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We need a sensible alcohol policy

The recent bust at the home of former Colts quarterback Jack Trudeau, and his subsequent arrest for allegedly hosting a party where high school students consumed alcohol, reflects current law in Indiana.



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Commentary

But it does not reflect the attitudes of some toward the appropriate age at which one is capable of making fully informed decisions about alcohol use. More important, it reflects the fractured nature of how the law views an adult and the rights and responsibilities associated with adulthood.

Indiana law recognizes individuals as adults when they become 18, with a few exceptions. This legal emancipation manifests itself in an 18-year-old's ability to enter into a legally binding contract, to vote and to enlist in the armed forces. We are confident that 18-year-old men and women can understand the implications associated with affixing their name to a long-term contract, such as a mortgage.

We believe men and women are able, at 18, to evaluate candidates seeking elective office. We believe they, at 18, can discern right from wrong while protecting us, the citizenry, using lethal force. We will train these young men

and women to kill, but we won't let them have a beer.

At 16, when hormonal and developmental changes occur, including the beginning of the establishment of brain functions that help an individual assess and understand long-term consequences, children are entrusted with the safety and security of themselves and the population at large while piloting several thousand pounds of aluminum down our streets and interstates.

Unfortunately, poor decision-making is a common trait of 16-year-olds everywhere. Any insurance actuary will tell you the most expensive group of drivers to insure is teen-agers.

So why, as a community, do we spend millions of dollars annually in insurance premiums to subsidize the poor and dangerous driving habits of a 16-year-old? A more sensible policy would be to set driving privileges at age 21 and beer and wine consumption at age 18. A skinned nose and a bicycle crashed into a tree are valuable lessons in understanding the effects of alcohol before getting behind the wheel.

Several countries permit the consumption of alcohol by those 18 or older and restrict driving to those 21 and older. By way of example, the approach Mickey Maurer outlined in his June 18 column would be considered a sensible and prudent one in Australia, where an adult must be present when an 18-year-old and his or her friends gather to enjoy a beer.

Socialized, responsible consumption of alcohol in the presence of an adult results in a better understanding of alcohol's benefits and detriments. In the United States, this lack of socialization is viewed as one of the causes of the epidemic of binge drinking at America's universities.

America's experiments with alcohol have usually ended poorly. The federal mandate to raise the drinking age, while not contemplating similar changes to the driving age, has resulted in a population of young people that, like their adult ancestors in the 1920s, seeks out alcohol. Unfortunately, the youth of today do so without the benefit of an education from their family on the appropriate consumption of alcohol.

While this blind exploration is happening, Indiana law allows these youth the privilege of driving with sometimes devastating consequences.

One axiom is true in the debate about alcohol: A good role model makes a tremendous difference in the development of a child. Parents are attempting to raise sensible, responsible adults, whether it concerns dating, voting, academics, military service or responsible alcohol use. At the end of the day, isn't that what we want as a society and isn't that what we expect of parents?•

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