

MICHAEL PAULMAN

Broken rule kills amendments

Life has rules. If you break the rules, you suffer the consequences. Stop completely at a red light. Brush your teeth twice a day. Pavement is very, very hard. Well, that last one isn't a rule so much as it is a cold, hard fact. If I were to write a rule about pavement, it would be: Don't slam your head against the cold, hard pavement.



The ever-vigilant lawyers in Nebraska say binding arbitration would take away every person's right to go to court. But exorbitant legal fees have done that already for most of us.

Being the rebel that I am, I have broken all of the preceding rules and a few others besides.

Riding my bike home Monday night, I took a curve too fast — breaking some rule about speeding — and did a nose dive with a half-twist onto the cold, hard pavement.

Thud. Skid. Ouch. I lay on the ground, suffering the consequences of breaking the don't-slam-your-head-against-pavement rule, and I realized I should have followed yet another rule: Wear a helmet, stupid.

Alas, had I not been a stupid schmuck before the crash, I could have saved myself from seeing stars.

Lucky for me, two strangers stopped to see if I was alive, and one of them offered me and my bike a ride home in his pickup.

Don't go out by yourself at night. Always have your Mace ready. Don't ride with strangers.

The pickup driver gave me and the woman who also had stopped his business card — so in case I turned up missing, she would know who did it.

Boy, that was cold comfort. I envisioned police finding my body in a ditch with a business card sticking out of my back pocket.

But I accepted the ride anyway. The business card transaction made me think that I could trust the guy. Plus, I was dazed and bleeding, and I don't think I could have gotten home on my own.

Sometimes, in special circumstances, we can bend the rules.

But not always. Income taxes are due on April

15. You have 90 days before your birthday to renew your driver's license. Amendments to be placed on the ballot must be submitted not less than four months prior to Election Day.

That last rule is making a lot of lawmakers and voters angry. Five amendments were missing on the ballot yesterday because of that rule.

Never mind that lawmakers thought they were well in bounds. The Legislature didn't follow the rules to the letter, the Nebraska Supreme Court said. Therefore, throw the whole mess out.

This mess started when a lawyer saw that Amendment One could put binding arbitration in general contracts.

For those of you who aren't lawyers, binding arbitration is the out-of-court settlement of disputes.

If one party thinks a contract has been broken, the two sides mutually pick a third party to mediate the dispute, and that party's ruling is binding. Hence the name binding arbitration.

If you are a lawyer, binding arbitration means that disgruntled people no longer will go to court to settle contract disputes.

In other words, lawyers' services — which do not come cheap — will no longer be needed in many cases, freeing up the courts to deal with more pressing problems like crime.

Hence again the name binding arbitration. Arbitration would be a real bind to a lot of lawyers' pocketbooks.

The Nebraska Supreme Court voted 4-3 on Friday that, according to the four-month rule, the amendments were submitted one day too late and therefore should be buried under a large rock where the voters can't get to them.

As backlogged as it is, the Supreme Court should welcome a way to relieve its burden, especially a way that already has been approved in 47 other states.

I smell a rat. What did the justices on the Supreme Court do before they hit the big time? Gee, I'll bet they were lawyers.

Don't trust lawyers. Don't EVER trust lawyers. And don't ever trust lawyers to do what's best for the legal system.

These rules stem from one simple fact: Lawyers are the ones making a profit from the legal system.

The ever-vigilant lawyers in Nebraska say binding arbitration would take away every person's right to go to court. But exorbitant legal fees have done that already for most of us.

My stance on arbitration is irrelevant, however, because the court has told voters that they can't be trusted.

In this ruling, the court has broken the unwritten rule of democracy: that the voice of the voters should be heard above everything else.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHAEL JUSTICE

Child killings hard to fathom

Union, S.C., is a small town of less than 10,000. Spartanburg is the closest "big city," and it only holds about 30,000 people. Actually, the whole state of South Carolina has half the population of my sweet home, Chicago. Small indeed.

That's what makes the Susan V. Smith story so hard to believe.

Mothers being accused of killing their babies is something that only happens in cities like Chicago and New York, right? I guess not.

According to Newsweek, Thursday afternoon — after crying on national television that week and begging people to pray for her sons' return that morning — authorities said Smith confessed to murdering her children and was arrested.

The mother of 3-year-old Michael and 14-month-old Alexander had carefully strapped them into their car seats before sending them to their deaths at the bottom of John D. Long Lake, according to reports in Time. Totally defenseless, her sons would trust her to any end.

She may have been suffering from emotional stress or financial worries, or a combination of many things. Whatever. Nothing gives a mother the right to take two lives.

Try to imagine what was going through young Michael's mind when the car began to roll off the end of the boat dock and into the lake.

According to a police official quoted in Newsweek, Susan Smith told investigators that Michael, secured in his car seat, woke up (he had been sleeping) and began to struggle. "He was struggling in absolute terror for his life," the official said, recalling Smith's conversations with police.

I can't think of a strong enough word for this crime, probably



The only mistake these children ever made was to be born to rotten, worthless parents who just didn't care.

because there isn't one.

What's more disturbing is the number of cases of parents killing their children.

In West Palm Beach, Fla., a woman by the name of Clover Demerr Boykin, age 19, confessed to strangling her 4-month-old son and a friend's 9-month-old child while baby-sitting. According to police, Boykin said she wanted to retaliate for abuse she suffered as a child. She faces first-degree murder charges, but deserves much more than any punishment the state can hand down.

People who kill other people should be killed, plain and simple. If they cannot value and respect another's life, why should they deserve any respect for theirs?

We are all hypocrites if we grant them amnesty, and we, too, should be damned for not respecting the life that had been stolen.

Especially the lives of all these innocent children. We are their guardians, everyone of us who considers ourselves adults. Perhaps that is what went wrong in South Carolina and Florida. They were not responsible enough to be adults, much less to have children. The only mistake these children ever made was to be born to rotten, worthless parents who just didn't care.

There is one more child who

not an ordinary one. His name was Jamie Butcher, 34, of White Bear Lake, Minn. His body died Saturday, Nov. 5, in his mother's arms, but his mind and soul passed on 17 years ago when he was involved in a car wreck that left him in a vegetative state.

For 17 years, Jamie's parents fed him, bathed him, talked to him, all the while hoping and praying that by some miracle their son would come back to them, that he would wake up one day and everything would be okay. That never happened.

Think of all the energy, the love, the money to keep him alive. But most importantly, think of the emotional effort expended by Jamie's parents. Then consider the lack of love and interest given to those small children by their miserable parents.

I'm going to go out on a limb here, but I think that Jamie's parents would give anything to have their son back, if only for a day, just to tell him that they love him and will miss him.

I wonder if Susan or Clover told their kids they loved them before they died.

Probably not.

Justice is a news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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