

## OUR VIEW Tougher Laws

As much as they are times for relaxation and celebration, holidays are troubled times, too. One example is the issue of drinking and driving. Nearly every major city in the nation ramps up patrols and checkpoints during the holidays. For good reason: research shows that driving under the influence peaks during holidays.

Among the busiest periods on American highways and roadways, the holidays have also been among the bloodiest—more traffic fatalities. The most dangerous and fatal of the holidays for injury and death caused by drunk drivers—New Year's, Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day.

Law enforcement agencies typically rev up to combat drinking drivers during the holidays.

So, why not triple the penalty for drunk driving during major holidays? Multiple fines apply for other crimes. Fines for speeding in construction zones are doubled and tripled. Increased time is meted out for sellers of crack cocaine versus those pushing a powdered form. Selective use of increased fines and sentencing during holiday time could deter the seasonal reveler from drunk driving. It would keep habitual DUI offenders who are convicted off the streets longer. Even if just during the holidays, make drivers think twice.

According to a 2002 study, "End Needless Death on Our Roadways," put out by a national physicians group, Nevada was part of the "Fatal Fifteen," states with the worst record of drunken-driving fatalities.

Clearly something must be done. And soon, because Americans are drinking at younger ages. And now there is an alarming re-emergence of liquor ads on television and cable stations. The first national probe of the effects of liquor ads on youth—conducted by researchers at Ohio State University and the University of Connecticut—confirmed long-held suspicions that youth who see alcohol ads tend to drink more. (Advertisers disagree). The impact is particularly felt in Black America where, according to a 2003 study by Georgetown University's Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, reported that Black youth are inundated by alcohol ads in major magazines, too.

Economists at Harvard and the University of Chicago reviewed a decade's worth of data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Fatality Analysis Reporting System and concluded in a 2002 study of fatal two-car crashes that a legally drunk driver was 13 times more likely to cause a fatal accident than a sober motorist; the rate of fatal vehicle crashes was seven times higher for drivers who had been drinking but weren't legally intoxicated.

Knowing this and knowing that current enforcement methods and legal statutes haven't made enough of an impact to curb drunk driving and drivers taking to the road while impaired by alcohol—though some cities have seen drops in DUIs/DWIs (driving while intoxicated), the problem isn't licked—it's time for action.

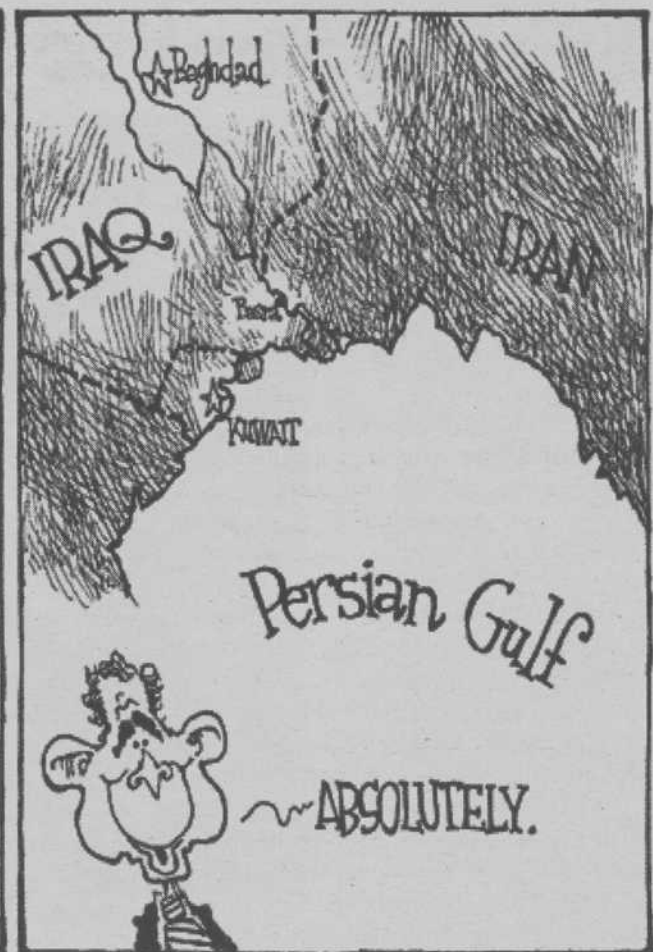
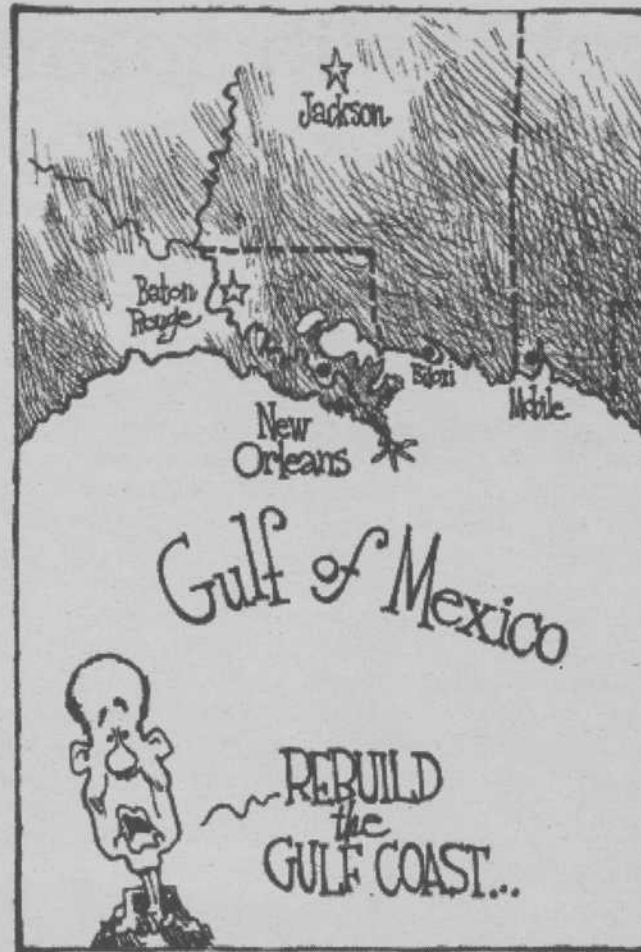
Increased punishment during peak holidays can encourage the use of designated drivers and other safe alternatives for high-spirited imbibers. Chronic problem drinkers would have an additional reason to consider quitting—before they suffer higher fines—before they kill someone.

