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# How to Fight Drug Abuse Through Legislation

By DeWitt S. Williams

**I**n the 1960s and 1970s numerous young people were drafted to fight in the unpopular Vietnam war. Many Americans believed that if 18-year-olds were old enough to fight, they ought to be old enough to vote. Subsequently, the 26th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was enacted, extending voting rights in Federal elections to 18-year-olds. With voting rights in hand, young people also sought to participate in other traditionally adult prerogatives—drafting wills, signing contracts, getting married, holding public office, and drinking alcohol.

Arguments for the latter privilege asserted that many young people already drank before the age of 21, and dropping the legal

age to 18 would simply legalize something they were already doing. Little attention was given to other, more dangerous results that might ensue from reduction of the drinking age.

## **Paying the Piper**

Dr. Richard Douglass, of the Highway Safety Research Institute of the University of Michigan, analyzed more than 9 million traffic crashes. He noticed some shocking differences between those states that had maintained the 21-year drinking age and those that had not. His conclusion, "We must all face the painful truth that these laws resulted in injuries and death among some of our young people. It is a dangerous fantasy to pretend that there was no piper to pay when we gave 18-year-olds the right to drink."

The increasing highway carnage ultimately caused citizens in a

number of states to lobby against youthful drinking. In 1978 Michigan raised its drinking age from 18 to 21, and several other states followed. However, to circumvent the law, many 18- to 20-year-olds would drive to neighboring states to purchase beer, then drive back drunk to their own state, often having accidents on the way. After looking at the evidence, James Florio, a Democratic Congressman from New Jersey, took the lead in introducing a national drinking law. His research showed that although teenagers make up 10 percent of the nation's drivers, they are responsible for 21 percent of its alcohol-related fatalities. Estimates predicted that raising the minimum drinking age to 21 would save 1,275 lives per year, and prevent many times that number of injury-related accidents.

Congress finally recognized the scope of the problem and passed

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legislation. As of October 1, 1986, any state that allows young people under 21 years of age to purchase beer, wine, or distilled spirits will lose 5 percent of its Federal highway funding, with the amount of funding lost increasing to 10 percent in 1987. (Apparently members of Congress believe that states would not raise the drinking age to save lives, but might do so to save dollars.) Thirty-one states have thus far complied.

In the past, laws have frequently made a distinction between so-called hard liquor and lighter spirits, allowing young people to buy beer and wine. Society has also participated in this conspiracy by portraying wine as a food rather than an alcoholic beverage, and beer as the working man's drink, a beverage no more worthy of additional taxation or legislation than coffee. The new drinking-age legislation will help people realize that alcohol is alcohol in whatever form it is sold.

### **Other Alcohol-related Legislation**

Another source of highway mayhem is the "happy hour," when cut-rate prices are often charged for liquor at bars and taverns. This problem has been brought to the attention of legislators in several states and provinces, where laws have been passed banning the practice. In addition, a number of areas have enacted statutes making bars and private hosts legally responsible for serving drinks to obviously inebriated guests, and then allowing them to drive.

### **Laws and Love**

Clearly, action needs to be taken to curb the use and abuse of alcohol, since it is the number one drug of choice for young people, it is widely available, and its use is condoned by society. The effects of

alcohol are appalling. It is estimated that 13 million Americans (including 3 million teenagers) either abuse alcohol or are alcoholics. Alcohol is involved in more than 65 percent of the nation's homicides, 35 percent of its rapes, up to 40 percent of its assaults, and 30 percent of its suicides. Thirty percent of high-school seniors get drunk once a week. One out of every three drinkers becomes an alcoholic. In the United States, drunk driving is the leading cause of death among those aged 16 to 24.

If we truly love our children, we will work to pass laws that protect them. Home and school organizations and student groups can lobby for laws that prohibit advertising that glamorizes smoking and drinking. Research indicates that young people are greatly influenced by alcohol ads featuring celebrities or drinkers leading happy and exciting lives. To counter such advertising, schools and communities can request, and even demand, equal time for health messages against alcohol, and join forces with organizations promoting anti-alcohol legislation.

### **Misleading Advertising**

Radio and television commercials give the impression that alcohol is associated with sophistication, sports, accomplishments, and success, while exactly the opposite is usually true. Therefore, the commercials are deceptive, and deceptive advertising is illegal.

The liquor industry says, "Everything we've been able to find so far indicates that exposure to alcohol advertising is not related to abuse, and it may not even be related to consumption." Such companies contend that they simply aim to get drinkers to change brands, not to attract new customers. Nonsense!

Last year, beer and wine makers spent \$900 million on radio and television ads promoting drinking as part of the "good life," money which really came out of your pocket and mine, since the companies could deduct advertising as a business expense on their taxes.

