

The advantage of smoking

By PAUL TURNER
(Scripps Howard News Service)
(Paul Turner writes for *The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tenn.*)
They might die sooner, but smokers have one distinct advantage over non-smokers.

They can earn good-guy credits for simply being considerate about their unhealthy habit. Non-smokers, of course, cannot.

A smoker who consistently takes pains to see that his puffing is not offending anyone soon becomes known for courtesy. Eventually that reputation transcends the realm of cigarette etiquette. And almost before you can say "inoperable lung cancer," the tobacco user is on his way to prince-of-a-tellow status.

Meanwhile, the non-smoker has no such opportunity to appear thoughtful. His failure to pollute the atmosphere is taken for granted. It makes no sense to say, "Mind if I don't smoke?"

Even the smoker who only occasionally bothers to take into account other people's wishes before lighting up can come off seeming polite. That is because a few smokers are so incredibly rude that someone snuffing out a cigarette before stepping onto an elevator can resemble an everyday hero in comparison.

Is this twisted logic or what?
A smoker demonstrating common decency winds up looking like a model of good manners while a non-smoker might as well be a piece of furniture.

This raises an interesting question: If smokers can score points by not blowing noxious fumes in their friends' faces,

why can't those with other arguably antisocial habits do likewise?

"Excuse me. Mind if I belch?"
"No, go ahead. You're so sweet to ask."

A real-life exchange? Not likely.

So why do tobacco-users get treated like honors graduates of the Miss Manners School of Appropriate Behavior when they try to control the billows of inevitably spreading air contamination?

Obviously, some nonsmokers are so grateful for even token gestures of consideration they will heap praise on any smoker who tries to keep from asphyxiating innocent bystanders.

But if we really accept that line of reasoning, it is possible to imagine several fairly ridiculous conversations.

"Pardon me, but would you object if I shouted a few obscenities? I'll try not to aim any in your direction. Just tell me if they bother you."

Fine. Thanks for asking.
"Would it disturb you if I took a chain saw to our water?"

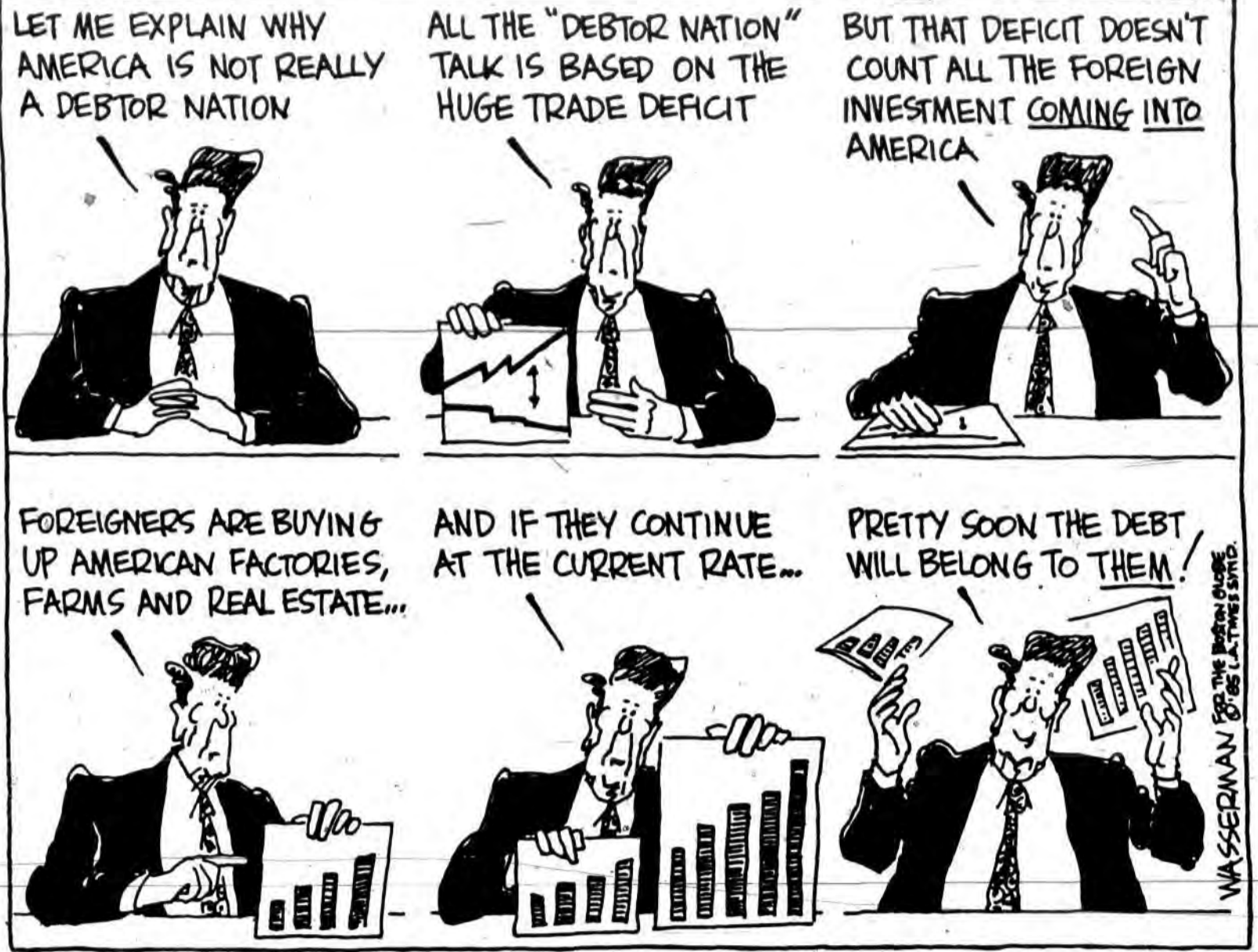
No, go right ahead.
"Mind if I honk my sinuses? I just can't taste my dinner otherwise."

