



Alcohol consumption: civil liberty or public hazard?

Raise

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A higher drinking age and tough liability laws would force these club owners to keep out as many under-21 drinkers as possible and thus effectively reduce the number of young people drinking while intoxicated.

It's true that the under-21 crowd could still obtain alcohol (through friends, at parties etc.) and probably wind up drinking and driving, but a higher drinking age couldn't help but reduce the number of those willing to take the time and trouble to go out and drink illegally.

Some opponents of the higher age try to turn this into a civil rights issue. They argue that if you're old enough to risk your life for your country and vote for the president you should be old enough to drink a beer. Yet, this issue is not simply a civil rights question. It is a question of sparing human lives, many of which become the innocent victims of drunken drivers. The right to life of the hapless victims of drunken drivers is certainly more urgent than the right of those under 21 to drink. We should all be willing to tolerate restrictions on freedom for the public good. It's a clear-cut matter of priorities.

Another point to be mentioned pertains to the reason the drinking age should be uniform throughout the nation. Right now, drinking ages vary from state to state and people drive across state lines to purchase alcohol legally. They end up driving home while intoxicated and turning these state borders into "blood alleys." Obviously, a uniform age would eliminate the tragic statistics that pertain to these dangerous stretches of highway.

Again, the higher drinking age will not solve the problem of drunken driving. Many people under 21 will continue to drink — probably more privately — and continue to drive while intoxicated. But the fact that a law will be widely disobeyed doesn't make it wrong. Considering the urgency and importance of the widespread problem of drunken driving among so many of today's youths, a national drinking age of 21 appears to be the most realistic and immediately effective approach to curbing the problem and, most importantly, to saving so many lives.

Ben Perkowski, a junior English major from Nassau Bay, Texas is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.

Lower

From page 1

in these states has had no measurable effect on safety and has not led to decrease in alcohol consumption and sales.

I feel the young people of our nation have been wrongfully targeted. These people who are old enough to vote, to be drafted, to get married, to have families and to be held legally responsible for their actions in almost every way, will not be afforded the same kind of responsibility where it concerns the consumption of alcohol. When we look at the statistics, the unfair treatment of the younger age group becomes even clearer. Men between the ages of 25 and 44 account for 27 percent of the population and 47 percent of drunk driving arrests, while those between the ages of 18 and 24 account for 13 percent of the population and 30 percent of arrests. The problems with alcohol in our country are real and spread throughout all age groups, not confined to youth.

Congress is working hard right now trying to find ways of putting young people to work. This new legislation will have a tremendous effect in putting young people under 21 — people who, because of the legislation in most states, can't work in a place that serves alcohol if they themselves are under the legal drinking age — out of work. Please don't get me wrong. I'd be the last person to weigh lives against dollars. But more than 30 percent of the five million American food service workers are under the age of 21. With this legislation, as many as one million young people could lose their jobs. This may translate into young people who can no longer work their way through college and are even, in their frustrated indolence, driven to drink.

When Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole was asked about her opinion of the legislation, she brought up "blood alleys" — namely, state borders over which teens from a state with a high drinking age travel to a state with a lower minimum age — and said the legislation would eliminate these hazardous zones. This is one point I agree with; states should have a uniform drinking age. But why not

18, or 19? A minimum age of 19 would have a favorable effect on keeping alcohol out of high schools without curtailing the freedom of too many responsible young adults.

One thing that personally bothers me is that the restaurant and hospitality industries have historically taken the blame for society's bad habits. Our industries — now more than ever — are actually trying to make people aware of not drinking too much and, in particular, not drinking and then driving. At any rate, whatever good we have been able to do will become even more restricted as those between the ages of 18 and 21 are cut off from this kind of controlled drinking environment.

Society, as a whole, needs to spend more time educating its children about alcohol: If it had done so in the past, the 25 to 44 age group of men wouldn't be the horrendous drunk driving problem that they are today. We have begun to enact legislation that punishes drunkenness: that much is commendable. We need to make sure these laws are carried out instead of making battlegrounds of our courtrooms to see if the accused can get off one more time. We should be more realistic about changing society's values. We are going to do it. People are slowly growing wise to the abuse of alcohol. Liquor consumption in the United States dropped 11.6 percent between 1973 and 1983.

