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OUR VIEW

Distraction kills

A law that goes into effect Oct. 1 will increase the penalty for distracted driving in Oregon and broaden the definition of what "distracted" means.

The upgraded punishments reflect the ever-increasing danger of controlling a speeding vehicle while also operating an array of digital devices, which is making our roads as dangerous as they have been in decades.

Using a handheld device while behind the wheel will soon cost you $260 to $1,000 for your first offense, $435 to $2,000 for your second and up to six months in jail for your third. And that's not just talking or texting. Any momentary glance, while in motion or at rest in the roadway, is eligible.

And it could cost you even more than that — a serious injury, an expensive fix, a fatal accident. More than 3,100 people die every year in cell phone-related crashes, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

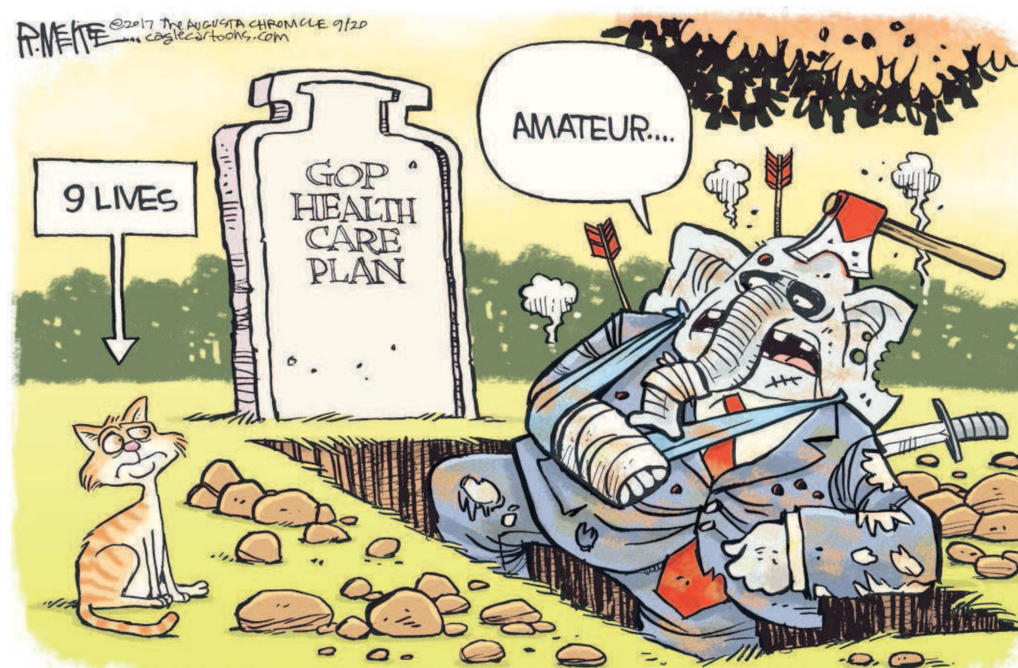
It's a serious public health threat, though not significantly different from ones we have faced before.

Drinking and driving, in the days before the dangers of such action were known, was laughed about or even admired as a rite of passage. But as fatalities mounted and innocent victims demanded to be heard, a nationwide public outcry called out for action. Advertising campaigns broadcast the danger of drinking and driving, law enforcement agencies committed resources to catching lawbreakers, and the justice system upped the penalties for those convicted of engaging in illegal contact.

And although drinking and driving remains an issue, you would be hard-pressed to find any American who doesn't know that it is a dangerous, illegal act that carries with it serious consequences.

That must now be the case with distracted driving as well. Until the not-too-far future when our cars are driving themselves, people are going to be bombarded with more gadgets and gizmos that do not play nice with operating a large piece of machinery traveling fast and carrying our loved ones. Not taking that responsibility seriously must be a serious crime.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Congressional majority leaders look to eliminate minority tool

The New York Times

Now that Republicans control both the White House and Congress, top party officials, including Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, are itching to eliminate the last remaining tool the minority party has to influence a president's picks for the federal courts — the so-called blue slip.

This longtime but informal Senate practice allows a senator to block the nomination of a judge from his or her home state by refusing to sign off on a blue-colored form. The idea was to give senators, who are presumed to be more familiar with the lawyers and judges in their own states, a meaningful say in the choosing of those judges. It also works as an incentive for moderation in staffing the federal judiciary, which, as the only unelected branch of government, depends on the public trust for its legitimacy.

But with Democratic senators now refusing to agree to hearings for two of President Trump's nominees to the federal appeals courts, Mr. McConnell told The Times that the blue slip "ought to simply be a notification of how you're going to vote, not the opportunity to blackball."

