

OPINION

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Daily
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High speed abuse

Police chase issue headed wrong way

Two weeks ago, the life of a Tampa, Fla., woman was saved from police by an airbag.

Elizabeth Meyers was driving through Tampa when a car being chased by police struck her auto head on. Police were pursuing the suspect for erratic driving. He was killed in the accident. The only thing that saved Meyers was the airbag in her 1995 Pontiac.

Later, it was discovered the car the suspect was driving was stolen, but police did not know it at the time of the chase.

Unfortunately, this is just one of numerous abuses of this dangerous police tool — the high speed chase. It also serves as an important reminder that Nebraska's strict liability law in police chases needs to stay in place.

But state lawmakers have taken a step in the wrong direction.

State legislators Wednesday resurrected a bill that would make accident victims in police chases prove police negligence in order to collect damages. A 31-14 vote gave new life to Legislative Bill 952. It was killed two weeks ago in committee.

Sen. Dave Maurstad of Beatrice, who sponsored the bill and has tagged it as his priority bill, said he doesn't intend for the bill to change police chase policies.

Omaha Assistant City Attorney Tom Mumgaard testified in committee that police have learned their lesson regarding unnecessary police chases. However, relaxing liability may help them forget.

In Tampa, since May of last year when police resumed chases, 39 of 88 chases have resulted in crashes. And where there are car crashes there are injuries or death not only for suspects or police but for innocent bystanders.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha said the bill would "make it almost impossible" for a victim to recover financially from an accident.

"The vast majority of these chases result from some minor traffic infraction," Chambers said. "These chases are irresponsible. They create a danger to the public."

Police in Nebraska may disagree with Chambers, but actually, he sounds very much like a police chief in Gwinnett County, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta.

"Police pursuits are inherently dangerous, and pose a risk to the safety of citizens, as well as members of the department," Gwinnett Police Chief Carl White told The Atlanta Journal.

White has implemented a policy that allows police chases only when the suspect is known to have committed murder, aggravated assault, rape or some other violent crime. Since the policy took effect, some surrounding counties have followed with similar policies, and the number of chases has declined dramatically.

"Before, we were often chasing for traffic violations, and it was not worth risking life and limb," White said.

Nebraska needs to maintain its strict liability law regarding chases to prevent police from abusing this tool and to provide innocent victims some recourse.

If police are given too much rope on police chases, they will not only hang themselves; they will injure or kill other people.

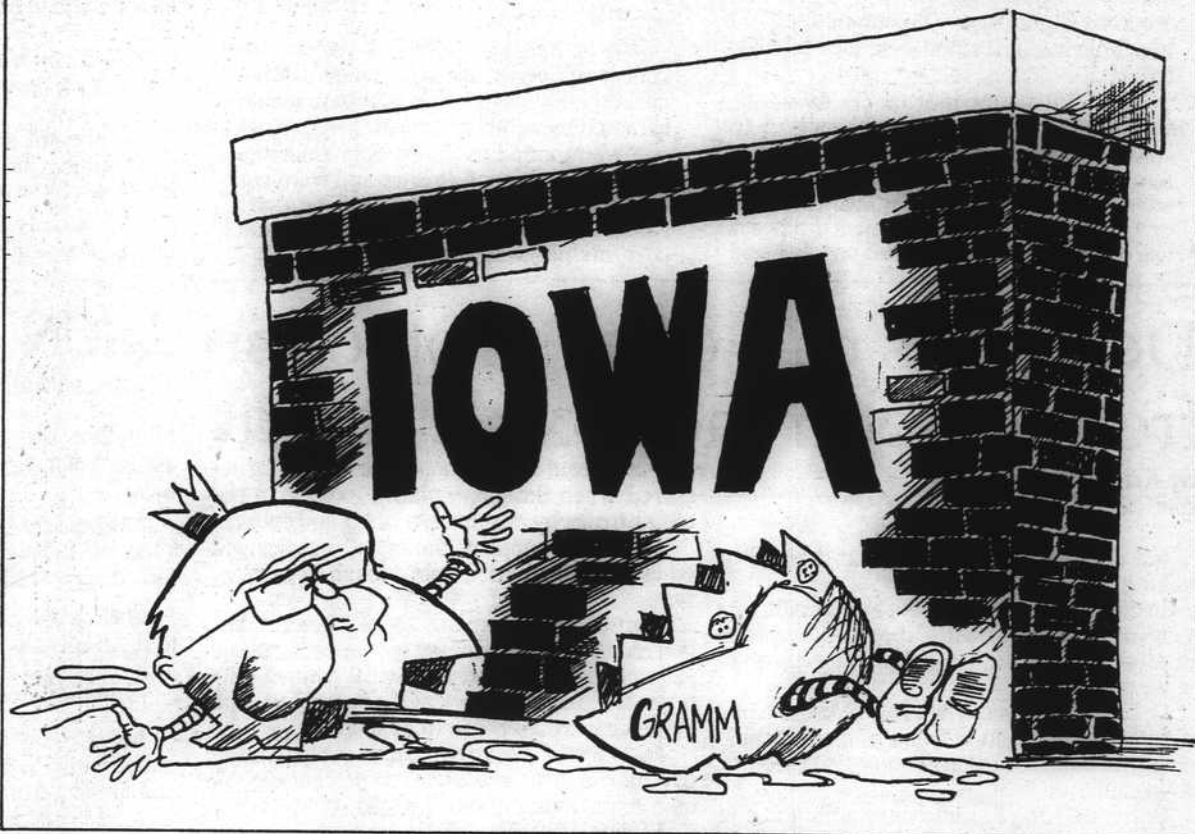
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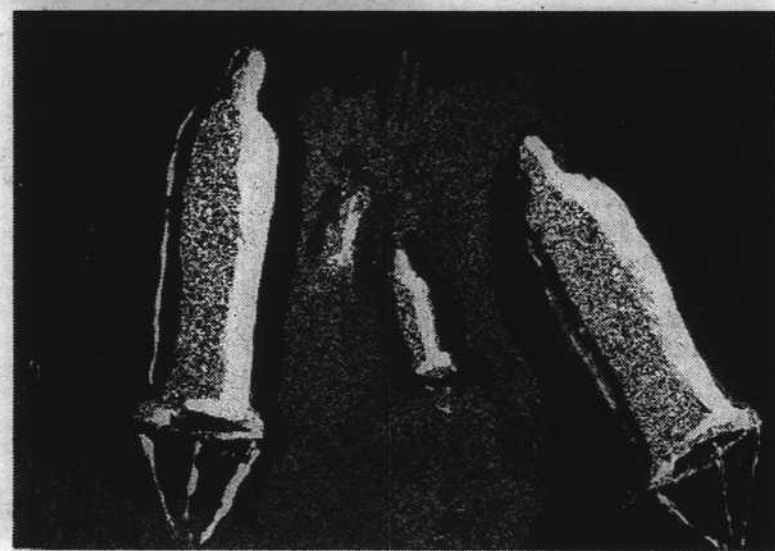
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Incredible shrinking student section