However this laudable trend may be impeded by the atmosphere of resentment to which the scapegoating of young adults could give rise. A permanent improvement in our nation's uses of and attitudes toward alcohol would more likely occur as the result of a society banding together to set a good example for future generations.

Mickey Ewell, owner of Spanky's restaurant and bar in Chapel Hill, is the second vice president of the North Carolina Restaurant Association. Frank Rexford assisted with this column.

Artists needed!



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A caricature of Daily Tar Heel editor Jeff Hiday, drawn by David Washburn. Many creative students like Washburn have found a forum for their work on the pages of the DTH.

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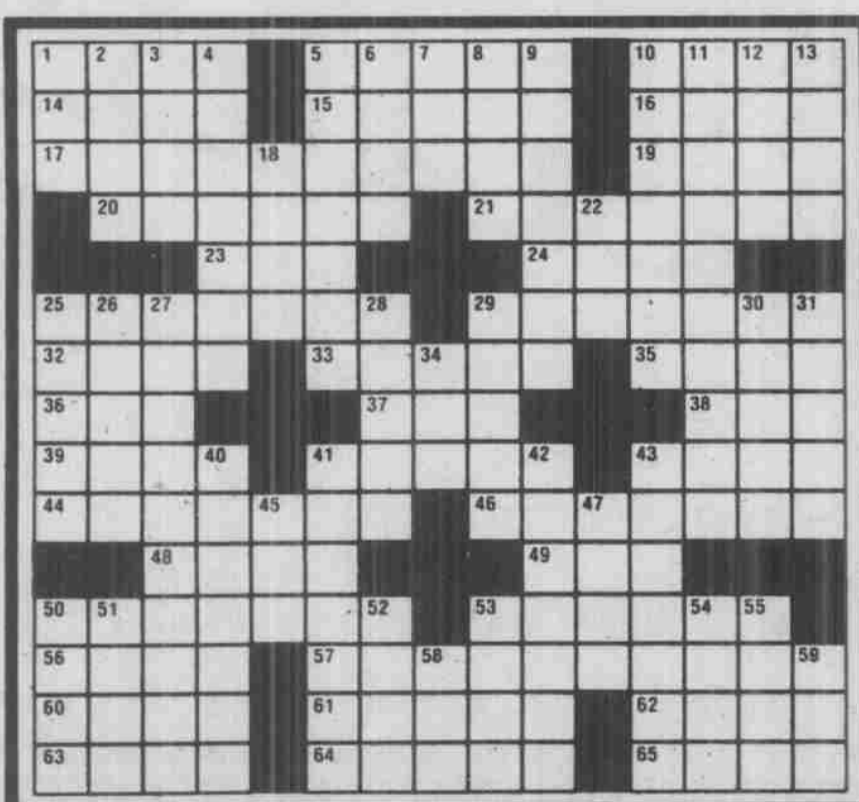
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THE Daily Crossword by Martha J. DeWitt

- ACROSS**
- Fellow
 - Cut
 - Pack full
 - Nicety
 - Kind of wind
 - Not on tape
 - Senseless
 - "Beware the — of March"
 - Pavarotti and Domingo
 - Dinner wine
 - Mongrel
 - Top army man: abbr.
 - Bid
 - Hazardous enterprise
 - Jungle sound
 - Passe
 - Pung
 - Opp. of dep.
 - Reagan to friends
 - Rah in Madrid
 - Cluster
 - Deign
 - Havoc
 - Rises
 - Annoys
 - Strained
 - Footlike part
 - Attainment
 - Like an egg white
 - Wimbledon champ
 - Eccentric
 - Mark of the villain
 - Roux ingredient
 - Days before holidays
 - Vortex
 - Seethes
 - Sp. painter



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- DOWN**
- Gr. letter
 - Senator from Colo.
 - Yorkshire river
 - Santa's reindeer
 - Churned
 - Son of Aphrodite

- Vehicle for transportation
- Kind of cheese
- Tied again
- Customers
- Absurd
- State with authority
- Tableland
- Journey for pleasure
- Racket
- Take to the stump
- Public meeting place
- Improbable
- Pub game
- Malice
- Kindled over
- Barbara and Sir Anthony
- Overly
- Decorative openwork
- Detonates
- Cottonwoods
- Lives

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