### **Education and Legislation Go Hand in Hand**

School and parent groups should promote legislation to exact an excise tax on cigarettes. Research shows that for each 10 percent increase in price there is a 14 percent decrease in consumption among youth. The Coalition on Smoking OR Health and its members will seek a doubling of the present excise tax level, from 16 to 32 cents per package.

Until October of this year, federal alcohol taxes had remained constant since 1951. Considering the effects of inflation, this was equivalent to subsidizing the liquor industry. If alcohol taxes had kept pace with inflation, the Federal Government would have been \$77 billion richer by 1981. Taxes on alcohol and tobacco are sources of potential income that should be brought to the attention of deficit-conscious legislators.

Additional activities that can help curb alcohol-related tragedies are lobbying for health warnings on liquor containers and strengthening and refining drunk-driving laws. In 1983, Utah passed a law requiring immediate revocation of a driver's license upon arrest for drunk driving. Laws that require a stiff penalty for driving after suspension of a license would also be helpful in preventing the rising incidence of alcohol-related accidents and deaths on our highways.

William Plymat, one of the supporters of the law in Utah, suggests, "Make it so costly to get the license back that drivers won't risk

its loss again. Drivers must know that the new laws will work." Revenues from fines can be put into an account that will be used to reinforce the provisions of the law or to educate drivers about the dangers of drunk driving.

A number of local and national groups such as MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) are actively seeking to obtain stiffer penalties against drunk driving and to enlighten the public regarding laxity in enforcement by police officers and court systems.

### **Warning Labels for Cigarettes**

A good example of legislation that helps educate the public about the health risks of chemical abuse is the Comprehensive Smoking Education Act of 1984, which requires four rotating warning labels to be placed on cigarette packages beginning in October, 1985. These labels warn that the Surgeon General has determined that smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, and may result in pregnancy complications including fetal injury, premature birth, and low birth weight. They also warn of the presence of carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke and advise that quitting smoking greatly reduces serious risks to the smoker's health.

Smoking causes the death of more than 350,000 Americans annually, and costs the country some \$65 billion a year due to disease and lost productivity—more than \$2 for every pack of cigarettes consumed. An additional indication of the need to educate people regarding the dangers of cigarette smoking can be seen when one considers the huge amount of money spent each year by tobacco companies to promote their products. Of the nine largest advertisers in magazines in 1983 in the U.S., four were

cigarette companies, including the top two. Of the ten leading outdoor advertisers in the U.S. in the same year, five were cigarette companies, whose products were seen on almost half of all billboards in the United States.

Product placement, which cleverly includes cigarette packages and logos in feature movies and sports presentations on television, has recently become more prominent. The movie *Superman II* (now seen by young audiences on television), prominently displayed more than a dozen promotions of Marlboro packages and logos such as the smoking of Marlboro cigarettes by Lois Lane and Superman's crashing through a delivery truck that contained an enormous Marlboro logo on either side.

Cigarette companies also promote their products to young people by offering free packages of cigarettes to passersby on city street corners, often adjacent to rock concerts that are especially attractive to teenagers, as well as through the mail to anyone requesting a sample.

### **An "Open Debate"**

In January, 1983, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company began a \$7 million corporate advertising campaign calling for an "open debate about smoking." The advertisements attempted to convince the public that the relationship between smoking, disease, and death was still unproven, an assertion rejected by every credible scientific organization that has examined the issue.

A few months ago, Reynolds ran a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* disputing the link between smoking and heart disease. As part of this campaign, R. J. Reynolds has also placed ads in youth-oriented magazines such as *Seventeen*, stating that teenagers, who

want most desperately to be seen as adults, should not smoke because smoking is "an adult habit" and because it is "controversial," but deleting any mention of possible health hazards.

### **Chewing Tobacco**

Advertising of "smokeless tobacco" on television has never been prohibited in the United States. Celebrities, often professional athletes, are used to promote the product. The ads appear to be targeted toward young persons. Joe Namath, Catfish Hunter, Carlton Fisk, Tom Seaver, Earl Campbell, Terry Bradshaw, Bobby Mercer, Shep Messing, Ralph Houk, Walt Garrison, George Brett, and Sparky Lyle, among others, have appeared in advertising for smokeless tobacco.

Despite the mounting scientific evidence regarding mouth and throat cancer, receding gums, and high levels of nicotine in the blood of those who use chewing tobacco and snuff, ads for these products contain no health warnings. In fact, one ad campaign with a budget of \$30 million produced for the United States Tobacco Company to promote "Skool Bandits" was aired in conjunction with the 1984 Summer Olympics and used the slogan, "Take the pouch instead of a puff," falsely implying that smokeless tobaccos are a safe alternative to cigarettes. Those interested in youth and our nation's future must see that laws are passed to eliminate these and other abuses in advertising.

