

Why not ban Ronald McDonald?

President Bill Clinton's recent tobacco proposals are creating quite a stir down here in the Tobacco Belt.

For years, tobacco critics have charged that cigarette advertisements such as the Joe Camel campaign are designed to attract children to smoking.

Clinton says his proposals, which restrict the availability and advertising of tobacco products, will reduce the rate of teenage smoking. Among other things, famous sporting events named for cigarette brands like NASCAR's Winston Cup racing series would have to be renamed. Cigarette vending machines would also be banned.

Those sympathetic to tobacco interests have naturally argued against the proposals. They have argued that tobacco is still a legal product. Moreover, they say that limiting advertising violates Constitutional rights to free speech.

Tobacco foes have countered that these arguments are amount to little more than selfish whining.

To be sure, tobacco is one of the leading industries in North Carolina. The preponderance of bumper stickers that say things like "Pride in Tobacco" and "Tobacco pays my bills" around Winston-Salem is just one indication of tobacco's importance here.

But to dismiss the arguments against further regulations this easily misses a lot. The larger question that needs to be addressed is what role we want our federal government to assume in regulating our behavior.

So far, Clinton and the Food and Drug Administration have largely singled out just one commonly used product for attack; however, there are dozens of companies that sell unhealthy products.

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Although I am no expert on nutrition, I am certain that most doctors would agree that foods high in fat and cholesterol are directly linked to many physical ailments, including heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and obesity. Heart disease, which is closely associated with poor nutrition, will claim the lives of more than half of all Americans.

Americans nevertheless continue to eat food that is bad for them. This has much to do with the billions of dollars food service corporations spend each year advertising their junk food.

Tobacco companies pale in comparison to the blatant advertising which fast food restaurants aim at children. This summer most of the major fast food restaurants began advertising campaigns designed to convince children to buy their food. McDonalds, for example, gave away Power Ranger toys. Burger King promoted Disney's animated film Pocohontas. Taco Bell sold Congo watches.

Some go even further. McDonalds, for example, even advertises directly in the classroom by distributing educational materials to elementary schools. The Golden Arches are of course featured in plain view.

And what child in America would

not recognize the most famous clown of all — Ronald McDonald?

Fast food advertising strategies are also sordid in other ways. The restaurants often sell a few healthful items, but much of their sales come from hamburgers and French fries, two foods extremely high in fat. McDonalds' Happy Meals come with hamburgers and French fries, not salads. And the toy promotions are usually sold or given away in a series of sales or campaigns that lasts for a few weeks. The child must therefore visit the restaurant several times over a period of a few weeks to collect all the toys.

The strategy is to entice children to eat unhealthy foods and to eat them often. The message contrasts sharply with that from doctors, who warn that foods high in fat should only be eaten sparingly.

So what has our benevolent executive done to restrict the vast advertising power of the fast food industry?

Nothing. In fact, Clinton gave McDonalds some free advertising a while back when news of his penchant for Big Macs made national headlines. No warning to children not to follow the president's bad example followed.

Although the hypocrisy of the president's actions is glaring, Clinton has been praised by anti-tobacco activists for standing up to the tobacco industry.

In truth, Clinton has lost little. Tobacco's influence on voters is largely relegated to a few Southern states. In 1992, Clinton did not carry North Carolina, South Carolina or Virginia, all major tobacco states.

By attacking tobacco, Clinton has effectively written off his chances of carrying these states in the 1996 election. But he knows that his tobacco plan will gain him support among the anti-smoking groups.

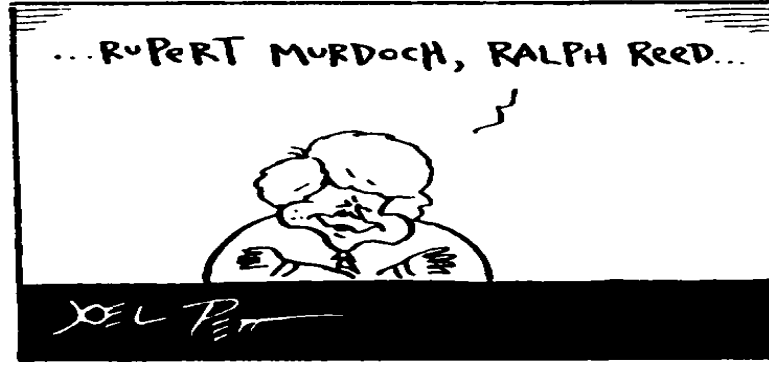
Clinton's motives for not acting against fast food industries is also transparent. The unhealthy food industry is much larger than tobacco. It also carries political power almost everywhere in the United States, from cattle ranchers to potato farmers to the local restaurant chain owners and workers.

Fast food companies also have formed a powerful marketing alliance with movie companies, soft drink companies, toy companies and the advertising and television industries. Similar political calculations have spared other products like alcohol from the degree of regulation put on tobacco.

Hypocrisy of course is not new to American politics. But democracy is at its worst when the majority eagerly point out the "sins" of one group while ignoring their own "sins." Fairness demands that we treat industries, as well as people, fairly and equally.

If we agree that our government must eradicate hypocritical policies, the question then is what kind of freedom do we wish to preserve. Do we want to continue to accept responsibility for our personal actions and those of our children?

Or do we want an intrusive federal government that would ban Ronald McDonald and require warning labels on tacos?