What a difference a few years make.

Back in 2009, Mr. McConnell and the entire Republican Senate caucus — then in the minority — implored President Barack Obama to honor all blue slips. The appointment of federal judges is a "shared constitutional responsibility," the Republicans said, warning Mr. Obama that "if we are not consulted on, and approve of, a nominee from our states," the senators intended to prevent that nominee from getting a hearing. They expected the blue-slip policy "to be observed, even-handedly and regardless of party affiliation."

Lucky for them, it was. Senator Patrick Leahy, the veteran Vermont Democrat and chairman of the Judiciary Committee at the time, applied the policy without exception, meaning that a single withheld blue slip would torpedo a judicial nomination.

Republican senators exploited their blue slips with abandon, and with little or no explanation. One senator blocked a nominee because she had once said the Constitution did not protect an individual right to bear arms — an accurate description of the uncertainty about the law at the time. Other senators blocked nominees they had previously approved for other courts, or even recommended to the White House themselves.

This abuse of blue slips led many, including this page, to call for an end to the practice, but Mr. Leahy continued it — as did Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, who became chairman of the Judiciary Committee after Republicans won the Senate in 2014. President Trump now has 144 vacancies to fill on the federal bench, many as a direct result of Republican intransigence during the Obama era. So it's particularly rich, if not surprising, for Republicans to urge its demise.

What led them to this? In short, the same behavior that they had engaged in with impunity. This month, Senator Al Franken, Democrat of Minnesota, refused to return his blue slip for David Stras, a well-respected but very conservative justice on the state's Supreme Court whom Mr. Trump nominated to the Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. Last week, Oregon's two Democratic senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, opposed another of Mr. Trump's court picks, Ryan Bounds.

Unlike their Republican counterparts, however, these Democrats provided a clear explanation for their opposition: The White House, they said, made no meaningful effort to consult with them before making nominations. Mr. Wyden and Mr. Merkley said Mr. Trump had completely bypassed Oregon's bipartisan selection committee.

These are fair complaints. The Constitution gives the president the power to choose federal judges, but only with the "advice and consent" of the Senate. In an earlier era of relative comity and good faith, the blue-slip tradition may have helped to ensure that advice was considered. But in this toxic, hyperpartisan age, there's no simple way to force a president to listen.

And that is not a minor matter. Any president, not least one who lost the popular vote by almost three million votes, should take account of the wishes and concerns of senators of the opposing party. Mr. Obama made concessions to Republican senators in states like Oklahoma and Utah, and he tried for years to negotiate with others, often to no avail. In contrast, Mr. Trump, not even eight months into his presidency, has farmed out the selection of judges to conservative advocacy groups like the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society.

The push toward ever-more extreme judges will only further politicize the third branch. Still, the blue slip is no longer the answer. As we argued in 2014, senators who oppose a nominee can state their objections on the Senate floor and try to persuade their colleagues — something Mitch McConnell was too cowardly to do in 2016, when he refused to allow even a hearing for Merrick Garland, Mr. Obama's pick for the Supreme Court vacancy.

For the next few years, at least, Democrats will have to grit their teeth and watch as hard-right judges begin to restock the federal bench. But Republicans who are gloating right now over their near-total control of Washington might remember one of the more painful realities of politics: No majority lasts forever.

OTHER VIEWS

When life asks for everything

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

I'd like to offer you two models of human development.

The first is what you might call The Four Kinds of Happiness. The lowest kind of happiness is material pleasure, having nice food and clothing and a nice house. Then there is achievement, the pleasure we get from earned and recognized success. Third, there is generativity, the pleasure we get from giving back to others. Finally, the highest kind of happiness is moral joy, the glowing satisfaction we get when we have surrendered ourselves to some noble cause or unconditional love.

The second model is Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. In this conception, we start out trying to satisfy our physical needs, like hunger or thirst. Once those are satisfied we move up to safety needs, economic and physical security. Once those are satisfied we can move up to belonging and love. Then when those are satisfied we can move up to self-esteem. And when that is satisfied we can move up to the pinnacle of development, self-actualization, which is experiencing autonomy and living in a way that expresses our authentic self.

> The highest kind of happiness is moral joy — when we have surrendered ourselves to some noble cause or unconditional love.

The big difference between these two schemes is that The Four Kinds of Happiness moves from the self-transcendence individual to the relational and finally to the transcendent and collective. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, on the other hand, moves from the collective to the relational and, at its peak, to the individual. In one the pinnacle of human existence is in quieting and transcending the self; in the other it is liberating and actualizing the self.

