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# Bond: Don't Mix Your Drinks...With Your Driving! DON'T MIX YOUR DRINKS...WITH YOUR DRIVING!

by Patrick Bond

Drinking and driving has become a tradition in American society. We have come to regard drinking and driving as a basic right. This is true for everyone from teenagers experimenting with their first taste of beer to business people and their three martini lunches.

It's time to put an end to this tradition and examine the frightening statistics.

Last year, alcohol related traffic accidents claimed the lives of 26,000 people in the U.S. On an average weekend in this country, one out of every ten cars on the road is driven by a legally intoxicated person.

The drunken driver is a menace — he is a threat not only to himself but to everyone in his destructive path as well.

Kelly Schuette, unfortunately, is a statistic of one such menace. Mark and Bonnie Schuette's only child, their 4½-year-old daughter, was playing dolls in the family's front yard when she was struck by a speeding auto. The driver of the auto was intoxicated. . . Kelly died; en route to the hospital.

The driver of the vehicle had his license revoked for a three month period and received a fine of \$284 for operating a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol.

I do not think that this nominal fee can be justified in compensating for a lost human life.

Let's face it, our society tolerates, if not promotes, the use of alcohol as a socially acceptable refreshment. And, in order to get from your place of refreshment — be it a bar, restaurant or what have you, back to your home or office, a car is a popular means of transport.

Unfortunately, to a drunken driver behind the wheel, a car can be a very dangerous weapon.

We have, through our laws and the enforcement of them, promoted a leniency toward the drunken driver. States' drunk driving laws need to be tightened and more rigidly enforced in order to protect the real victim — those injured and killed by the drunken driver.

While they vary from state to state, under the present law persons convicted of operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated face mandatory license revocation, fines up to \$2,000 and sentences up to one year in jail. The terms of the sentence vary depending on the number of prior convictions on the driver.

Although stricter laws are definitely needed, a redefinition of the penal system itself is necessary. Frequently, prosecutors are able to plea bargain the penalties and sanctions that the law imposes on the offender. Often, the penalty is partially suspended and instead the driver is required to attend a traffic safety school or an alcohol treatment facility.

In theory this appears to be a feasible solution. Alleviating the problem at its roots. In practice, however, this solution fails to achieve its objective. The problem stems from the fact that there is insufficient enforcement for these substitute penalties. Drivers often fail to attend these schools after their initial visit. The courts have failed to provide an effective means of ensuring drivers' participation in the program. This renders the program a virtual farce.

Frequently, therefore, convicted drivers only pay a small fine and after a temporary revocation of their license, the driver is back behind the wheel.

In order to remedy this situation, we need to somehow limit prosecutors from reducing charges in drunken driving cases.

Repeat offenders need to be more strictly dealt with as well.

This is a serious problem and one which our penal system should afford just consideration.

We must protect those who do not drink and drive from those who do.



— Mark Pfefferman

Twelve years ago, Joe Quinn was a typical carefree 17 year-old. Co-captain of his high school football team and an above average student, Joe seemingly had his world by the tail.

Today, Joe is unable to walk without the aid of a cane, his speech is slurred almost to the point of being incomprehensible and his brain is significantly damaged.

On his way home from football practice on that cool autumn evening, Joe's red Vega was demolished in a head on collision with a car driven by a man who was legally intoxicated.

The man was charged with driving while under the influence of alcohol and ordered to attend a safe driving program. The man drove his car home from the police station after the incident.

Joe has not driven an automobile since October 23, 1970.

Joe's case is not unique in drunk driving incidents.

It is unique in the fact that Joe is my cousin.