

Wednesday, February 25, 2004

EDITORIAL

Ignition lock requirement is inefficient, too costly

When will the government learn that it all too often makes a miserable baby-sitter? Apparently, not soon enough.

Last week, the New Mexico House of Representatives passed a bill requiring all car-owning citizens to breathe into "alcohol detection devices" (usually called "ignition interlocks") installed in their own cars in order to unlock the ignition. The New Mexico Senate will now consider the issue.

Although the law's intentions are good, the unintended consequences of setting this new regulatory bar are staggering. The most pressing problem with the idea is the absurdly high cost and the harsh reality that it would be passed down to the consumer (we're pretty sure that the government would be unwilling to foot the bill). According to Reuters, the device currently costs \$1,000 — and that's before installation. It defies reason that these lawmakers could possibly rationalize forcing mostly law-abiding taxpayers to fund such an expensive device. A middle-class working family with two cars would pay a minimum of \$2,000 to clean up the government's inability to stop drunken driving.

Second, implementation of the device would be a nightmare. Would car manufacturers be required to install the device or would consumers need to take their cars to a dealership? What about out-of-state drivers who don't have a device? What consequences will befall consumers who uninstall it from the car? What if it breaks and consumers can't start their car even though they haven't been drinking? (Last we checked, any object the government requires to be installed in a car, such as seatbelts or registration tags, won't keep the car from starting if it breaks).

Beyond these two considerations, one must also analyze how effective the devices would be. Consider this: A student goes to a party, knocks back several beers, pays somebody \$20 to blow into the ignition for him and he's on his way.

Allowing the government to assume that all drivers have been drinking before they even enter the car is frightening territory. A similar debate surrounds the issue of gun control: Advocates say firearms should be restricted so people can't use them for violent means, which assumes that all people who pick up a gun will potentially use it in this way.

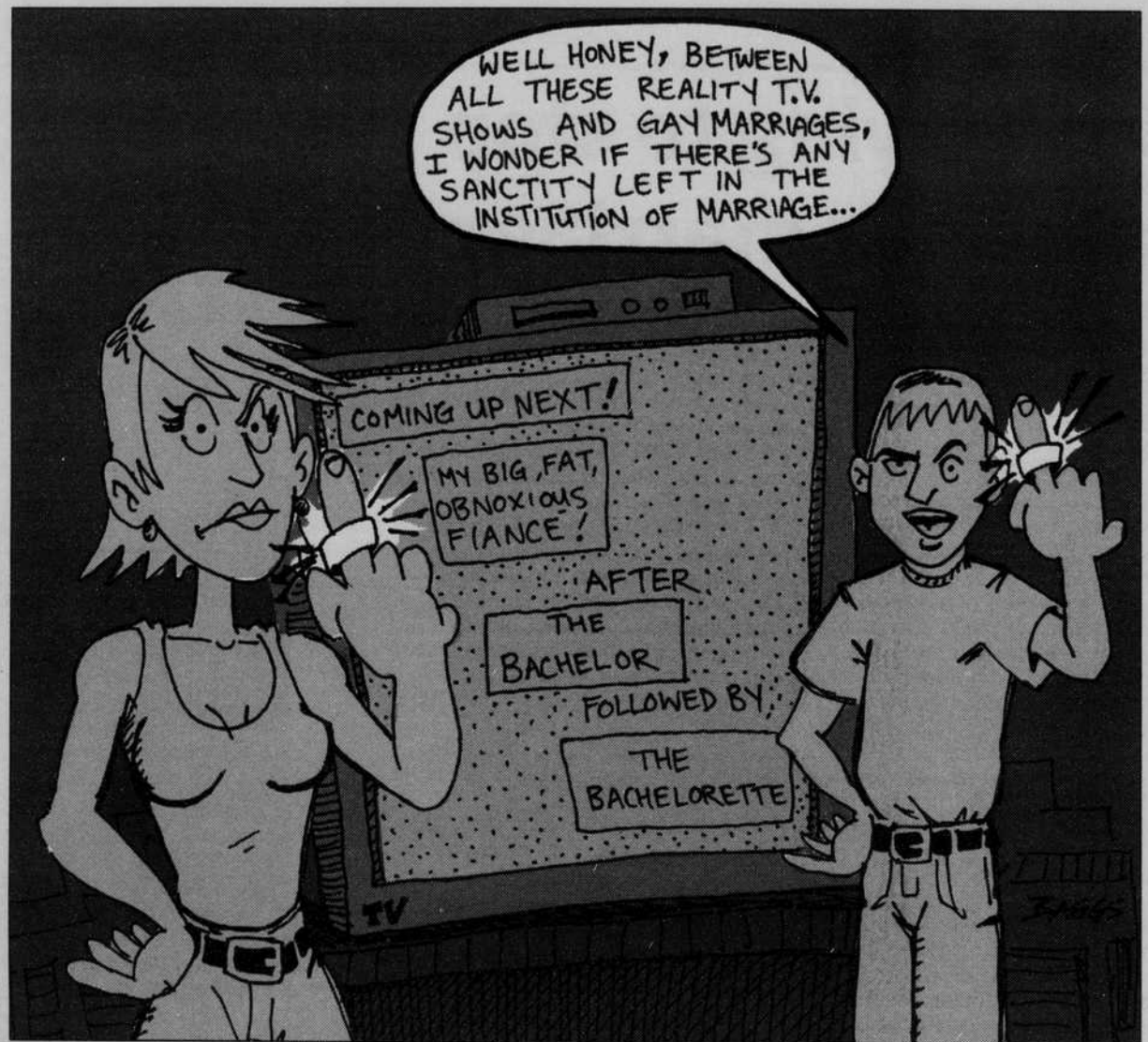
And we all know how well gun control goes over in the realm of political discourse. Many would argue that gun control doesn't stop violence, instead failing to address the underlying problems in society that cause it.

