the new ingredient in this year's campaign is the Tea Party and they, like the Republican and Democratic parties, need their share of "hard-earned money" to get their messages and new faces of hope before the public. Regardless, it's tasteless and just sounds crooked when you try to justify billions of dollars to elect people to represent us.

Special interests, folks, are still alive and well, and special interests have a special way of raising those special dollars. In some cases it would be nice to know who they are, but secrecy in this campaign wins out over transparency.

I think all contributors, regardless of amount, should be public knowledge. I don't care who knows who I supported and voted for.

Control of the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate are at stake. If the Democrats have to take a back seat to the Republicans when all the votes are counted election night, so what? The state of affairs as it currently exists would almost mandate that some sort of "adjustment" in the makeup of the House and



Tom Dreiling

• A View From the West

the Senate is necessary.

From where I sit, it looks like President Obama started too late to do much good for his Democrats. Matter of fact, this seems to be the president's pattern. Often times, as I watch him go about his business, I just want to shake him. He just doesn't seem to have the capacity to tell someone or some group to get lost. You can't be nice to everybody all the time.

The Tea Party is nothing to laugh about. Your next-door neighbor just might be more in tune with them than with either the Democrats or the Republicans. Some of those candidates will be elected to office and take their seats in either the House or the Senate.

You must give Sarah Palin credit for mobilizing a force that cannot be ignored. In fact, some high-ranking Republicans are beginning to make love to this new bunch in the open.

Overall, the blame game in Washington involves both political parties. It's all about politics with rarely a nod given to the people. You have Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi in the 'D' corner and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader John Boehner in 'R' corner.

Why must they stick in those corners? Could there not be a spot for compromise? Nothing

gets done without it. Just maybe if these four individuals would have reached out to one other, our current mess might not even exist.

I continue my advocacy for term limits. I have been pushing for this since the early 1980s, and I think again that this would take care of a lot of the problem.

I am well settled here in Aurora and live close to the kids and grandkids, and granddogs and grandcats. I'm not a golfer, so it stands to reason that my location is next to the Saddle Rock Golf Course.

I am looking forward to my first winter in Colorado, and seemingly it's now within reach. Lots of snow in the high country and the skiers have already tested the slopes. No, I don't slide down mountains. So the question begs: If I don't golf but live next to the golf course and I don't ski but live next to the mountains, what do I live next to that I do? Good question.

A friend told me a few days ago that he was reading something that said, in effect, that the economy is so bad that Motel 6 isn't leaving the light on any more.

When I was asked what I wanted for my birthday, I said something that would feature the song, "76 Trombones."

Tom Dreiling of Aurora, Colo., is a former publisher of the Colby Free Press and The Norton Telegram, and a former long-time editor of the old Goodland Daily News. He is a life-long Democrat, a curmudgeon come lately and a newly minted Coloradan.

Spending should be cut, not frozen

A recent *Wichita Eagle* editorial, "Freeze means big cuts," said governor-elect Sam Brownback's intention to freeze state spending would cause big cuts in services by not replacing federal stimulus money. The unspoken presumptions one must accept to make that leap are (1) every government program and service is essential and (2) every program and service is being provided as efficiently as possible.

Most programs are never examined to determine whether they are effective, and independent efficiency studies are rarely conducted, yet we're to believe that government could not possibly spend less money without wreaking havoc on taxpayers?

Governments commonly present taxpayers with Soprano-like ultimatums — "either pay higher taxes or surrender necessary services" — as though there are no other options. But there are countless options.

For example, eight consecutive studies conducted by Legislative Post Audit found ways schools could operate more efficiently and still meet outcome requirements. State employees pay far less for medical insurance coverage than private sector employees. The state spends millions of dollars on overtime, conference travel, organization dues, advertising campaigns, and in 2009, enough mileage reimbursement to fund twenty-five round trips to the moon!

Government not only can spend a lot less money, it must for the sake of the state's economic future. Admittedly, that sounds a bit alarmist, but consider the facts.

Private sector jobs increased just 5.2 per-

Other Opinions

• Dave Trabert
Kansas Policy Institute

cent between 1998 and 2008, well below the national average of 7.9 percent and worse than all but one neighboring state. We've also lost population due to domestic migration (U.S. residents moving in and out of states), representing 2.5 percent of total population over the last decade and the worst performance in the region. At the same time, our state and local tax burden increased significantly. State and local taxes jumped 59 percent between 1999 and 2009 but income available to pay taxes only increased 38 percent.

Underperforming in job creation and losing on domestic migration while the tax burden rises is not a coincidence; it's part of a very clear national pattern.

Between 1998 and 2008, the ten states with the lowest combined state and local tax burdens averaged 16.5 percent private job growth and gained 3.8 percent population from domestic migration; the ten states with the highest tax burdens grew jobs by just 6.1 percent and lost 3.3 percent population from domestic migration. Tax burden rankings are provided by the Tax Foundation using FY 2008 data. Kansas was ranked No. 21 but is now likely well in-

side the top twenty, with nearly \$500 million in increases just this year between sales, unemployment and property taxes.

Freezing spending might slow the rate of decline but it won't solve this problem, as our tax burden will continue to grow. Kansas' overall population is increasing because the birth rate exceeds the death rate, but infants don't pay taxes; coupled with domestic migration losses, each year sees fewer and fewer taxpayers. The burden on remaining taxpayers goes up, it becomes more expensive to create jobs and the downward spiral continues.

By cutting spending and reducing the tax burden, Kansas can become a state that leads in job creation and attracts population, but only if we're willing to make the necessary changes.

Dave Trabert is president of Kansas Policy Institute and serves on the Tax and Fiscal Policy Task Force for the American Legislative Exchange Council. He graduated from West Liberty State College with a degree in business administration.

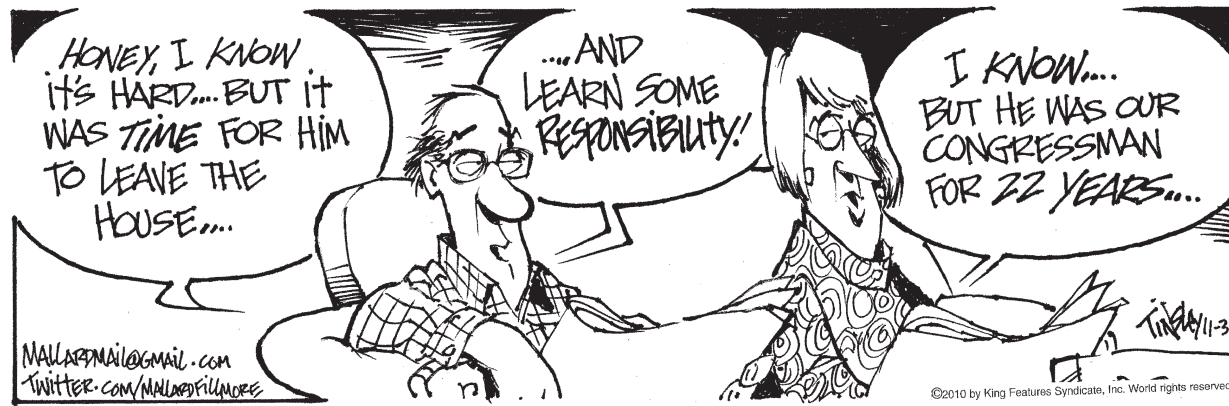
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