Prestige: more important than we'd like to think

As the wheels begin turning once again on this academic steamroller we know as our university, we should reflect on what higher education means for our future. I don't mean the classes we take or what sort of career our education is preparing us for. I'm thinking of the broader picture: how our college degree affects other people's perceptions of us throughout our lives.

When we applied to colleges, each of us faced a confusing muddle of factors to prioritize. Along with academic rigor, social atmosphere, size and cost, the reputation of the school inevitably arose as something to think about. Now that I am approaching the end of my college career and looking ahead to graduate school applications, I am once again forced to think about such criteria in selecting a school and, more importantly, in hoping a school selects me.

I have to say that when I first went through this process, the so-called "reputation" of a college was not something I deemed of highest importance. I thought I could make an objective decision about the quality of schools based upon factors other than name recognition or alumni prominence.

This is not to say that the university lacks a good reputation — it is in fact a very well respected institution, particularly in this region of the country. Rather, I'm simply suggesting that I, and I dare say the majority of my friends as well, chose this university because of its academic strength and the personal attention one receives here.

For years, students have accused President Thomas K. Hearn Jr. and other administrators of taking measures solely aimed at earning national name-recognition for the university. Many students, including myself, have argued that changes should be directed toward tangible improvements for students at the university rather than toward gaining publicity or higher national rankings.

A related argument has been that the university should focus on improving what it already does rather than stretching itself too thin with new pursuits. The administrators have countered that, essentially, we can have our cake and eat it too. That is to say, we can both expand and continue what we already do with success.

Certainly one of the most controversial changes in recent years is the laptop computer portion of the Plan for the Class of 2000 approved by the board of trustees

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last spring. Students argued that it was a sellout to IBM, students wouldn't use the computers enough to justify the plan, the cost would be prohibitive and on and on, but the plan was passed above their complaints. The spin now seems to be that if the changes ushered in with this plan are as beneficial as promised, then the value of a Wake Forest degree will go up. A tempting argument for those who have already entered the university, though next year's freshmen will pay quite a bit more for that coveted diploma.

I had an experience this summer which has led me to re-evaluate my view of this "prestigious degree" argument. While out west for a summer research program, I paid visits to several graduate schools to get an idea of whether I should apply to their programs this year. I had what I considered to be a fairly significant experience at one of these schools (which shall remain nameless but is a top graduate school in mathematics). As I spoke to the chairman of the graduate admissions committee, I noticed that he assumed a rather elitist tone.

He rather bluntly informed me that the committee knew what to expect from applicants from Harvard, but of an applicant from Wake Forest, it would require a bit more to be impressed. In other words, he informed me that one of the first criteria the committee uses is its perception of the reputation of the applicant's undergraduate university.

Fortunately, my reaction to his comment was more comedic appreciation than offense. Nonetheless, one cannot help but be disturbed by such an experience. When we come to the university, we are assured our degree will be meaningful, will serve us well later in life. The perceptions of a graduate admissions committee at a top university certainly reflect upon the truth of that pledge.

I still think a college should be judged upon its objective strengths and weaknesses, not its subjective reputation, just as a person should be judged upon his merits and not his familial ties. Nonetheless, might it be true that in the world we live in today, reputation still carries the most weight? Our administrators just may know more than we give them credit for after all.

Odds are, college will change you

Welcome freshmen to the best days of your life. No more mom and dad, bothersome siblings, or curfews except for showing up to class Monday morning or Tuesday afternoon if it is more convenient for you. We are excited to have you here.

Odds are that you or someone you know is currently pre-med, but you should not find it odd that they won't be in less than a year.

Chances are that you have probably consumed a Busch beer before, and chances are that you will probably drink many more — this is college, after all.

Statistics tell me that a number of people that you know say that they do not plan to rush. If you give them six months, they will probably be in your fraternity or sorority.

Percentages show that if you love Pizza Hut or Taco Bell that you have come to the right place, but in eight months you will wish that you were anywhere else.

Numbers indicate that you are paying a small fortune to be attending this university. Wait three years and you will be paying more. Surveys show that you walked into your dorm room and thought that it was small. Give it three months, and it will get smaller.

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STUDENT COLUMNIST

Most of you are dating someone from home. In less than six months,

Ask around — especially to religion majors to find out what courses might be the most valuable to you. Attend several of the religious group activities and meetings on campus. It's a great way to meet new people, learn new things, and get lots of free food.

that person will be history. You will not leave here the same.

College is a time to experiment, grow and develop as a person. One important area of introspection is religion. Unless you are an open curriculum genius, you will have to take a religion course for a requirement.

Don't fret. We have some nationally recognized professors in the department.

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activities and meetings on campus. It's a great way to meet new people, learn new things, and get lots of free food.

Finding a church in Winston-Salem can be quite a challenge. Many students attend church on Sunday, and it's fairly easy to get a ride to a variety of churches. Go to as many churches as possible.

This is one of the few times in your life when you are out of the reign of mom and dad. See what is out there. It will either confirm your own beliefs or help you to understand others.

Most importantly, ask lots of questions and do not be afraid to look for the answers.

Odds are that there is a committed Christian somewhere in your hall or dorm who would love to talk with you, share his or her ideas, and answer any questions.

One friend who recently became a Christian said that he spent much of his freshman year provoking Christians with tricky, difficult questions. He revealed that his life changed when he stopped asking the questions and began looking for the answers.

Odds are that you won't do all of these things, but if you just try a few you will be on your way to enjoying some of the best days of your life.

