

Opinion

A good belt

Preliminary results of the mandatory seat belt law look good. The first four months show a reduction in traffic fatalities and insurance premiums. But the determination of pro-belt groups such as the Texas Coalition for Safety Belts still needs to be directed in other areas.

State Sen. Ted Lyon, D-Rockwall, a sponsor of seat belt legislation, says the period from September to December of 1985 shows a 14 percent decrease in the number of front-seat fatalities over 1984.

Lyon says the law also is responsible for the 5.1 percent reduction in average statewide auto insurance premiums by the State Board of Insurance — a \$137 million annual saving to insurance buyers.

Based on these early reports, the seat belt law could be considered a success, especially since most of the findings cover the grace period from Sept. 1 to Dec. 1 when motorists were not fined for driving beltless.

If equal vigor were put into adopting an open container law, perhaps Texas also could reduce the number of alcohol-related automobile fatalities — 1,049 in 1984.

If an open container law were pursued with the stamina of the seat belt law, Texas could end its drink-and-drive-just-buckle-up highway hypocrisy.

If something as unpopular as a mandatory seat belt law can be so successful early on, imagine the support for something as socially acceptable as curtailing drinking and driving.

The seat belt law protects drivers from themselves when they drink and drive, now we need an open container law to protect the potential victims as well.

The Battalion Editorial Board



Texas: How it's changed over the last 150 years

On March 2, 1836 delegates to the Washington-on-the-Brazos convention unanimously adopted a declaration proclaiming Texas independent from Mexico.



Glenn Murtha

On March 2, 1986 Texans celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Republic and eventual state of Texas.

Much has changed in the state over the past 150 years. Texas has the distinction of being one of the most culturally diverse states in the union. Much of this diversity has been achieved in the last two decades.

How is Texas changing? In 1974 the U.S. Bureau of Census estimated that

Texas had surpassed Pennsylvania to become the third most populous state in the nation, with 12 million people. The 1980 census counted 14 million people. A 1985 census estimate revealed a population of approximately 16.5 million Texans. If the present rate of growth continues, Texas could become the 2nd most populous state by the 1990 census.

Who are these people? The three predominant ethnic groups in Texas are Anglos, Mexican-Americans and blacks. The Anglo group, which includes whites, accounts for 70 percent of the Texas population. Immigrants from Mexico have swelled the Mexican-American population to 21 percent of the total. Blacks account for 12 percent of the population and are heavily concentrated in urban areas.

Where do they live? At the turn of the century 80 percent of Texans lived in rural areas. Today 80 percent of Texans

live in urban areas. Houston and Dallas, neither of which existed during the birth of the Republic, are now among the 10 largest cities in the United States.

Where do they come from? Texas seems to be overwhelmed by a new influx of "Yankees". But during the 1970s only three of the top 10 states providing new residents were located in the north. These 10 states were California, New York, Illinois, Ohio, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arkansas. The presence of northerners tends to be felt disproportionately to their numbers possibly because of their odd dialects, outspokenness and liberal ideas.

What do they believe? The two states which provided the most new residents, California and New York, can be considered as two of the most politically liberal states in the nation. Texas has traditionally exercised more conservative,

Bible Belt values. These new residents are bringing new ideas, conflict and change. California and New York are diverse states but both lack the large, religiously-oriented conservative faction of Texas. Texas may maintain its large religious faction, but traditional religious cultural domination is ending with the arrival of new residents.

With whom do they worship? Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics account for two-thirds of the Texas church-going population. Roman Catholics have made tremendous numerical gains in Texas in recent years. The large influx of Mexicans and northern immigrants is primarily responsible for the increase. About 19 percent of Texans are Southern Baptist and 17 percent Roman Catholic. The Texas Jewish community is expanding rapidly. About 90,000 Jews reside in Texas with over half concentrated in Houston. Houston

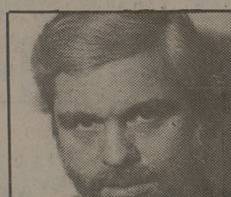
also contains large Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh populations. Texas is also home to the irreligious. The national headquarters of American Atheists led by the outspoken Madalyn Murray O'Hair (an ex-Yankee) is located in Austin.