Here's an idea: stiffer penalties for drunken drivers. Currently, driving while under the influence in New Mexico becomes a felony only after the fourth offense. Likewise, anti-plea bargaining only kicks in if the accused driver had a blood alcohol level of .10 or above — the legal limit is below .08. New Mexico doesn't impose harsh sanctions against repeat offenders, failing to employ minimum one-year "hard license suspension" and mandatory minimum sentences, either, according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Before the New Mexico Legislature sets an example based on faulty assumptions that other state lawmakers around America might parrot, it should consider the unintended consequences and try stiffer penalties before infringing on the public's freedom and the rights of the vast majority of citizens who don't drive drunk.

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Steve Baggs Illustration

DON'T ASSUME...

When I was 21, a beautiful woman leaned over and kissed me in a bar. Unprompted. Full flush, on the mouth. I was in the middle of a sentence.

My friend Chris, an incredibly sexy man in his own right, owns a T-shirt with the phrase "Don't assume I'm straight" printed on the front and on the back, "Don't assume I'm gay." Chris has art tattooed in sleeves down both arms and across much of his chest. Rumor has it, his penis is pierced. He works as a writer and photographer. I know which way he swings, but I'm not telling.

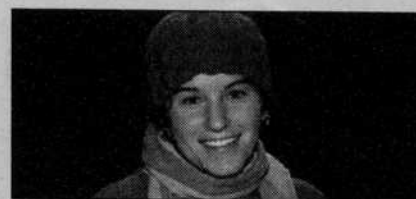
I dated a man once who didn't know how to change the tire on a car. He sat in the passenger seat while I jumped up and down on the tire iron trying to loosen the lug nuts that the serviceman had overtightened after mounting my studs. Eventually I got the tire off, the spare on, and the guy was left by the wayside.

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about gender and sexuality and the roles of men and women in the media. On Feb. 12, Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco, directed the city to begin granting marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Since then, more than 3,200 licenses have been granted to people — not just from the Bay Area, but from around the world.

Newsom's action was in direct opposition

to a California voter-approved law prohibiting gay and lesbian marriages. California State Attorney General Bill Lockyer has said he plans to file a lawsuit against the city to prevent further licenses from being issued.

Newly elected California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," saying he fears the allowance of same-sex marriages will result in civil unrest.



Aimee Rudin
Five feet of fury

"All of a sudden, we see riots, we see protests, we see people clashing," Schwarzenegger said on the show. "The next thing we know, there is injured or there is dead people. We don't want it to go to that extent."

On Tuesday, President George W. Bush backed a Constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriage in the United

States. He said he believed such an amendment would protect the sanctity of the "most enduring human institution."

Here is the president of our nation — a nation that touts itself on personal liberty and opportunity, a nation that was founded in part because of the pursuit for religious freedom — suggesting that language be added to the Constitution that would not ensure freedom but would instead limit it. Way to go, George.

If we as a nation choose to follow our president's advice and place a Constitutional limit on the freedom of individuals to marry whom they choose, then we are doing more than a segment of our population a disservice. We would be wronging the population in its entirety by unjustly restricting freedom.

Mark Twain once said, "Love is not a product of reasonings and statistics. It just comes — none knows whence — and cannot explain itself."

We can't choose the people we fall in love with, but we can choose who we marry. Isn't it important not to limit that choice?

Contact the columnist at aimeerudin@dailymerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Senator Smith's speech full of 'opportunity'

The Emerald published a front-page article on Senator Smith's public speech at the Lane County Republican's Lincoln Day Dinner ("Smith stresses Bush's strength," Feb. 18). His speech reflected the ideals of his conservative party's platform — a

redundant reminder of Republican homogeneity during this current administration.

My only reply: Thank you, Mr. Smith. Thank you for reminding Oregonians "George Bush understands what creates opportunity in America." I have truly appreciated the president's current reforms: the opportunity to restrict birth control, the opportunity to remove funding from education, the opportunity to limit education

reforms and the opportunity for government to close its door on the gay community. For me, these four years have been inundated with opportunity. My only question remains, Mr. Smith: What will be left for Bush if elected for another four years? My opportunity, at least, has been exacerbated.

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