

Seat belt use should be left to personal choice

The mandatory seat belt bill proposed in the Oregon Senate is yet another attempt of government to infringe on the public's right to choose. Oregonians should be able to decide for themselves whether to wear seat belts.

Senate President John Kitzhaber has called the issue one of "sound public policy vs. personal freedom." Although the policy may be sound, the value of personal freedom outweighs it.

If the bill is passed, supporters say Oregon could save \$40 million in medical costs and lawsuits. Death rates would also go down.

Almost everyone agrees seat belts do save lives; numerous studies have proved the point. But simply passing a law making it mandatory to buckle up does not mean people will wear them.

The big question remaining is: "will the benefits claimed by supporters actually occur? And does this give government the right to infringe on an individual's liberties?"

Seat belt law proponents say driving is already regulated through drunk-driving laws and the speed limit. But these laws exist to protect people outside the car as well as the driver. The seat belt law is an individual protection — nobody else is endangered if the drivers choose not to wear their seat belts.

This is very important because the seat belt law issue is not a question of saving lives — that is a given. It is an issue regarding personal choice. The government should not place restrictions on a person when his or her actions do not harm another.

Rep. Bob Brogotti, R-La Grande, said Oregonians would be living in a "police state" if the law passed. America prides itself on the freedom it gives individuals. We have the ability to choose our medical care, our religion, and make other decisions about our lives.

In keeping with these freedoms we should be allowed to decide whether to wear our seat belts. When the government starts making laws that invade these personal decisions, it undermines the basic concepts outlined in the Constitution.

Because the benefits of the bill stem from more people wearing seat belts, the enforceability of the law is an important aspect to consider. Current laws only affect people under 16. The current law holds drivers responsible for young passengers because they are not old enough to drive. However, the driver can only be ticketed if stopped for other reasons.

The Senate Bill carries a fine up to \$50. It is unclear whether violators are to be pulled over specifically because of the law or are ticketed in conjunction with another violation. In either case, the enforcement seems flawed. The method opens up possibilities of abuse. Police could pull people over for not wearing a seat belt if they suspected them for another crime.

America has upheld a laissez faire attitude toward government throughout history. The rights professed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution represent a government for the people, by the people. Regulations and restrictions have become an inherent form of the system in order to avoid an uncontrollable state of nature. When government starts to tread on the individual's freedoms, however, that cannot be accepted.



"IT'S ANOTHER EXTORTION NOTE FROM GOD. THIS TIME HE WANTS SMALL BILLS!"

Letters

Seat belts

In her article on safety belts, Shawn Wirtz demonstrated insight and courage in addressing the reason more people are buckling up and the possible passage of legislative mandate.

I say courage because it's about time someone put seat belts in the context we can all reckon with: economic impact.

Seat belt advocates (I am a belated member) have too long centered their argument on the very subjunctive "quality of life." In the meantime, the ACLU and its following harp about government intervention into human rights. I want to know if the right to die or be maimed for life falls into their so-called humanitarian Bill of "Rights".

I didn't buckle my seat belt five years ago. The economic impact on me has been astronomical. I've also learned a lot about the quality of life. I was fortunate enough to enjoy life to the fullest, to laugh and to cry and enjoy life's little ironies. I no longer do.

I don't enjoy the distinction of being recognizable. Perhaps a few of you have shared classes with me. I don't talk well — because I can't. I don't walk well for the same reason. I am

old enough to be your mother.

Five years ago I had grabbed the "brass ring" and was on my way up the magabucks category. Now, I'm just another student. I belong to the Oregon Head Injury Foundation. I pray I never meet any of you there.

BUCKLE UP — I didn't and wish to hell I had.

Kristi Svendsen
Pre-Journalism

Disarmament

The nuclear test carried out by the Pentagon on Feb. 3 has sent a resounding message to the people of Europe: The United States under the current administration is opposed to arms control.

Beginning in August of 1985, the Soviet Union voluntarily halted its own nuclear weapons tests and urged the United States to sit down at the negotiating table and sign a test ban treaty. Knowing full well that the USSR would end its 18-month unilateral moratorium with the Feb. 3 explosion, the Reagan administration went ahead anyway, effectively blasting any chance of such a treaty coming into existence in the near future.

President Reagan's attempt to militarize outer space is further evidence of his administration's opposition to the cause of disarmament. Although SDI or "Star Wars" will probably never shoot down a single missile, it has proved remarkably successful at shooting down disarmament proposals. It alone was responsible for shooting down the summit at Reykjavik.

Letters Policy

The Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing fair comment on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters to the editor should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.

When the American people sit down in mid-February to watch ABC's Nazi-style propaganda series "Amerika," they may be advised to consider the events of the last six years and ask themselves which of the two superpowers is really endangering world peace. For the people of Europe the answer has become increasingly clear.

Christian Gunther
West Berlin

Powers

Human beings as members of the animal world and being of such high intelligence must have a higher power other than man. The need for a god that has power over the most powerful humans has always been important to the betterment of societies.

I think it is too bad that our intellect has evolved out of the Dark Ages only to discover that we invented God "the almighty, thrower of lightning bolts, creator of Satan and the fires of hell." Now we fear no retribution and behave as we please.

Sure, being free of guilt that once was really fear of hell-fires is fine, but can we let our children play alone in the park?

So what are we to do now that we know the Bible was written by mere men, claiming to be speaking for God? Do we let people like Pat Robertson and Oral Roberts, and their followers like William Moore, Brian Frary and Micheal Cross dictate to us that the humans that wrote the Bible were not really creating helpful myths to humble wicked men, but really meant all they said as fact?

Of course not; not when it means letting egocentric, authority-hungry humans represent God, our higher power. The Bible as myth and not as fact is fine but the idea of trusting a human to speak for God is pointless. The spirit of God speaks to us by way of our love for life, not by words on a page.

Patrick Clancy
Eugene

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