A great deal has changed in Texas since independence from Mexico declared 150 years ago with much of change occurring in the past two decades. The large influx of new residents has added much to the richness and diversity of our state. Let's hope that we continue to expand upon our diversity as we begin another 150 years.

Glenn Murtha is a senior political science major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Don't play cards with a man named Ron

"Never eat at a place called 'Mom's,' never play cards with a man called 'Doc' and never make love to women crazier than you are." So goes an old American adage on some of the eternal verities. One of those verities is about to be changed, though. I, for one, would never play cards with a man named Ron.



Richard Cohen

Doc Ron has done it again. After figuratively putting an arm around the

shoulder of Ferdinand Marcos, dispatching his vice president to slobber a toast to the nonexistent Filipino democracy, suggesting the opposition and the government were equally to blame for fraud and violence and then — tick, tick, how the clock doth tick — waiting until he and Marcos shared the same vision of the future, things turned out splendidly. When the president turned over his cards, there was Cory Aquino, mellow in yellow, smiling up at him. He had won again.

In a recent issue of "Foreign Affairs," Michael Mandelbaum writes about "The Luck of the President." Mandelbaum counts the ways. Soviet leaders kept dying, making it hard — or harder — for

America's chief adversary to be creatively adversarial. The president came into office campaigning against the SALT II treaty and then, lo and behold, realized that it was a good thing after all. It is a lucky thing to discover the uses of something you were once willing to throw out.

In the Middle East, the president's peace initiatives have been spectacular failures, but it hardly matters. The Israelis and the Arabs make no war anyway. The price of oil, once sky-high, fell during Reagan's tenure and, more recently, has plummeted. For Reagan, there is effect but no cause. He had nothing to do with it. Even the administration's recent attempt to cheat on

Israelis by flirting with the PLO created nothing like the fire-storm produced when Andrew Young attempted something similar. The Israelis are bitter, but they have decided to hold their tongue.

The Philippines, though, shows Reagan at his sheer luckiest. In the truest sense, he personally had no policy, unless it was the wish that Marcos somehow pull through. Despite the kudos he is now receiving for a job well done, the fact is that for too long he did next to nothing. The bloodshed that accompanied the elections might have been avoided had Reagan and the United States not suggested to Marcos over the years that he could, literally, get away with murder. He took the United States at its word.

The Philippines crisis did produce some genuine heroes — if that is the right word. One of them is Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), who had to tell the president the facts of life. Another, sort of, was the Pentagon, which warned that there would be no comfy California exile for Filipino army officers who caused bloodshed. But the truest heroes were the Filipinos themselves — the people, the Catholic church, its prelate and, of course, all those people for whom democracy is not a slogan, but a conviction. It is doubtful today that they would give our president the sort of hero's welcome he got in Grenada.

In the Reagan imagination, the foe is a wishy-washy figure, a kind of latter-day Gandhi, whose dreamy but misguided efforts are always doomed to failure in the cruel world beyond Beverly Hills. If you had to draw such a person, she would look like Cory Aquino, a breeze of a figure who makes St. Joan seem like an apostle of realpolitik. Nevertheless, she sits today in the president's chair, a repudiation of Reagan's world view, an asterisk to the writings of Jeane Kirkpatrick. Reagan was wrong, Aquino was right, but he wins anyway.

Unlike Marcos, the president of the United States is a realist. In the end, he did what he had to do, and Marcos went

the way of loyalty to Taiwan and constructive engagement for South Africa. I suppose others might have lashed themselves to the mast with their ideology and gone down with the ship. When the United States finally did move, moved deftly, showing the world what the term "great power" means. And how from Uncle Sam was about all took.

One thesis of the Mandelbaum article is that Reagan's luck, while formidable, does not fully account for his foreign policy success. His luck could be the fruit of wise policies or, at the least, a dictate (his) view of the world. But in the Philippines, he initially played all the wrong cards, won anyway, and now his critics and Marcos eat at the same place. It's called "Mom's."

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