Of course. You're a gentleman and a scholar for requesting permission.

"Hi — I'm new in the next apartment. I wanted to tell you all I'm going to be playing my stereo at about 10 million decibels until about 4 a.m."

Thanks. I appreciate your courtesy.

The list could go on and on. But maybe it's not wise to poke fun at polite cigarette addicts. After all, they could abandon efforts to be fair. And then the progress stemming from years of negotiations would just go up in smoke.



What it means to be a debtor nation

By KENNETH ESKEY
(Scripps Howard News Service)
(Kenneth Eskey covers economics for Scripps Howard News Service.)

WASHINGTON — President Reagan's denial that the United States is now a debtor nation — or if it is, maybe that's not so bad — is drawing hoots and catcalls from the usual sources.

Economists, whom Reagan does not greatly admire, say the president misunderstands the problem.

We were wondering if the president was properly briefed on the subject, one economist told me after Reagan's remarks.

Democrats, who tend to be less charitable, say the president doesn't know what he's talking about.

He did not even understand the concept of a debtor nation, and he missed entirely its significance, said Sen. Max Baucus of Montana.

In fact, the president did what he does so well. He made it seem as though foreign ownership of American assets is a tribute and a compliment to the American way of life.

"Are we?" he asked, when a reporter reminded him that the United States is in hock to the rest of the world. "I think the false impression is being given that a trade imbalance means debtor nation."

Reagan went on to point out that we ran a trade imbalance from 1790 to 1875

and became an industrial powerhouse at the same time. Conversely, he said, we had trade surpluses during the 1930s, when one American in four was out of work.

"So I think this has been exaggerated," he concluded, "and it isn't a case of us being a debtor nation."

There is, of course, no doubt that we are a debtor nation for the first time since 1914. What this means is that foreign claims on U.S. assets (equities, securities, bank deposits) now exceed U.S. claims on assets overseas. That puts us in the same boat with Brazil and Mexico, neither of which can be considered a commercial success.

Why are we in debt? Because we're running up foreign-trade deficits in excess of \$100 billion a year.

"Trade deficits are producing an increasing drag on the U.S. economy," says Kevin Villani, financial analyst for the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

Howard Rosen, research associate for the Institute for International Economics, says there are four things wrong with the United States being deeply in debt:

— Because we borrow so much, we're highly susceptible to abrupt fluctuations in the world money markets.

— If foreign investors decide to pull out, the value of the dollar could plummet, driving up prices and interest rates.

— The United States is soaking up

billions of dollars in foreign capital that could better be used to help developing countries.