"Gilbert police target holiday impaired driving" reads the headline of the *Arizona Republic*. From the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* in Santa Cruz, Calif.: "Area law enforcement agencies launch major campaign to stay sober." The *Daily Egyptian* in Carbondale, Ill., ran a story titled "Holidays and increased patrols to keep DUIs stable."

But police departments need to do more than set up roadblocks and checkpoints and lawmakers need to do more than sponsor ineffective, tough-sounding legislation.

It's time for meatier laws that enhance punishment for scofflaws who mix drinking and driving.

Super-sizing the penalties might be a simple tool to achieve immediate results, if only for the holidays.



# ID theft crime rising in U.S.

By Dora LaGrande  
*Sentinel-Voice*

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States, and it occurs in many forms. At any time, the victim could be you.

Identity theft is much more than the misuse of a Social Security number, driver's license, state ID or birth certificate; it can include credit card, workplace and mail fraud. Within the last twelve months, 9.3 million Americans or 4.6 percent of the population were victims of identity theft and 27.3 million Americans have been victimized over the last five years.

Thieves have just a one in 700 chance of being caught by federal authorities. Since the odds of the thief being caught by authorities are so slim, the public must protect itself to help prevent becoming a victim.

Because Caucasians and high-income earners were the first segment of the population to experience identity theft, many of them are now more cautious. Many Black consumers and low-income earners think it can't happen to them; however, the new wave of identity theft victims are African-Americans and Hispanics — and it crosses all socioeconomic lines. ID theft is an equal-opportunity crime.

Identity theft is the criminals' means to commit illegal activities, including computer and cyber crimes, organized crime, drug trafficking,



## ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

alien smuggling, terrorism and money laundering.

There are two common ways ID theft victimizes the public. There is the kind of identity theft that occurs when a criminal uses another person's personal information, for instance, to open bank accounts, obtain credit cards or use the victim's active accounts to make unauthorized credit card charges or write bad checks for purchases.

An even more sinister kind of identity theft occurs when a criminal acts as an imposter to hide his own identity. It works by giving another person's name and personal information, such as an actual driver's license (not the criminal's), a date of birth, Social Security number or other identifying information to a law enforcement officer during an investigation or arrest. In some cases, the imposter presents a counterfeit license containing another person's data. For example, the criminal might use his or her own photograph but print the unsuspecting victim's real ID information.

What could be more humiliating than being arrested for crimes committed by someone using your name?

The horrible thing about identity theft when a criminal is using an innocent person's ID is that the victim may not know that there is a warrant of arrest issued under his or her name. The victim may unexpectedly be detained pursuant to a routine traffic stop and subsequently arrested and taken to jail. That innocent person now has a record and can either be denied employment or suddenly terminated from a job, sending an honest life into a tailspin.

Recently, Privacy & American Business, a public policy think tank, conducted a survey and found that identity theft is up 80 percent from last year. Current statistics show 3.23 million consumers or 1.5 percent of the

population were shocked to discover last year that new accounts had been opened, apartments and homes had been rented, medical care and employment had been obtained fraudulently in their names. More than 6.6 million people found out that their existing accounts had been compromised by identity thieves, and 52 percent of all identity theft victims (5 million people) found out last year that they were victims by monitoring their active accounts.

Identity theft not only costs its victims, but costs businesses an enormous amount of loss. Last year alone, businesses and financial institutions lost \$47.6 billion, while consumers' out-of-pocket expenses incurred to try to repair their credit amounted to about \$5 billion.

What can you do to protect yourself from identity theft?

The first thing is to recognize (See LaGrande, Page 9)



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