

Editorial

Seat belt law would save lives, money

Buckle up. It may save your life. It's not just a good idea — it may soon be the law.

If legislators pass LB495, Nebraska drivers and front-seat passengers would be required to wear the protective devices while operating or riding in most motor vehicles made after 1964.

Some vehicles, such as trucks, buses, mopeds, wheel chairs and taxi cabs, would be exempt from the bill.

Although a seat belt law would restrict Nebraskans' freedom of choice, it would benefit the state.

Proponents say the law would save the state about \$48 million annually and eliminate half of the state's traffic fatalities.

Opponents say the law would be impossible to enforce. Police could not stop all violators, and chances are they would not be able to see whether drivers are using seat belts.

Despite the enforcement problems, the bill should be passed. It would be largely symbolic, but it would help people get into the habit of wearing safety belts.

Sen. Shirley Marsh of Lincoln, one of 16 co-sponsors of the bill, said most people obey laws without police surveillance, so enforcement should not be an issue.

Sen. Patricia Moorhead of Beatrice, another co-sponsor, says the proposed law would save about 85 lives a year and prevent about 2,300 injuries.

Nebraska legislators should act now. If more states make seat belt use mandatory, automakers will not have to install air bags, which are expensive and often ineffective.

Unlike seat belts, the bags offer no protection for drivers who are hit from the rear or the side or in a car that rolls over.

Elizabeth Dole, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, last year ordered automakers to install either air bags or automatic seat belts attached to doors by 1987.

If automakers are forced to install air bags, the cost would be passed on to consumers in states that have no seat belt law.

Safety belts are the best deterrent for traffic deaths and injuries. Most cars are equipped with seat belts. Drivers just need to get in the habit of wearing them.

Maybe a seat belt law could start the habit.



Secular Humanism retains influence

In a column published last week in the Daily Nebraskan, syndicated columnist Richard Cohen claimed that President Reagan's Washington is "obsessed with the mythical, the undefinable and the downright fictional." In defense of this claim Cohen cited as an example of this obsession the fact that Congress recently forbade the expenditure of federal funds to teach "Secular Humanism." To this last phrase he then appended the comment "whatever that is."

ministers along with a scattering of authors, politicians and businessmen — all of whom take their belief in humanism seriously. One of the most influential signers of the first Humanist Manifesto (written in the early 1930s) was John Dewey, typically titled, among other things, the father of modern educational philosophy.

festos speaks of "religious" humanism, while the second manifesto observes that humanism is "a growing, living faith." Similarly, courts have recognized humanism's religious nature. In a footnote in the 1961 case of *Torcasco vs. Watkins*, the U.S. Supreme Court argued that "(among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others."

The author of a recent article in the Yale Law Journal on the unconstitutionality of the introduction of the educational philosophy known, among other names as "Humanistic Education" in the public schools, adequately summarized the contents of the second Humanist Manifesto (written in the early 1970s) as follows: "The Humanist Manifesto II...contains 17 major statements of beliefs, including assertions that God, religions, and the supernatural are at best irrelevant; that specific religious beliefs, including belief in heaven or hell, or any form of life after death, the existence of a separable human 'soul,' and the creation of man by a direct act of God, are dangerous and represent obstacles to human progress; that moral values are wholly relative and situational; that meaning is a function of happiness in 'the here and now,' that the scientific method and reason are the best tools by which to achieve fulfillment as individuals and communities; that no form of sexual conduct short of 'unbridled promiscuity' is evil; and that individuals should have the right to abortion, divorce, and birth control."

In the 1965 Seeger decision, the Supreme Court included nontheistic and humanistic beliefs as religions within the definition of religion for the purpose of the Selective Service statute's conscientious objection exemption. And in a federal court of appeals decision in 1979, Judge Adams, in his concurring opinion in *Malnak vs. Yogi*, persuasively argued that the establishment clause in the First Amendment encompassed nontheistic religions such as Secular Humanism.

The author of the article also rightly observed that the "proponents of Secular Humanism do not unanimously subscribe to all the propositions asserted in Humanist Manifesto II," and that in practice, "the views of Secular Humanists tend to coalesce around a somewhat narrower set of beliefs, such as the relativity of morals, the centrality and dignity of man, and the sufficiency of reason."

Additionally, in several other federal and state court cases during the 1950s, humanism was deemed a religion worthy of protection under the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.

Cohen's derisory comments as to Congress actually believing something called "Secular Humanism" really exists are based on Cohen's own ignorance and are not proper criticisms of a Congress that apparently did more research than Cohen did.

Whether or not Congress ought to have cut off funding for the teaching of this sometimes evangelistic antitheistic religion is a different question. But obviously the term "Secular Humanism" is sufficiently amendable to clear definition that the use of the term in legislation is not superfluous, but rather meaningful.

Consequently, legislative protection from the establishment of this antitheistic religion is at least within the broad purview of proper lawmaking.

The religious nature of Secular Humanism is typically widely acknowledged. The first mani-

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Jim Rogers

Many people seem to share Cohen's thought. That is, a lot of people seem to think that the term "Secular Humanism" really doesn't meaningfully describe any real set of ideas held by real people. Instead, many people think the term was created by Jerry Falwell as a pejorative title to append to that with which he disagreed — whatever that was.

The rather surprising truth is that for decades now groups of people have actually termed themselves "Secular Humanists." Additionally, a few of these groups of people actually subscribe to a "Manifesto" of belief; (available in Love Library); are members of what is called the American Humanist Association; publish a magazine called "The Humanist" (also available in Love Library); and even name a "Humanist of the Year." (Carl Sagan was once so honored).

The Secular Humanism movement was not started in response to fundamentalist proddings (like some people go about wearing buttons terming themselves the "immoral minority"). Rather, the signers of Humanist Manifestos I and II are mainly professors and Unitarian

Political beliefs prompt jeers, insult and attack

Last weekend two friends of mine had the unfortunate experience of being persecuted for their political beliefs.

The two young men attended a local party, bearing no malice of forethought, and certain

members of the party began quizzing them as to their political leanings. An argument ensued when my friends, who tend to be of liberal mind, finally did share their views. Sensing the futility of such an argument my friends opted to leave the party.

Certain members of the party then followed them on the streets, as they were on foot, jeering and hurling insults at them. This culminated in the unprovoked assault upon one of my friends

leaving him with various injuries to the face.

I am appalled at this sort of behavior. Apparently, back at the party, some of the attackers had identified themselves as UNL students. I don't understand how people who claim to be educated can be so ignorant as to resort to violence to satisfy their political frustration. This is the way the Nazi party got started in Germany.

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Letters