— In time, it could become necessary to borrow to pay the interest payments we owe to investors overseas.

Gerald Corrigan of the New York Federal Reserve Bank warns that the money the United States owes to foreigners could reach \$500 billion by the end of the decade. Others say \$1 trillion is a more realistic guess.

There are various explanations of how we got into this fix. One is that other countries are flooding the United States with imports while refusing to buy American goods. Another is that the Yankee trader fell asleep.

But the prime culprit is the \$200 billion federal budget deficit. We borrow so much money to pay our bills that interest rates are artificially high, ballooning the value of the dollar and making it difficult for American companies to compete.

Reagan is right when he argues that political stability and a growing economy have made the United States the envy of the world. It's not hard to understand why foreigners invest here.

The down side is that we're borrowing so much money there won't be anything left to envy that isn't already mortgaged to somebody else.

Mideast snake pit

WASHINGTON — Vipers are hissing in every corner of the snake pit that is the Middle East. So before jumping in with new peace moves, the U.S. has to look beyond Jordan, Israel, the Palestinians and the American Jewish community.

Iran, Iraq, the Gulf States, Syria, Lebanon and Gorbachev's Russia also enter the calculation. Together they reinforce what has been and remains the American policy — a policy of advancing only very slowly, and with extreme caution.

The two radical regimes in the area are now breathing hard. Iran can no longer pump oil because its depot at Kharg Island has been virtually knocked out by Iraqi bombers. Tehran has vowed punitive measures against the Arab states of the Persian Gulf that have been supporting Iraq. Some kind of Iranian-sponsored terrorist action against Kuwait or Saudi Arabia can be expected any day.

Syria, the other radical state, is bogged down in Lebanon. President Hafez Assad has had to commit more and more troops to the murderous task of policing the warring groups. An anti-Syrian faction has now turned the terror tactics back on Assad and (as the kidnapping of Soviet diplomats indicates) his Russian allies. Assad is more than ever determined to crush the Palestine Liberation Organization forces loyal to Yasser Arafat. If he thought Jordan and Arafat were about to negotiate with the U.S. and Israel, the violence would know no bounds.

King Hussein of Jordan has, in fact, been proposing such a negotiation since last February, and he renewed the effort at the United Nations last week and in Washington this week. He says he wants direct negotiations among Jordanians, PLO officials and the Israelis. But before the talks begin Hussein wants elaborate protection for himself and Arafat.

For himself he wants, prior to direct talks with Israel, the cover of an international conference that would group all interested parties, including the Russians and the Syrians. He also seeks a major packet of arms from the U.S.

For Arafat, Hussein wants the enhancement of stature that would come from a meeting between PLO officials and American authorities prior to direct talks with Israel. In the meanwhile, PLO terrorists, some of them based in Jordan, have stepped up actions against Israeli civilians. Last week three Israelis vacationing on a yacht in Larnaca, Cyprus, were murdered by PLO operatives.

Israel's prime minister, Shimon Peres of the Labor Party, has welcomed King Hussein's proposal for direct negotiations with Jordan. But he has balked at the international conference that would bring Russia into the game with its Arab friends. Peres has opposed the proposed

Joseph Kraft

U.S. arms deal with Jordan and his supporters in the American Jewish community have lined up an overwhelming majority against the deal in Congress.

As to the PLO, Israeli public opinion has been roused by the recent wave of terrorism. Peres has refused any meeting with PLO representatives. Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir of the Likud Party, who is due to replace Peres as prime minister next August, has been even tougher in denouncing PLO terrorism. Peres responded to the anti-PLO consensus Tuesday when he ordered Israeli planes — in retaliation for the Larnaca murders — to bomb PLO headquarters in Tunis.

President Reagan has made a personal commitment to Hussein on arms sale, and the Congress has, been formally notified of the Administration's intention to go through with the deal. Reagan has also welcomed the prospect of direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel. But he has raised questions about Hussein's scheme for an international conference that would bring in the Russians.

A long-drawn-out wrangle on the issue of the international conference now impends and that suits the American interest down to the ground. For there is no point in bringing the Russians into the negotiations as a prelude to a negotiation through Hussein. If Moscow is going to reenter Middle Eastern diplomacy, the U.S. can get a much better deal directly from Gorbachev.

