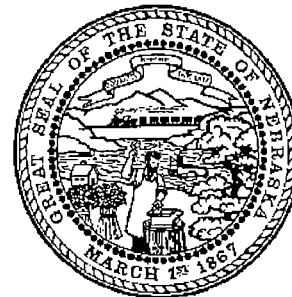




UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

3rd DISTRICT, NEBRASKA

TOM OSBORNE



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Rep. Osborne's Comments: Sports and Alcohol Advertising Press Conference

Washington, D.C. – Over 36 years of coaching, I would estimate that more than 90 percent of the disciplinary incidents that I encountered were precipitated by alcohol related events. At the time of the disciplinary episode, the majority of these individuals were under the legal drinking age. Those who have spent considerable time on high school or college campuses realize the number one drug problem is alcohol. In fact, alcohol is the most used and abused drug among young people in the United States.

In the 2002 Monitoring the Future survey, a study showed a troubling 72 percent of 12th graders reported that they had consumed some alcohol in the past year. Thirty-nine percent of eighth graders who are generally of the ages 13 and 14 reported the same. It has been reported the American child now tries alcohol before the age of 13 and more than 40% of those who begin drinking before age 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependency in their lives. This higher rate of addiction is due to psychological and physiologically immaturity which makes the onset of addiction much more rapid. Studies also indicate at the college level, 31% of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6% for alcohol dependence in the past 12 months.

In recent years, I have been alarmed at the cultural shift regarding underage drinking. I have learned that many parents look the other way when they encounter underage drinking. According to a recent report, "Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility," released by the National Academy of Sciences

(NAS) and the Institute of Medicine, less than 1/3 of parents were aware of their teenager's drinking. Even more alarming, some parents or adults furnish alcohol to young people with the assumption that as long as they are using alcohol, they will not use other drugs. Research finds that exactly the opposite is true and that young people who use alcohol at an early age are much more likely to eventually be involved with drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and steroids because alcohol is a gateway drug.

It is also disturbing to see the use of alcohol glamorized by many advertisements, particularly those shown at athletic events. Evidence indicates that these commercials often specifically target a youthful audience that watches athletic events. In fact, in 2002, beer producers spent \$27 million advertising on the NCAA basketball tournament, which had as many alcohol ads as the Super Bowl, World Series, College Bowl Games, and NFL Monday Night Football combined. The money spent by non-beer brand marketers on advertising for malt and hard liquor has also skyrocketed in recent years.

It is particularly difficult for me to understand beer commercials and malt liquor commercials appearing during NCAA sports events. Most of the young people who participate in NCAA athletics are under the legal drinking age, and since intercollegiate athletes are supposed to represent positive values, the alcohol commercials seem particularly inappropriate. Furthermore, having alcohol commercials appear during televised college games is inconsistent with the efforts colleges make to curb underage drinking. Rather than make money from the beer commercials, universities have a unique opportunity to minimize the exposure of young people to alcohol advertising and send a clear message on the serious risks of underage and excessive drinking.

I am pleased the Center for Science in the Public Interest has launched this important campaign and I look forward to working with them in the future. In addition, I am very appreciative my friend, Dean Smith, was able to come to Washington and bring attention to this pervasive problem.

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