

NEWS DIGEST

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Judge refuses to stop victims' rights law

1 SALEM — A victims' rights ballot measure became law Thursday after a judge declined to block it.

The constitutional amendment permits crime victims to insist on jury trials for the defendants and to speak at court proceedings.

The American Civil Liberties Union attempted to block the law, but Circuit Judge Pamela Abernethy rejected its request for a restraining order Thursday.

Abernethy said the plaintiffs in the lawsuit did not show how the measure would harm their rights any differently from Oregonians in general.

But she went on to say the measure "may well pose a threat of irreparable harm to the due process rights of criminal defendants."

Abernethy's ruling dealt only with whether the law should take effect now, not with the validity of the law itself. Arguments now will be scheduled by both sides.

The ACLU is attacking the measure on grounds that it violates the state constitution's requirement that ballot measures deal with only one subject.

The organization also contends some provisions of the measure violate individuals' civil rights, by doing such things as expanding government power in search and seizure and surveillance activities.

Auto fatalities drop for teenage drivers

2 ATLANTA — Fatal car crashes involving teen drivers dropped 24 percent in the past eight years, and the government gives some of the credit to laws that limit their driving privileges while they gain experience behind the wheel.

But the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said crashes are still the top killer of youths between 15 and 20.

The CDC said teen drivers were involved in 7,993 fatal crashes in 1995, down 24 percent from 10,415 in 1988.

"There is a decline but there has been a slight drop in all age groups," said Ann Dellinger, a CDC epidemiologist. "People will be encouraged by this decline, but I don't want them to forget that teens are at a higher risk for these accidents than any other age."

That's evident in another statistic: Young drivers were involved in about 2 million non-fatal crashes in 1995 alone, the CDC said.

Young drivers between 15 and 20 make up 7 percent of all licensed drivers but 14 percent of drivers involved in fatal crashes.

All the more reason for limits, the CDC said. That's the thinking behind new laws adopted in at least 15 states.

The laws establish a multi-step, or "graduated" license that slowly gives teen-agers more and more driving privileges as they gain experience behind the wheel.

Court records show cult leader confessed

3 TOKYO — Doomsday cult leader Shoko Asahara confessed under police interrogation last year to ordering the killing of an anti-cult lawyer and his family, according to documents released Thursday.

The reported confession would be the only one known so far by Asahara.

Asahara is charged with ordering a deadly nerve-gas attack on Tokyo's subways on March 20, 1995, the murder of lawyer Tsutsumi Sakamoto and his family Nov. 4, 1989, and more than a dozen other crimes.

The transcript of a police interrogation of Asahara in October 1995, read at the trial of a cult follower Thursday, included the confession, the Kyodo news agency and the Japan Broadcasting Corp. reported.

"I have decided to tell you the truth," Asahara was quoted as telling interrogators. "I instructed my followers to carry out (the killing). There is no doubt about that."

The statement was submitted as evidence in the trial of former top cultist Kazutomo Okazaki, one of six cult members accused of murdering the lawyer and his family.

Criminal defendants in Japan often confess during intense police interrogations, only to claim later that their confessions were extracted under duress.

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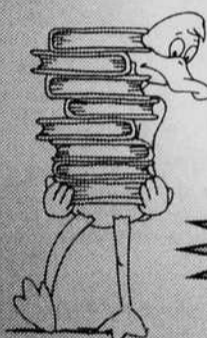
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