The rest of the Hussein peace proposal has become a recipe for trouble. The prospect of direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel under U.S. auspices would work to intensify Syrian and Iranian terrorist actions. The Saudis, the Kuwaitis, the Jordanians and other Arab states friendly to the U.S. would suffer.

Because of the anti-terrorist frenzy in Israel, Peres could enter negotiations with the PLO only under severe U.S. pressure. If he even buckled a little, Israeli opinion would swing strongly against him. The result would be the outcome the U.S. wants least in Israeli politics — the emergence of Shamir as prime minister with a strong popular mandate for a tough anti-Arab policy.

There remains the arms deal with Jordan. Carrying through on a presidential commitment is important to this country's reputation and Hussein's political health. Trying to block the deal directly is futile, as Reagan could sustain a veto of a congressional prohibition. So the right tactic in Congress is to approve the arms sale — with conditions. The conditions would spell out the real American objectives — direct talks with Israel and no conference with the Russians.

Don't be afraid to let your child fail

By NANCY DAVIS
(Special to The Hartford Courant)
(Nancy Davis teaches journalism at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Conn.)

"Play it by ear and respect your instincts."

"Every time you say 'no' to your child, remember, he is probably doing something you really wanted to do when you were a kid."

Such was the typical advice written in the baby book presented to the guest of honor at a recent shower I attended.

I wrote as my entry in the book, "Don't run after the bus." And I tried to explain it to the young mother as I will try to explain it to my own children when they have children.

My own mother put it differently, "Don't do anything for your children that they can do for themselves." How I wish I had heeded her.

Instead, I ran after the bus.

Not, always literally, but very often figuratively.

Literally, more than a few times I could be seen running toward the school bus stop, waving a forgotten math paper or clutching a lunchbox or shouting, "Wait, you forgot your quarter for class dues."

And figuratively, there were the innumerable times I tried to protect each of my four children from what I predicted as disaster — lying ahead, schoolwork not finished the way I thought it should be, making arrangements with friends to have their children come for a visit when neither mine nor theirs cared to do so, or voicing dire threats about "If your room isn't picked up by suppertime" only to pick it up myself, instead of letting the child

face the consequences.

Whether it was something as simple as tying shoes because I was in a rush (even though the child could do it himself, and was proud of the fact) or as complex as planning her summer (camp, then a family vacation, then a trip to grandma's) without consulting the child in more than a cursory way, I deprived

Whether it was something as simple as tying shoes because I was in a rush (even though the child could do it himself) or as complex as planning her summer without consulting the child in more than a cursory way, I deprived each of the luxury of making mistakes they could learn from.

each of the luxury of making mistakes they could learn from.

A forgotten math paper might, eventually, teach the child punctuality; a forgotten lunch might teach the child to remember if the next day; and peer pressure from classmates when dues were not paid would have had a greater impact than my reminders.

A nursery school teacher I know, who is dealing with today's parents of preschoolers, sees mothers intensely occupied with child-rearing, a contrast, she thinks, to a more laissez-faire attitude 10 years ago, when she began teaching.

"Most of these mothers," she said recently, "are in their mid to late 30s. They have had careers before children. And now they are putting all their energies, which formerly were directed to climbing career ladders, into one or two children. I'm spending more time trying to teach parenting than I am with the children themselves."

Yet thinking back, I see myself, in the

1950s and '60s, displaying a similar intensity. Which brings me back to running after the bus.

My daughter, with her husband, is facing a gargantuan task (in my eyes) of rehabilitating three apartments in an abandoned building in the South Bronx — in order to live in New York where apartments are more precious than

pearls. She wrote to us, describing the project, and ended the letter with, "Every time I'm wielding a crowbar or hammering up wallboard or trying to fit in new windows, I expect Dad to come up behind me to say, 'Here, honey, let me do that for you.'" She is still undaunted, but I think she may recognize that all that early helping may have been too much.

No matter how often we hear it, the advice that children need to try and fail, with supportive parents behind them, is hard for parents to take. We want to spare them the failures, big and small, which we experienced or which we see looming on their horizons. We've been told a hundred times that people learn from their mistakes, but we want our children to never make mistakes because they may be hurt in the process.

Perhaps I can pass my mother's advice on to her grandchildren, as they prepare for parenthood. But in my own words — "Don't run after the bus."

