

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Cigarette tax shouldn't bear revenue burden

Gov. Bill Graves thinks we should raise taxes on tobacco to cover the budget deficit. That shouldn't hurt him politically. Sin taxes are always popular, except for those committing the sin.

Why shouldn't we put extra tax on cigarettes? They cause bad breath, premature wrinkles, shortness of breath, lung cancer, and emphysema. If smoking doesn't kill you, it will affect your health eventually. In the meantime, you are annoying all nonsmokers with your pesky smoke.

Smoking is an easy target. People generally don't approve of the activity, so whenever the state runs a little short of money, they feel no compunctions about taking money from those who do it.

Smokers are an unpopular class, and rightly so. But unpopularity does not justify disproportionate taxation. Every time our legislators apply a sin tax, they are setting a bad precedent. Not only will those who commit current sins be penalized, but others become possible targets.

Take chocolate for example. Eating chocolate is horrible to a body. If 10 years from now health food advocates are running the legislature, and they run into a budget shortfall, will they impose a sin tax on chocolate? If they do, they will use past taxes on cigarettes as justification.

If we allow tobacco users to carry an uneven portion of our taxation, just because the activity is unpopular, we run the risk of any other unpopular group joining them.

Many nonsmokers dismiss the whole situation with a wave of a hand. "It doesn't affect me," or, "serves them right."

It does affect everybody. If the government can single out a small group, or a single product, for excessive taxation simply because it is unpopular, nobody's pocket book will be safe.

It's smokers now. Who's next? — *Doug Stephens*

where to write

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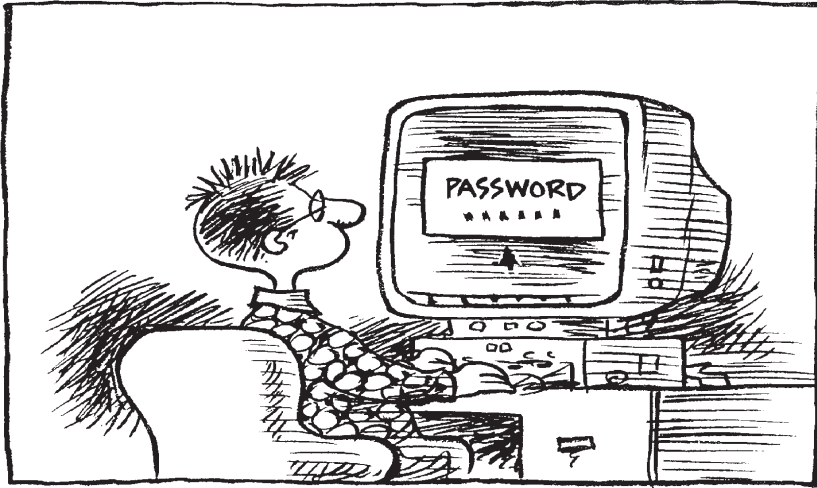
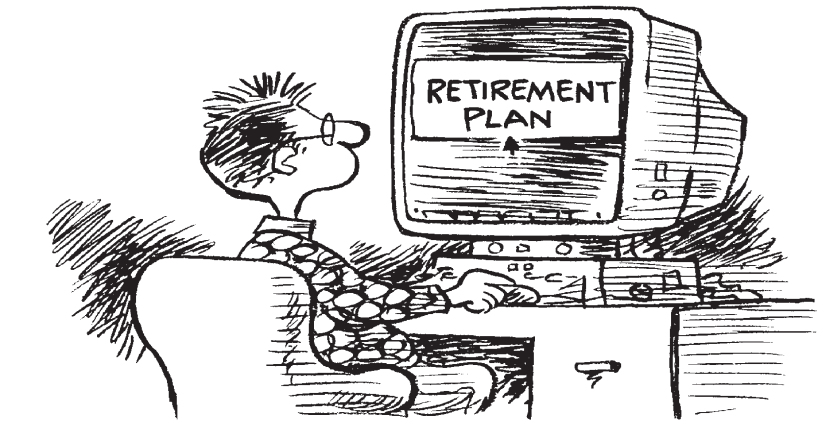
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HULME



Birthdays seem to sneak up on me

I don't know about you, but last week I celebrated a birthday.

I have them about twice a year now. They sneak up on me, but then I'm not moving as fast as I used to.

I can only remember two parties as a youngster. One was when I was five. Unknown to me, my mother invited all of the neighborhood children.

I met one little boy at the door and wouldn't let him in because we'd had a fight the day before. I didn't care if he was carrying a present! Mom swore to me that he had been invited — before we'd had the argument. Finally I let him in.

I think I had a mind of my own even then. There's no one to ask about that now except my older brother and sister, and who could believe they'd tell it right - and/or if they'd be kind in the telling.