I would like to comment on the current situation that students are in when they attend a football, volleyball, or men's basketball game. In simple terms, we are getting dumped on. Thank you Bill Byrne, you have successfully screwed the students of this university out of decent seating at football games, and volleyball and men's basketball are not far behind. When I was a freshman back in 1989, I sat on the 40-yard line on the east side. The worst student seats were down on about the south 15-yard line. Now since Bill Byrne has been here, he has crammed us into the SE corner and wants to push us farther back! You have taken every measure in your power to make sure we have no way to sell our tickets if we don't wish to go. The entire Fiesta Bowl ticket arrangement was a joke. The general public could buy up and scalp any amount of tickets, but if a student wanted to buy some and sell them, even to another student, they had to show ID at the game!

The people who have been bitching lately about the students in front of them obviously haven't been to games in the last 50 years or so. They don't realize that we get fired up about the games and stand through them. Simple solution, give us back the entire middle of the east side. Of course, you can't do that Bill, there is no money in that.

For basketball, we are slowly being pushed aside as well! At the Kansas game, about a third of the south side of the student section was roped off reserved. Money involved? Special high priced seats? Each year, the reserved section of the lower level grows larger into the student seating. What is the reasoning? Also, the rule that says only those with ID's will get onto the floor at the Sports Center is another joke. I can't validate a ticket and bring my brother and a friend because they have no student ID. They have to sit clear on top in the nosebleed section. Oops, I forgot, students don't get to sell tickets, only the Athletic Department. Those of us who wanted to see the lady Cornhuskers on their quest for the National Championship in volleyball also got the shaft, when the tickets we purchased were nowhere near the



Bret Gottschall/DN

normal ones we had during the season. We weren't reminded when we bought tickets that they were nosebleed section!

In closing, I would like to ask Bill Byrne to please either give us, the students, a little respect or go back to where you came from. I for one have never liked you or your agenda, and I doubt I ever will.

Jon Herrera
senior
secondary education

Teen sex a deadly plunge

In the editorial "Deserved Protection" (Feb. 14), you put forth, with appropriate gravity, the following analogy in support of supplying teen-agers with condoms: "If someone swims out into choppy water and starts to go under . . . We throw them a lifeline." Wrong analogy. I'd suggest that a more appropriate one for the concept of condoms as a cure-all for teen sex would be, "If someone wants to plunge over Niagara Falls, we give them an inner tube."

James Freeman
Omaha

"Truth" changes

I want it made clear that John Osterholm's comments in the Feb. 14 DN do not apply to me. He says: "Anything that interferes with the general public that is not of majority

consent is purely showmanship that is completely laughed at by the rest of us." Sorry, John, I don't see the humor. The use of the words "anything," "purely," and "completely" suggest to me that John has not thought through this statement carefully. Aside from the generalizations, I disagree with the statement's implication that the "majority" is always right. I am not an expert in history but it seems to me that minority opinions have had a significant impact on the opinions and values of the "majority." Perhaps one of the more notable (and analogous) is the history of blacks in America. Majority opinion (at least the way we chose to define majority) suggested that it was appropriate to treat individuals as property based solely on the color of their skin. One of the many ways these attitudes changed was through the "pure showmanship" of a concerned minority. When you think about it, the "majority" has a pretty poor track record. Consider what our ancestors accepted as "gospel truth." We are fortunate that

in the United States that minority opinion and belief is protected under free speech. We are better for it. I don't mind Bob Ray, John Osterholm, and Eric Anderson espousing opinions with which I disagree. I don't mind that they use rhetorical strategies to sidestep the issues. I just wish they wouldn't do it in public.

James Keim
graduate student
English