Most religions and moral systems have aimed for self-quieting, figuring that the great human problem is selfishness. But around the middle of the 20th century, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and others aimed to liberate and enlarge the self. They brought us the self-esteem movement, humanistic psychology, and their thinking is still very influential today.

For example, on Tuesday one of America's leading marriage researchers, Eli J. Finkel, publishes an important book called "The All-or-Nothing Marriage." It's quite a good book, full of interesting insights on contemporary marriage. But it conceives marriage completely within the Maslow frame.

In this conception, a marriage exists to support the individual self-actualization of each of the partners. In a marriage, the psychologist Otto Rank wrote, "one individual is helping the other to develop and grow, without infringing too much on the other's personality." You should choose the spouse who will help you elicit the best version of yourself. Spouses coach each other as each seeks to realize his or her most authentic self.

"Increasingly," Finkel writes, "Americans view this definition as a crucial component of the marital relationship."

Now I confess, this strikes me as a cold and detached conception of marriage. If you go into marriage seeking self-actualization, you will always feel frustrated because marriage, and especially parenting, will constantly be dragging you away from the goals of self.

In the Four Happiness frame, by contrast, marriage can be a school in joy. You might go into marriage in a fit of passion, but, if all works out, pretty soon you're chopping vegetables side by side in the kitchen, chasing a naked toddler as he careens giddily down the hall after bath time, staying up nights anxiously waiting for your absent teenager, and every once in a while looking out over a picnic table at the whole crew on some summer evening, feeling a wave of gratitude sweep over you, and experiencing a joy that is greater than anything you could feel as a "self."

And it all happens precisely because the self melded into a single unit called the marriage. Your identity changed. The distinction between giving and receiving, altruism and selfishness faded away because in giving to the unit you are giving to a piece of yourself.

It's not just in marriage, but in everything, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has always pointed toward a chilly, unsatisfying version of self-fulfillment. Most people experience their deepest sense of meaning not when they have placidly met their other needs, but when they come together in crisis.

Rabbi Wolfe Kelman's life was fraught with every insecurity when he marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma, but, he reported: "We felt connected, in song, to the transcendental, the ineffable. We felt triumph and celebration. We felt that things change for the good and nothing is congealed forever. That was a warming, transcendental spiritual experience. Meaning and purpose and mission were beyond exact words."

In one of his many interesting data points, Finkel reports that starting around 1995, both fathers and mothers began spending a lot more time looking after their children. Today, parents spend almost three times more hours in shared parenting than parents in 1975 did. Finkel says this is an extension of the Maslow/Rogers pursuit of self-actualization.

I'd say it's evidence of a repudiation of it. I'd say many of today's parents are moving away from the me-generation ethos and toward covenant, fusion and surrendering love.

None of us lives up to our ideals in marriage or anything else. But at least we can aim high. Maslow's hierarchy of needs too easily devolves into self-absorption. It's time to put it away.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

No sense blaming Obama for logging levels, wildfires

A recent editorial about federal land management and fires covers a topic that is close to my heart — the use of active forest management to better set up our national wildlands for the inevitable wildfires. I was happy to see that you got much of it right, especially with respect to the need to place thinning treatments in strategic places in order to better manage fires.

However (and this is critically important) the editorial took an irresponsible turn when you chose to lay the blame on the Obama administration.

Your statement ("(A)t some point the Obama administration decided nearly all federal forests were off-limits to logging, the best and only way to manage forests") is flat out wrong and unnecessarily divisive. Does every issue have to be viewed through the lens of partisan politics?

Here are the facts: according to the Oregon Department of Forestry, federal annual timber harvest levels in our state were actually higher during the Obama administration than during the G.W. Bush administration (503.75 billion board feet harvested per year 2009-2016 vs. 324 billion board feet per year 2001-2008). Interestingly, the harvest level per year during the Clinton administration was even higher (665 billion board feet/year 1993-2000). I see absolutely no evidence that any particular administration "decided that federal forests were off-limits to logging" as you have so boldly stated — let alone the Obama administration.

In my beloved Blue Mountains National Forests, harvest levels have also risen over the past eight years, due in part to the collaborative approaches to forest management that were encouraged (and funded) by the past administration.

If you want to blame federal laws for our current situation, it is popular to blame the National Environmental Policy Act, the Wilderness Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Be aware that these laws were passed (by Congress) and signed (by the president) in the 1960s and 1970s — under the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

There is enough partisan politics being played in our country right now, and to further polarize the public in the west by falsely laying blame for the 2017 fire season on the Obama administration only makes it worse. I would expect the opinions of the editorial board to be based on real facts, not "alternative facts" or partisan hyperbole. I can get enough of that by reading letters to the editor and social media.

W.C. (Bill) Aney
Pendleton