

Opinion Piece

Words can be deceptive. Over the course of my life I have run into many word that have made me misinterpret what I'm reading or what was said. One of my favorites is the word "moot" and is almost always used as a point that is inarguable but actually means the opposite. Some more common ones may be "effect" being used as "affect", they sound the same but really one is the action and one the result. Some words just one letter can affect an entirely different meaning; you wouldn't use "naval" jelly on a small child after birth, just as the navy wouldn't conduct "navel" exercises in preparation for war. Most recently I have learned through working with the courts and legislature that "must" and "shall" can have a different effect on what we're trying to accomplish as in ABATE's Act 466 legislation. There is one word that I've always known the meaning of that has become the most important to me as an adult though, "MANDATORY". I'm not confused by this word but it seems that many people, including legislators, are. If you are an adult involved heavily in your rights this word should be everything that you abhor. It takes away choices, responsibility, and freedom. It is a patriot's worst nightmare. We toss this word around in society as if it is a solution to our problems rather than a hindrance to free thoughts and ideas. What does this word mean to you?

Mandatory: Authoritatively ordered; obligatory; compulsory. Law: permitting no option; not to be disregarded or modified. Even Webster's definition clearly shows why we shouldn't support anything mandatory but in case you haven't made the connection, I'll outline a few issues I've dealt with lately that make me assumes that not everyone understands the meaning of this nasty word.

Although it is not a motorcycle issue, my first example affects all of us and we all have an opinion on it. The mandatory smoking ban took effect last year and has had an impact on almost everyone I know from individuals to business owners. Although I've heard many people rant about the inconvenience or complain about the loss of freedom to choose, the majority of people I've asked about the subject have said; "I don't mind, I'm glad my clothes don't smell like smoke when I go out" or something similar. Now, nothing was stopping establishments from being smoke free, and hospitals and schools have already had this ban in place for obvious health reasons, so why the need for a mandatory smoking ban? I don't smoke and although my wife does, she would refrain if we were in the company of others that didn't. We all know the dangers of smoking and should understand the myriad of ways that one can get lung cancer but we chose to concentrate our efforts on the people that like to socialize as adults. I thought when I was a kid; I would enjoy personal freedom as an adult. Scratch that one. If the legislature decides to repeal the mandatory smoking ban I'm sure there will be a larger amount of smoke free establishments that will give everyone that freedom of choice we so deserve.

We have all seen the effects of excessive drinking and driving. Catastrophic, life changing events can take place when we choose to drink too much and get behind the wheel or put a leg over our scoot. Over half the motorcycle fatalities in this state are the result of someone having a few too many before riding or driving on the road. I'm sure all of us have an opinion on this issue and I would even bet to say that most think that drinking and driving is wrong. Would you support mandatory absolute sobriety, or better yet the mandatory ban on the sale of alcohol? Maybe we should eliminate alcohol in bars and put in mandatory soda fountains instead? Or, should we leave that decision up to responsible adults that are educated and informed on the effects of drinking too much and not having a designated driver?

I regularly monitor several motorcycle blogs and there have been a few discussions lately that make me wonder if we all understand the meaning of mandatory. A topic that came up at our recent ABATE of WI officer training several times was the offering of experienced rider courses free to our members by our award winning safety program Safe Rider Inc. This program also teaches many riding enthusiasts how to ride and certifies drivers through MSF basic rider course curriculum. I would say that most of the leaders in the room agreed on the need for rider training and continued education and since this is the second year that we've offered the free ERC course I've spoke to many old timers about taking it and there has been good reception of the offer although not many have taken the time to do it. It has been tossed around by the federal government that maybe a mandate of rider training is in order. Everyone that goes to renew their current M endorsement on their license would be required to complete a BRC or similar program if this would be proposed as law. Now, from seeing comments, some of you think this is a great idea. We wholeheartedly support rider training don't we? Well, total support shouldn't mean mandatory. We can just as well educate riders throughout the state the need to be properly trained, since almost twenty percent of motorcycle fatalities happen to riders that aren't properly trained or endorsed. You can believe strongly in something without burdening everyone with a mandate. How long would the waiting line be if we had to train 480,000 motorcyclists every time their license was renewed? How much would it cost? Does everybody agree with its effectiveness? There are many questions to be answered before such a mandate occurs and I would hope that we would always oppose it, even though I would also hope that everyone agrees that rider education is important.

Mandatory seat belt laws. This is an item that I believe comes more from federal blackmail than a concern by Wisconsin legislators to save our lives. Much like the helmet issue, this law is more about personal freedom and adult choice than about safety. As an adult, I understand the need to use personal restraint devices in the event I maybe involved in a crash. I also understand from the continued testimony of many

people that I've spoken to that a seat belt could very well not work when needed, or cause more injury or even death if wearing one in certain crashes. Although this might be a small percentage of crashes compared to the crashes it would help you in, isn't that fact enough to call for a choice in the matter? Is the belief that it "might" help enough to mandate it to all roadway users? I don't know how strong of a voice motorist associations had against this bill, but you can be assured that ABATE of WI weighed in on the issue when presented and we didn't promote mandatory.

My last example seemed to be the most difficult for legislators to understand. I testified before a joint committee of insurance at the Capitol our clear position on the insurance law repeal as decided by our board of directors in January. It seems that besides not understanding our opposition to this bill, many didn't understand how we could be against mandatory insurance but still wanted them to mandate higher rates that insurance companies should offer as the minimum. The answer to why we don't want insurance mandatory should be obvious after reading this article and I proposed that it was the responsibility of the government to educate not mandate on this issue. In 2010 there were 16,591 tickets issued to uninsured drivers which shows me that not only does mandatory not seem to mean mandatory to many drivers, but the eight million in revenue generated by these tickets may offset the cost to the state for charges incurred by underinsured drivers whose victims will undoubtedly need state assistance after a crash. I think they were stumped by a matter of semantics (word choice) on why we wanted the higher minimums to remain. Instead of calling on them to "mandate" these higher minimums, I should have called for them to leave the minimum standards in place. Standards are something the government regularly sets to make sure companies offer consumers a fair, safe, or responsible product. This is just a little different than a mandate although I'm sure this issue was decided before my poor choice of words. It seems that the old standard of 25/50/10 is enough to cover 95% of crashes that occur in this state, although I question whether that would cover even 1% of motorcycle crashes. It should show all motorcyclists that carrying the minimum insurance levels may be cost effective but will never cover you in case of a crash. Everyone should set their UM and UIM to maximum amounts if they want to ever recover fair damages from a crash. I concede to the legislature on this point but I will verify their statistics before conceding. Motorcyclists should not be overlooked. Do you feel that insurance should be mandatory even if minimum standards do not even cover the cost of replacing your motorcycle?

All of us have common beliefs on a variety of issues and I'm sure we all disagree on a number of them also. That is why as educated, responsible adults we should have the freedom of choice. Now, where have I heard that before? Freedom of choice isn't just about helmets, but is about lifestyle and personal responsibility. Whether your choice is about your freedom to eat, drink, smoke, partake in an activity or protect yourself, it should be a choice we make as adults and free Americans not mandated by a government that thinks they know better as to how you should run your life. Act respectful, be educated, and taking responsibility are things that should all be done without further thought as adults. Mandatory is a dirty word.

Any Comment or thoughts let me know preacher@freeriderspress.us

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