

Background On the Issue

Since the mid 1930's, the legal drinking age in the United States has been set at 21. But during the Vietnam War, in consideration of young people in military service, 29 states lowered the legal drinking age. As a result, there was no uniform drinking age, with some states choosing 18, 19, or 20, and some states also putting restrictions on types of beverages that could be purchased such as beer and wine, or limited the right to on-premise sales only, etc.

As a result of these changes, there was a marked increase in car fatalities where young people and drinking was involved. This patchwork of laws also led to problems at state borders, creating significant risk for teens that would drive to an adjacent state to obtain or consume alcohol. For instance, Wisconsin allowed liquor sales to 18 year olds, and Illinois did not, and it is not uncommon to hear local adults tell stories, some tragic, of their youth and driving back and forth to Wisconsin to drink.

Under Ronald Reagan's administration in 1984, the Uniform Drinking Age Act was passed, creating a mandatory requirement for all states to establish the drinking age at 21 within 5 years. Funding for highway construction was tied to compliance, providing a strong incentive, but the concern about teen drinking and driving was the most compelling reason for the change. All states complied.

The age of majority, also called the "legal" age, across the country is 18 years, and includes rights for medical information and decisions, voting, entering into contracts, and so forth. Some restrictions on rights, privileges, and accountability do vary by state or across the nation from 16-35; examples are the age one can rent a car (25), age considered an adult in an arrest (17), age of consent (can marry, have sex—16 with permission, 18 without), the age one can run for the state legislature (18 to 21), the age one can be held responsible for a contract (21), age one can run for US elected positions (House of Representatives, 25, Senate 30, President 35), and so forth.

Some states, such as Ohio, allow alcohol consumption in establishments by minors when parents are present; most allow parents to serve alcohol to their children in their own homes. All states have penalties for fake id possession, sale, or use, and most consider this a felony. Even so, many high school and college students report that they have a fake id for purposes of obtaining alcohol.

(reprinted courtesy of Lake Forst/Lake Bluff Underage Drinking Prevention Coalition, www.speakuplflb.com)

Sample statistics from the 2006 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results at New Trier High School: **Alcohol Consumption:** 44% percent of students had at least one drink of alcohol one or more times within the 30 days prior to the survey. 90% percent of students **believe** that most students had at least one drink of alcohol one or more times in the 30 days prior to the survey. **Episodic Heavy Drinking (5 or more drinks in a row):** 37% (943 of 3499 students) reported at least one episode of heavy drinking in the 30 days prior to the survey. (National results at www.cdc.gov/YRBS)



Family Awareness Network
And the
League of Women Voters
present a debate of ideas



Re-Thinking the Drinking Age: Is 21 Working? Is 18 The Answer?

Moderator:
Mary-Lou Aagaard

Advocates:
Alex Koroknay-Palicz, National Youth Rights Association
Donald Zeigler, American Medical Association

Thursday, April 23, 2009
7:30—9:00 pm

New Trier High School, Northfield Campus
Room C234, 7 Happ Road, Northfield, IL

Sponsored by Family Awareness Network www.fan-ntts.org
Moderation and meeting services provided by the Leagues of Women Voters of Glen-
coe, Wilmette, and Winnetka/Northfield/Kenilworth

Facilities, video-taping and cable rebroadcast courtesy of New Trier High School



Advocates

Donald W. Zeigler, Ph.D.

Don served as Deputy Director of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's national program to reduce high risk drinking among college students. Based at the AMA, the 10-year project involved 10 major universities and their campus/community coalitions.

Pertinent to tonight's topic, Don was lead author of two AMA reports, the "Effects of Alcohol on the Brains of Underage Drinkers" and "Responding to Depression, Suicide, Substance Use and Addiction on College Campuses" as well as the World Medical Association's policy "Statement on Reducing the Global Impact of Alcohol on Health and Society."

Don has addressed the legal drinking age at several national conferences, one sponsored by MADD and another where he debated Dr. John McCardell, the instigator of this "controversy."

Don has a PhD in Public Health, is adjunct professor in Preventive Medicine at Rush Medical College, and lives in Evanston.

Alex Koroknay-Palicz

Program

Welcome

Charles Jameson, co-chair Family Awareness Network

Introduction

Mary-Lou Aagaard, League of Women Voters

Opening Remarks (15 minutes each)

"18 is the answer" Alex Koroknay-Palicz

"21 is working" Donald Zeigler

Rebuttal Remarks (5 minutes each)

Alex Korokany-Palicz

Donald Zeigler

Audience Questions (Submitted on cards. Questions asked by the moderator. 1 minute each side per question. There will be time for about 15 questions)

Closing Remarks (3 minutes each)

Don Zeigler

Alex Koroknay-Palicz

Wrap up

Charles Jameson