FDA saccharin ban badgers Americans

By William Laser

In 1957 the Congress of the United States passed an amendment to the 1938 Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act which ordered the Food and Drug Administration to ban from human consumption any food additive which "is found, after tests which are appropriate for the evaluation of the safety of food additives, to induce cancer in man or animals." Under this so-called "Delaney Amendment," interpreted strictly, the FDA last week announced that it planned to outlaw saccharin in the United States, an action which would leave us with no approved artificial sweetener for use in dietetic low-calorie foods. The FDA ruling was based on tests commissioned by the Canadian government which found an increased incidence of bladder cancer among rats fed astronomical amounts of the sugar substitute.

For weight-conscious consumers, diabetics and opponents of big government legislation it is a clear case of the fulfillment of Barry Goldwater's 1964 campaign prophecy — repeated often recently by Ronald Reagan — that regulations like this prove "too much government, too late." Reasonable people would say compels them, regardless of their judgment, to act against all potentially hazardous additives. But the American people cannot understand why a government which allows them alcohol and tobacco, and which talks about decriminalizing marijuana, would forbid them to enjoy their favorite soft drinks and desserts without worrying about the calories.

The government is perceived as looking for areas in which to interfere with the private lives of the people. Compared to tobacco, saccharin is less harmful to the user, less irritating to non-users, and far less in need of regulation. The FDA was set up to protect us, not to badger us: and the government has responsibilities to ensure that only truly harmful drugs are banned from the marketplace.

The Canadian researchers fed the rats the equivalent of 800 bottles of diet soda a day, an intake which corresponds to 140 pounds of saccharin a year. Tests based on such evidence are of doubtful validity. Furthermore, recent experiments in New York failed to demonstrate a relationship between saccharin and bladder cancer in primates. And a Brazilian government study, which showed that more artificial sweeteners than saccharin were no more susceptible to bladder cancer. Saccharin has been in widespread use for over fifty years, its proponents argue, and carcinomas in a few rats surely mean nothing.

At the same time, the 1964 campaign prophecy - repeated often recently by Ronald Reagan — that regulations like this prove "too much government, too late." Reasonable people would say compels them, regardless of their judgment, to act against all potentially hazardous additives. But the American people cannot understand why a government which allows them alcohol and tobacco, and which talks about decriminalizing marijuana, would forbid them to enjoy their favorite soft drinks and desserts without worrying about the calories.

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The last straw came when the Massachusetts state legislature was reimbursed, causing Martha's Vineyard to lose the seat it had held for nearly 300 years. The talk of secession now is not serious — it is merely a device to draw attention to the island's lack of representation in the legislature. Yet, more and more residents of Martha's Vineyard find the idea attractive. Not only are they tired of being ignored from "Tasachusetts," they want to become a totally independent country in their own right.

The answer is that everyone wants some self-determination as to how he is governed. This is a natural principle upon which the United States was founded, and which still holds today.

This could be a large part of the American public's disenchantment with Big Government. It is just not clear enough to say that we feel that we are part of it — that we are in control.

Recently, more and more governmental powers have been delegated to the state level — grassroots governments. What was once under state jurisdiction, for example, is now often controlled on the county or township level. And this process of concentration, say, trash collection throughout the state when each community has its own needs and can best determine them, is coedity, a trend of which I highly approve. I know of no living group which has not melted drastically with the introduction of permanent, official manifestations of the sea that was previously represented. Somehow, the reasons for the subtle ebb and flow of rowdiness just simply disappear.

Frankly, what is the purpose for this rowdiness, this outward manifestation of that seething entity, "floor spirit," anyway? The purpose of creating living groups is, in theory, to create some sort of basis for individual, not necessarily group friendships. Sometimes group friendships can inhibit the formation, and occasionally break, individual friendships. Every exhibition of "floor spirit," be it waterfights, hockey teams, or beer blasts, can backfire and alienate the studious, the unathletic, or the testotallizing. "Floor spirit," if it exists, should be based on the real camaraderie that comes from individual friendships, in fact not round but rather "manifestations."