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OPINION

Soda connection: where business, education collide

By **JEROME ENGELBERTS**
Opinion editor

Last Thursday Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill to ban carbonated sodas in California state high schools.

The ban (already in effect in elementary schools) will be phased in between 2007-09, and is meant as a way to help battle obesity, which has become a serious concern. An estimated 9 million school-children ages 6-19 nationwide are overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In addition, sodas contribute in a major way to tooth decay and caffeine dependency.

This ban will have more repercussions than just dietary, though. Many school districts in the coun-

try have business arrangements with such companies as Coca-Cola and Pepsi (Ohlone College has one with Pepsi, for that matter.) that enable these companies to place their product on a particular school campus on an exclusive basis.

This is lucrative for the schools, and helps the companies establish "early branding" of their product. "The school system is where you build brand loyalty," as John Alm, president and chief operating officer of Coca-Cola Enterprises, stated in the April 6, 2003, Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

What this means in practice is that by doing so, the soda vendor establishes brand loyalty with school-going children by paying the school district for the privilege. It's big marketing dollars at work. Many school districts, especially in

less well-off areas, have come to depend heavily on this extra influx of money to supplement the tight educational budget allowances they get.

This new law may change all of that, much to the displeasure of the American Beverage Association (representing the soda manufacturers) who see their branding and marketing opportunities being curtailed. (More information on soft drink distribution arrangements in and through schools can be found at web sites such as http://www.mercola.com/2001/mar/10/schools_soft_drinks.htm)

To give you some idea of the numbers that we're talking about, a report from the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a non-profit consumer advocacy group based in Washington, DC:

According to the new report, called "Liquid Candy," the average soda consumption among teenage males between ages 13 and 18 who drink soda is three or more cans a day, and 10 percent drink seven or more cans a day. Of 13 to 18-year-old girls who drink the beverages, the average intake is more than two cans a day, and 10 percent of those teenagers drink more than five cans a day.

With consumption at a level that high, it should not be surprising that the beverage industry has big money riding on their ability to market to students.

According to the Director of Business Services, Joanne Schultz, Ohlone College has a current exclusive agreement with Pepsi to distribute Pepsi products on campus. This arrange-

ment is worth approximately \$14,000 yearly to the school, and is spent on athletics, forensics, the student ambassador program, and the ASOC general fund. In addition, the ASOC gets a small percentage of beverage sales.

In relation to many other schools, this is actually not a very significant amount. There are schools that get upward of \$100,000 thanks to their beverage agreements. It should come as no surprise then that this new law will have repercussions far beyond student obesity or lack thereof.

That being said, undoubtedly there will be more developments before it all comes to pass - both the American Beverage Association and the affected schools are liable to put up a fight. Whichever happens, the truth shall be set free.

Do corporations have the right to never hire smokers?

By **JEROME ENGELBERTS**
Opinion editor

About a week ago, some attention was attracted to an article that mentioned how several big employers (Alaska Airlines, for one, as well as some police departments around the country.) have started to test job applicants for to-

bacco use, and candidates who smoke - even when not on the job - would not be considered for a position (in states where testing for nicotine is legal).

Of course, it is now a well-known fact that smoking is not the equivalent of a Maui vacation for most living things, (More like a brick in the brain. Repeatedly.) and it's also pretty clear that second-hand smoke

is potentially the cause of problems, too.

However, if corporations are allowed to obtain information like this and apply it to a person's job status, a person's privacy gets invaded pretty heavily. After all, one reason to have a job with the subsequent paycheck is that one might then have some money to spend on whatever one likes to do to get

one's groove on.

Tobacco, regardless of where you stand on the topic, is still a legal substance in this country, and allowing companies to use it as a yardstick for a candidate's suitability for a job just doesn't fly.

Let's extrapolate on this policy, taking a bit of an exaggerated view. What if tomorrow corporations would be allowed to disqualify can-

didates because they engage in bungee jumping? Bungee jumping is, after all, potentially hazardous for a person. What about hunting? What about crossing the street? (People get hit by cars while doing that).

The point (if that wasn't obvious) is that corporations should have no business at all prying into what-

Continued on Page 3

CAMPUS COMMENT >

>> How many sodas to you drink every day?



AUNJ KHAING
Undecided

"One a day."



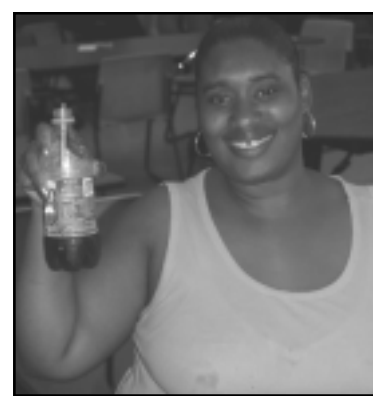
BLAIR BOATLEY
Undecided

"None."



CHARLENE DATVIN
Undecided

"One a day."



COTINA GUYSTON
Interior Design

"Five or six every two days."



LATRICE COTTON
Undecided

"Five a day - it's very addictive."