

# News For Thought

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## Trooper Tells 911 Caller "Too Bad"

A Connecticut state trooper was suspended for 15 days without pay after he was recorded on a 911 tape saying "too bad" to a caller seeking help for a man injured in a motorcycle accident, reported the Associated Press on March 22, 2005. State police said the dismissive answer caught on tape by Trooper Robert Peasley did not affect the response time to the accident involving Justin Sawyer, 21, who died of a severe head injury a week after the accident last August.

Russell Shepard, a friend of Sawyer's, called 911, which was routed to the state police barracks in Montville, CT. When he reported the accident, officer Peasley said, "Yeah ... too bad," and hung up, according to the audio tape obtained by WTNH-TV.

Shepard said he was shocked, believing he had reached a wrong number. So another friend made a second call. "Yeah," the officer responded. "Help will get there. Shouldn't be playing games." A third emergency call was finally answered by a different dispatcher, who asked about Sawyer's condition and advised those nearby not to touch him.

"I am absolutely outraged every time I hear that 'too bad' and then click," said Sawyer's father, Jim Sawyer. "I only know that I would have felt a whole lot more comfortable if I had heard people responding on the end of that 911 call with some heart and caring." State police said the comments by Peasley, an 18-year-veteran, were unprofessional, and the agency apologized if "our actions added to the family's pain."

## Bikers Lobby Against Nevada Helmet Law

Motorcyclists showed up in force in Carson City to back a bill that would let them ride without helmets if they're at least 21 years old. Senate Bill 151, sponsored by Sen. Bob Beers, R-Las Vegas, would remove the helmet requirement for adults who have been riding for at least a year and who have completed a state-approved motorcycle safety course. Also, passengers over 21 wouldn't have to wear helmets.

"We believe that the real issue is freedom of choice, and there is a double standard," said Rick Eckhardt, a Reno-area resident who questioned why skiers, horseback riders and rock climbers don't have helmet requirements. Eckhardt of the Northern Nevada Coalition of Motorcyclists told the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee he would still wear his helmet 95 percent of the time, but would like the option not to "when it's 114 degrees in Las Vegas."

Beers said 26 states have some sort of helmet law depending on the age of riders, four have no law, and 20 states and the District of Columbia require helmets of all riders.

"I'm not a motorcycle rider. To me this is not about obviously having the wind blow through my hair, but instead about personal freedom and liberty," said Beers who doesn't have a full head of hair. "My concern is that when the government mandates a helmet, it propagates the myth that government can be your parent."

"Education is the key, not helmets or insurance," said Donald Boyer, senior director of Motorcyclists for Nevada. "Let me ask you: If we took all of the motorcycles off the road today, could we close down just one hospital? I wouldn't think so."

## Motorcycle Clubs Oppose Patriot Act

Sacramento April 9, 2005 (AP)

The Northern California Confederation of Clubs, representing 41 motorcycle clubs including the Hells Angels and the Vagos — is asking its members to send letters to their senators opposing the USA Patriot Act. They also oppose California's Gang Abatement Act and a similar measure now before Congress (S 155, HR 970), according to an article appearing in the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

According to Nick Vales, a Vagos member and founder of the Sacramento Bill of Rights Society, the California Justice Department classifies Hells Angels and Vagos as "motorcycle gangs" and treats them the same as street gangs. Critics call this a form of group profiling.

"We are not a gang," said Vales. "Last year we raised money for Christmas presents for the kids at the Sacramento Children's Receiving Home and donated \$1,000 to a school for disabled children in Auburn. In August we sponsor a campout for our own kids."

The federal legislation contains several provisions similar to the Patriot Act, but unlike the Patriot Act, these provisions don't have a "sunset clause," i.e. they are not subject to periodic review and possible expiration. "If they lose those parts of the Patriot Act, they will still have them in the gang law," Vales said.

Under the California Gang Abatement Act, a misdemeanor charge ("like spitting on the sidewalk," said Vales) automatically becomes a felony if you are identified as a gang member, and a six-month sentence can be increased to five or 10 years. It also becomes a strike against you under California's Three-Strike law.

People are being coerced by the threat of long sentences to sign a statement admitting to being a gang member. "This would make me a 'person of interest' under the Patriot Act," Vales said.

"Because of the vagueness of the legislation, if I go to see my brother in Chicago, I can be charged with money laundering because I take cash across a state line and am identified with a motorcycle club."

"Our club also has ties in other countries, such as Mexico and Japan," Vales said. "If I give a club brother in Mexico \$100, I could be charged with supporting terrorism in another country. Even collecting dues for any club or association can be called money laundering. "As a young man I volunteered for the military," he said. "Now they are trying to tell me what to wear, who I can associate with, what causes I can fight for. We're trying to educate all our people that they have rights and should stand up for their rights."

## Australian police want to ban patches

Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan wants laws toughened to crack down further on outlaw "bikie gangs". The police legal services team is reviewing possible legislation, including that affecting bikers, and Commissioner O'Callaghan will take his proposals to Police Minister Michelle Roberts within weeks, according to March 13 The Sunday Times.

South-West district Supt. Ron Randall wants the reforms to include a ban on bikers wearing their colors in public. And they should be stopped from riding in groups bigger than four when moving between towns, he said.

"All I'm saying is that the environment may now be conducive to some debate on this issue, whether or not there is a need for reforms and separate legislation, and whether or not this is viable," he said.

Reforms that might result from such debate would benefit the community because police resources now used to deal with "bikies" could be used elsewhere, he said.

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