### **Working for Changes in Alcohol and Tobacco Laws**

The responsibility of parents and educators in combating these evils was succinctly stated by Mrs. White in citing the importance of

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input was obtained from academy principals and college dormitory deans. The surveys inquired about respondents' involvement with tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, "uppers" and "downers," cocaine, and heroin.

<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1969), p. 172.

<sup>5</sup> *Temperance*, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Grace Paley, *Later the Same Day*, quoted in *Time* 125:15 (April 15, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Miller Newton, *Gone Way Down* (Tampa, Florida: American Studies Press, 1981), and Vernon Johnson, *I'll Quit Tomorrow* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Vernon Johnson, "Why Do They Have to Suffer So Long," pamphlet (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden Educational Materials, n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> Sharon Wegscheider, "Inside Structured Intervention," *Alcoholism Magazine* (July-August, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Recommendations and other information in this article drawn from the "Capable of Caring" program—a drug-awareness workshop for concerned Seventh-day Adventist educators, parents, and leaders, by Paul and Carol Cannon, The Bridge Fellowship, Inc., Bowling Green, Kentucky.

<sup>11</sup> *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 171, 172.

## Influencing Legislation

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citizen involvement in temperance laws.

There can never be a right state of society while these evils exist. And no real reform will be effected until the law shall close up liquor saloons, not only on Sunday, but on all days of the week. The closing of these saloons would promote public order and domestic happiness.—*Temperance*, p. 208.\*

The honor of God, the stability of the nation, the well-being of the community, of the home, and of the individual, demand that every possible effort be made in arousing the people to the evil of intemperance. Soon we shall see the result of this terrible evil as we do not see it now. Who will put forth a determined effort to stay the work of destruction? . . .

Let the voice of the nation demand of its lawmakers that a stop be put to this infamous traffic.—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 346.\*

\*Italics supplied.

We should not work solely for our own people, but should bestow labor also upon noble minds outside of our ranks. We should be at the head in the temperance reform.—*Temperance*, p. 220.

In other churches there are Christians who are standing in defense of the principles of temperance. We should seek to come near to those workers and make a way for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. We should call upon great and good men to second our efforts to save that which is lost.—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 110.

## Reaching Legislators With Your Concerns

Letters to legislators and concerned groups are read with great interest. Such correspondence greatly influences the votes of congressmen and state representatives. Letters from children and young people are very effective in shaping the opinions of lawmakers regarding healthful living. Here are a few principles to keep in mind when you and your students write to such people:

1. Write in your own words.
2. Be brief.
3. Give your reasons for taking a stand on the topic you are writing about.
4. Ask for a response.
5. Be kind and courteous.
6. Use the facts and be accurate.
7. Write a letter of thanks if you get a response.
8. Don't write on every issue.
9. Keep copies of your letters.
10. Keep informed on legislative issues. Be extremely vigilant.

Remember, your efforts to obtain good laws and ban commercial advertisements for health-destroying substances demonstrate love in action. □

## Caffeine—A Drug of Educational Concern

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creation of a false energy, and its anxiety-producing properties are significant hazards. Its practical effects on test performance should particularly be noted. Students should realize that using caffeine may prevent them from achieving the academic success that they seek.

*Students who are high on caffeine are . . . likely to be disruptive, belligerent, and less receptive to instruction.*

In closing, Ellen White's counsel is inspired wisdom for us today: "Tea is poisonous to the system. Christians should let it alone."<sup>1</sup> "Coffee is a hurtful indulgence. It temporarily excites the mind, . . . but the aftereffect is exhaustion, prostration, paralysis of the mental, moral, and physical powers."<sup>2</sup> □

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1909), pp. 326, 327; \_\_\_\_\_, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), vol. 2, pp. 64, 65.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, "Influences Promoting Abstinence From Alcohol and Drugs Among North American Youth Delegates," Technical Report 85-1. Berrien Springs, Michigan, Andrews University, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> B. A. Mosher, "Caffeine," Report by American Council on Science and Health, 1984. For information write to 1995 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

<sup>4</sup> P. Mutch, "What's All the Fuss About Caffeine?" *Listen*, vol. 37, No. 1 (January, 1984), pp. 10-13; J. Scharffenberg and F. Soper, "What's in That Coffee Cup?" *Listen*, vol. 38, No. 8 (August, 1985), pp. 10-14; Richard H. Zander,

## NOTE

Because of space limitations, this article has dealt primarily with alcohol and tobacco. However, many opportunities can be found to influence legislation dealing with the manufacture and distribution of both legal and illicit drugs, such as tranquilizers, amphetamines, marijuana, hallucinogens, cocaine, and heroin.