I remember that I insisted on wearing my favorite dress to the party. Mom finally gave in — even though the dress was worn and faded. And I was



lorna g. t.

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very happy. After all I'd never had a party before, and I was wearing my favorite dress.

When it was over, I came in the house crying because I'd torn that dress on a fence nail. My mother was so sympathetic. "Come over here and let me see." Then as she inspected it, she slyly pulled it so that the tear was bigger, told me it could not be mended and then proceeded to tear the dress off of me. She felt bad when I cried, but at least never had to look at the dress again.

The other party was when I was 16. All girlfriend guests. No alcohol. We played games and laughed a lot. My boyfriend called from college, so it was

perfect. I remember one gift - a pair of earrings.

The only other party I can remember having was two years later. My husband (the former college boyfriend) arranged a surprise party with some of our college friends. I don't remember the actual party, but I remember how he got me out of the house so he could decorate. Of course our 28' trailer house wasn't very big, so it didn't take him long.

I've had many (well, not all that many) birthday celebrations. They used to be welcome; now I'd rather ignore them — especially if I could get by without counting them — but some friend or relative always has to remember.

That reminds me of the year when no one remembered.

As much as I complain about birthdays, I remember that one wasn't much fun.

To contact Lorna about her column or to make comments or suggestions email her at <lornagt@nwkansas.com>.

Bush flashes power and prowess

Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., may have merit on his side when he criticizes President Bush's economic policy, but so far he's losing the political argument — badly.

On the merits, Daschle was right to say in his speech at the Center for National Policy last week that Bush's \$1.6 trillion tax cut is the biggest factor in the \$3.7 billion projected drop in the government's 10-year budget surplus.

And he may have been right to say that the tax cut's upward pressure on long-term interest rates has worsened the recession, the next-biggest factor in the surplus decline.

But politically, Daschle dared not call for the repeal or delay of the tax cuts for which 12 Senate Democrats voted. Even so, Bush has been pummeling him as though he'd done so.

Indeed, the president accused Daschle of favoring tax increases and used the idea both to ridicule the majority leader's economic judgment and to memorably declare "not over my dead body will they raise your taxes." That line was a political winner.



morton kondracke

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investment in worker training, broadband communications, infrastructure and scientific research.

Daschle proposed two new stimulus ideas: a job-creation tax credit to reimburse employers for new payroll taxes and a depreciation bonus to cover new equipment purchases.

His advisers said the speech was targeted more at an "elite media audience" than at the public at large. Hence, Daschle attacked Bush's tax cuts more for their impact on long-term interest rates than their making it impossible to pay for popular programs such as Medicare prescription drug benefits.

But if Daschle intended the speech to be serious and substantive — and, stylistically, it certainly was delivered that way — Bush picked it up, dragged it into the political arena and stomped on it to the merriment of his supporters.

Over the weekend and early this week, Bush made rich use of his presidential pulpit, and one Daschle adviser was forced to admit, "They do have a bigger megaphone than we do."

At town meetings in California and Oregon, Bush deftly segued from the patriotic themes of war on terrorism and national spirit to bipartisanship to economics, cloaking his entire program in a red, white and blue aura of national unity.

"The terrorists not only attacked our freedom, but they also attacked our economy," he said. "And we need to respond in unison. We ought not revert to the old ways that used to dominate Washington, D.C. The old way is, 'What's more important, the country or my political party?' I stand here as a proud party man, but let me tell you something, the country is far more important."

Bush came close to declaring that disagreement benefits the enemy, then cheerfully moved on to

say how he was about to sign a landmark education bill in the company of Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., proving his bipartisanship.

He defended his economic program by saying, "The principle I have been operating on is this: In tough times people need a check to help them when they're unemployed, but what they need in the long run is a paycheck."

Lampooning (and misquoting) Daschle, he said, "There are some in Washington saying that the tax cut caused the recession. I don't know what economic textbook they're reading. The best way to come out of a recession is to ... cut taxes (and) expand the job base in America."

Last Sunday, Bush's economic advisers also hit the talk-show circuit to accuse Daschle of favoring "huge" new spending programs, though the total would cost less than the \$214 billion in new tax cuts over 10 years that Bush favors.

According to one presidential political adviser, "Bush has such a well of trust going that his agenda is seen as America's agenda."

"And Daschle," this adviser continued, "is seen as the face of what America doesn't want — partisan bickering in Washington."

That's obviously the way Republicans want Daschle to appear. The top Senate Democrat's own pollsters say Daschle's favorable ratings outmatch his unfavorables by 2 to 1.

But Daschle doesn't have an 84-percent overall approval rating, as Bush does, or a 59-percent approval rating for his economic policy — even in the midst of a recession.

And as a Bush adviser put it, "Our bullhorn is bigger than his." And right now, Bush is using it masterfully.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

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