



SARAH OVERSTREET

Setting limits on drug tests

There's probably never been anyone as opposed to mandatory drug testing as I am. That is, against it in the way it's gained popularity in the last few years, as a tool for government and private companies to randomly demand employee urine samples. Without probable cause. Whether you're the newest kid in the warehouse or the bookkeeper wearing a 25-year pin.

Like George Shultz and his famous refusal to take a polygraph test, I will never give at the office. My company has no more reason to suspect me of drug abuse than President Reagan had to think that poor old lonesome George was a security risk. Random sneaky-pecky on loyal, productive

employees is an insult.

And the shabby reliability of drug labs is notorious. In studies, some labs' tests have proven about as reliable an indication of drug abuse as lifting someone's eyelids and demanding that he or she recite the alphabet backward. A recent News Information Wire Service investigation professionally laced 70 urine specimens with dangerous drugs and sent them to seven different drug labs in the Washington, D.C., area. By the time the labs had finished their sophisticated analyses, they'd come up wrong 82 percent of the time.

And the stories of careers ruined by inaccurate drug tests are popping up with enough regularity to be truly

frightening. They are especially so because drug paranoia is so high, and wronged employees often have had no chance to fight back. They're handed their walking papers and a "Just Say No" bumper sticker, and shown the door.

Yet amid my outrage at the paranoid bungling by ignorant companies — and let's not forget the Navy, which accused a physician of morphine addiction when his fondness for poppy seed bagels erroneously marked his specimen — there's one incidence of drug testing I can agree with, if the proper safeguards are implemented. It is the testing of transportation workers on whom others depend for their safety: pilots, navigators, railroad engineers, bus drivers, etc. No one has any business conveying others under the influence of reaction-altering drugs.

Sen. John Danforth, R-Mo., makes a proper analogy when he likens drug-testing these employees to checking all of us when we pass through metal-detectors at airports. No one has any probable cause to suspect any of us, yet the consequences of one handgun sneaked through by one nut could be scores of dead, innocent people.

If Danforth has a good idea, so does Rep. Glenn English, D-Okla. The National Institute on Drug Abuse is now setting up a national certification program for labs, and English is sponsoring a bill that would make employers use certified labs if they're going to fire, or refuse to hire, people based on their drug tests. It's about time.

Unions representing transportation workers are fighting any kind of man-

datory drug testing. I wonder how they'll feel if English's bill becomes law this spring. If workers are guaranteed a fair urine test, the whole issue will quit being a mockery and at least be an option worth considering.

Before Congress approves drug testing for transportation workers, it should specifically define the jobs that affect others' health and safety, and restrict the drug testing to those.

Face in the Crowd



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3. THIRD HILARIOUS WEEK

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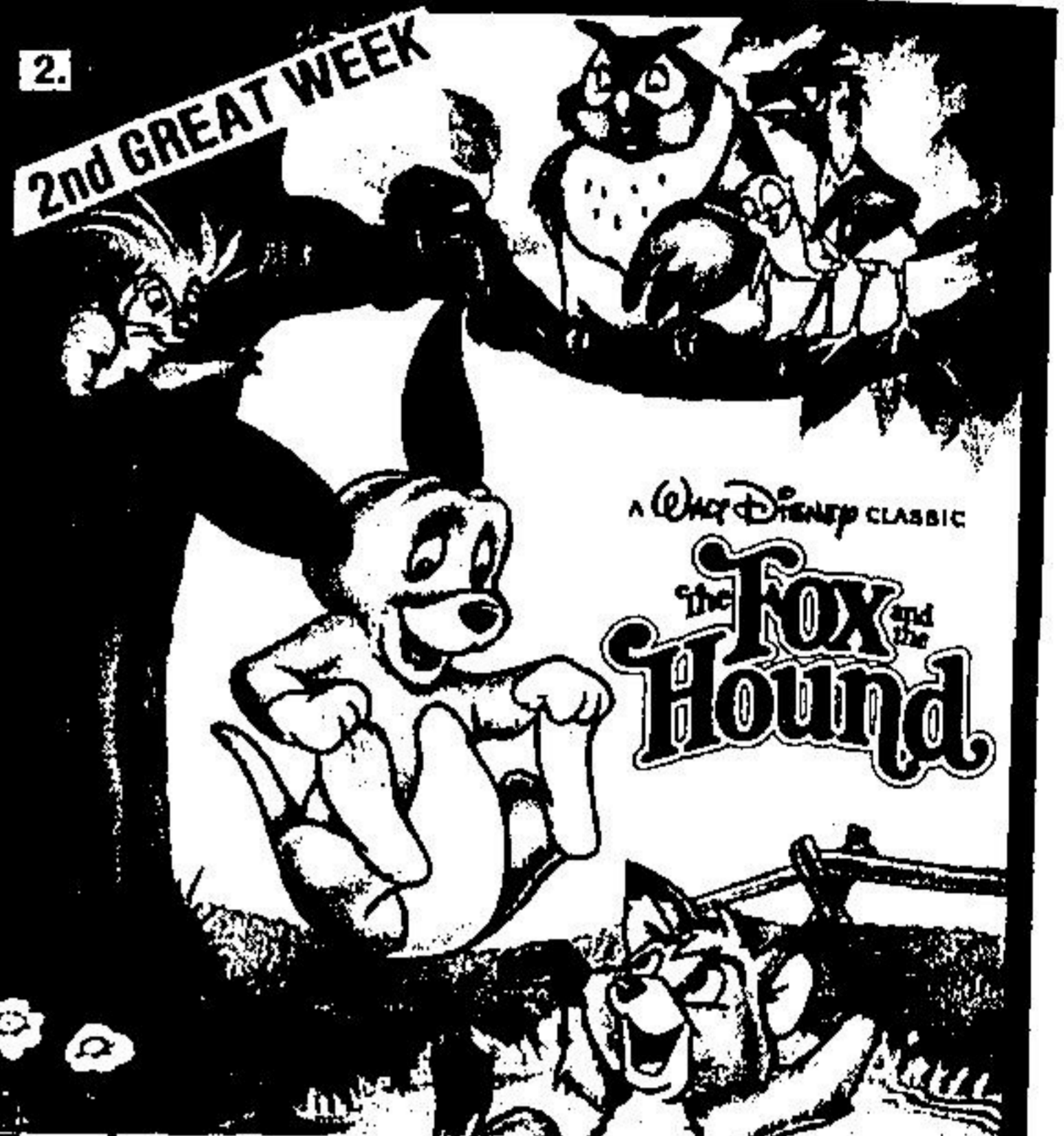
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2. STARTS TODAY

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