

News For Thought

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Michigan Governor Vetoes Repeal of Helmet Law

Governor Jennifer Granholm vetoed legislation that would have repealed the state's 37-year-old mandatory motorcycle helmet law, despite the measure having passed the Michigan State Legislature by a 2-1 margin.

Members of ABATE of Michigan accused her of caving in to pressure from insurers, who opposed repeal. ABATE legislative director Jim Rhoades said riders will make their votes count on Election Day.

It didn't take long for the motorcycle group ABATE to cast an endorsement for Granholm's Republican challenger, Dick DeVos, who himself rides a motorcycle and said he would have signed the repeal.

Bikers are hoping they can sway the election. "With the passage of time, they have become much better organized, much more aggressive," said Bill Ballenger, editor of Inside Michigan Politics and a former state lawmaker. "They really go after people in primary elections," Ballenger said. "They've become much more of a force. The question is: Can they make a difference in the general election?"

ABATE claims a high success rate in backing winning candidates. "We usually have about 85 percent voting," Rhoades told reporters. "In the last cycle, we supported 90 candidates and had a 92 percent success rate."

Granholm is currently trailing in the polls. "This will not be over," said Rhoades.

Biker Party Plans Political Impact

Steven Erato earned the nickname "Mad" in the 1970s after writing about the mistreatment of American veterans returning from Vietnam. Thirty years later, he says he's still mad.

It's that indignation toward the system that led Erato to help found the Wisconsin-based

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American Biker Party — a year-old political party whose first convention recently drew national interest.

"We have made it very clear that even though it's called the American Biker Party and it was started by a group of bikers, this is not a biker organization," said Erato, party co-chairman and co-owner of Eagle Nation Cycle in Neenah, WI. "Everybody's welcome."

He said the average American's disgust with special-interest politics has voters searching for an alternative to the status quo, and he believes the American Biker Party has potential to fill that void. The party, hoping to mobilize in all 50 states, plans to someday run its own candidates for elected office, but for now plans to encourage its members to vote for candidates it supports.

Nationwide, about 50 third parties exist in name, but fewer than a dozen are active and viable in more than one or two states, said Austin Cassidy, who runs a Florida-based Web site that tracks third-party politics in America.

"If people realized there's enough of us to form a block on a vote, things could change," said 75-year-old Bob "Bandit" Barbiaux of Green Bay. "I probably won't see it advance too much in my time, but you have to start with a strong foundation before you can put a house on it. I think this is the right direction, and it's a start."

The American Biker Party recently held an organizational and strategic planning meeting in Louisville, Kentucky during the National Coalition of Motorcyclists (NCOM) annual Convention.

Missouri Passes Row Violations Legislation

Missouri Governor Matt Blunt has signed "Clutch's Law" to increase fines and penalties for drivers who commit right-of-way violations that result in injury or death to other road users. Named in memory of John Michael "Clutch" Clubine, an active member of Freedom of the Road Riders (FORR-MO) who was killed by an inattentive driver. Clutch's Law, which will take effect January 1, 2007, allows for additional penalties of up to \$1,000 in fines and a drivers license suspension of up to 180 days, when someone is injured or killed, beyond the other fines for right-of-way violations.

In New York, A4914 addresses what ABATE of New York considers inadequate sentencing of drivers who seriously injure or kill others on the road. Following a three and a half year battle in the statehouse, this right-of-way legislation has passed both houses of the state legislature with unanimous consent votes in both the State Senate and State Assembly, and is on Governor Pataki's desk awaiting his signature. The bill substantially increases the suspension and revocation of license penalties in cases of serious injury or death. It also includes a mechanism for the judge to mandate courses for the perpetrators which they will be required to pay for.

Seven states this year have passed laws to enact or strengthen penalties against right-of-way violators who cause injury or death on the roadways: Louisiana, Wisconsin, Georgia, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Iowa and West Virginia.

Schwarzenegger Finally gets a Motorcycle License

The Governor has finally gotten a motorcycle license after riding his Harley-Davidsons for years in movies and off without one.

Nearly six months after he crashed one of his Harleys into an S.U.V. pulling out of a driveway while riding near his Los Angeles home with his 12-year-old son in a sidecar, the California governor has taken and passed both a written and a riding test and got the required permit. The governor, who needed 15 stitches on his upper lip, said at the time that he had not bothered to get the proper license because he had "never thought about it."

The Los Angeles Police Department did not issue any citations in the accident because department officials said no police officer saw what had happened. Officials at the Department of Motor Vehicles also cleared the governor of any violation, noting that because of the sidecar he was not technically riding on two wheels.

The actor-turned-politician, who broke six ribs in an accident years earlier, reportedly had not ridden since the January crash because he has been too busy governing, but finally found the time to make himself a legal motorcyclist.

Stars Wars Meets T-3

Remote speed control technology, as recently featured in the Terminator 3 movie, is coming next year to London. Using satellite positioning in conjunction with on-board electronics would ensure total compliance with speed limits and would reduce injury accidents by 20%, according to a report issued by the Institute of Transport Studies at Leeds University.

A trial will be undertaken in 2007 with up to 20 vehicles. The Leeds study suggests that the system could be introduced initially on taxis, buses and Greater London Authority vehicles. Private motorists could be offered concessions such as lower insurance premiums to fit the technology.

Weird News A Bright Idea from Yamaha

Yamaha has developed a process for making its bikes glow in the dark. A phosphorescent polymer film, developed by Yamaha of Japan, absorbs sunlight and then releases the energy at night as a soft glow.

In phosphorescent materials, incoming UV light excites electrons to a state that they depart from very slowly, emitting visible light as they do so over many hours.

Yamaha has developed a vacuum pressure process that sticks a thin even layer of phosphorescent plastic film to irregularly shaped fenders, engine covers and cowlings.

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