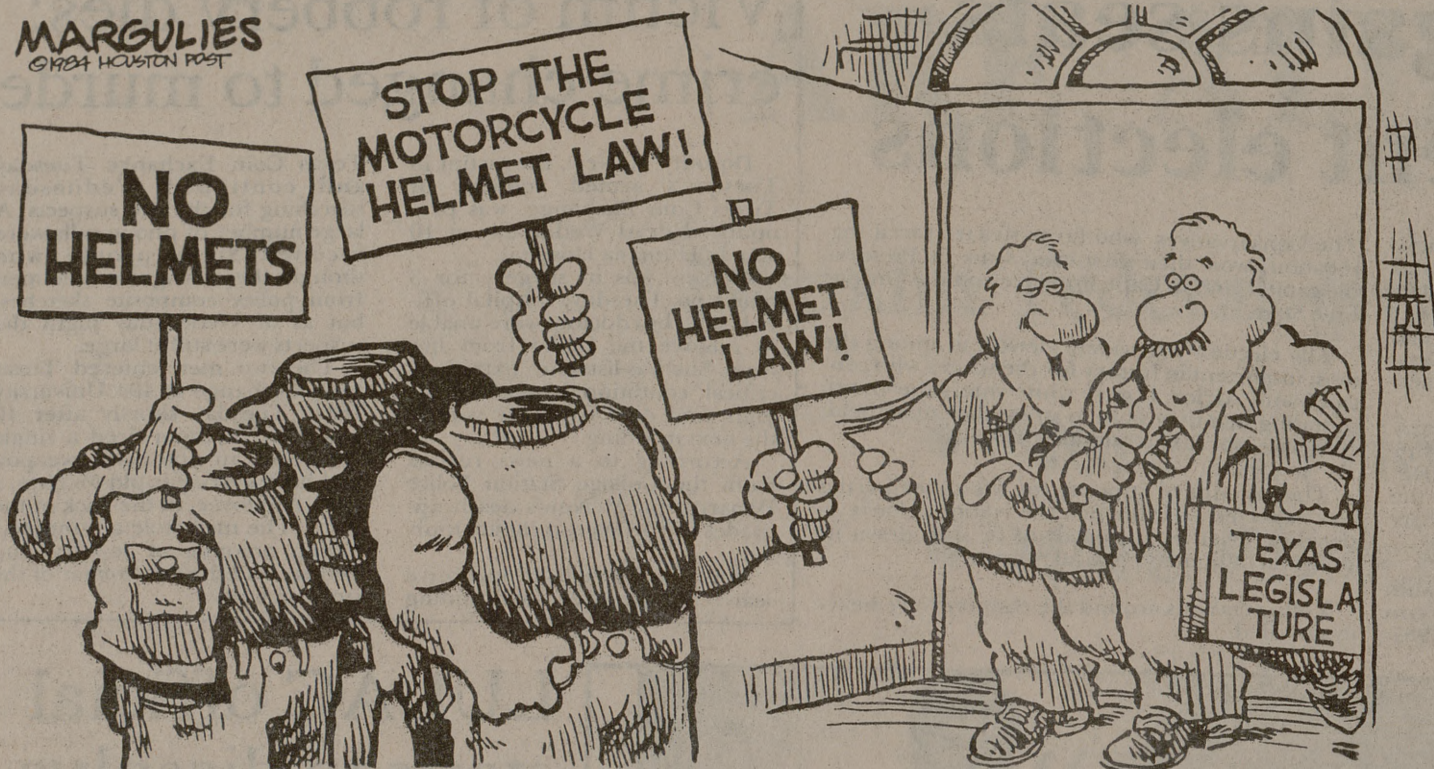


Point / Counterpoint: motorcycle helmet law

MARGULIES
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"Some of those protesters make a strong case for not needing helmets"

Helmet law may cause accidents

Last Friday was September 1, the day all motorcycle and scooter owners have been dreading for months. As of last Friday, if you want to ride a motorcycle or scooter in Texas, you must wear a helmet. And don't think you are excused because your Spree only has a 50cc engine, or because you only drive on campus or even because the helmet won't fit over the bow in your perfectly teased hair. The Texas Legislature is serious about this one. And there are NO exceptions.



Damon Arhos
Columnist

Both legislators and law enforcement officials have said the new helmet law will start saving lives immediately. I am sure many of our legislators voted for the helmet bill envisioning cyclists zooming across the highways of Texas on powerful Ninjas and revved-up Harley-Davidsons. And surely a helmet could be viable protection against head injuries for these riders, especially considering the incredible rates of speed at which these monsters travel. Surely, right?

Well this MAY be all fine and dandy for those riders who travel over 35 miles per hour, but the legislature neglected to consider two important issues related to mandatory helmet wearing.

First of all, if our elected representatives are REQUIRING us to wear helmets, they are essentially telling us we are not responsible enough to make a decision for or against wearing a helmet for ourselves. As adults, we are supposed to be able to make rational decisions about our lives. At 18, we can make decisions about who will run our government. At 21, we can decide whether or not to partake in the con-

sumption of alcoholic beverages. But, as of last Friday, there is no age at which we can make our own decision about whether or not to wear a helmet.

What is important is the ability of the people of Texas to make their own decisions about wearing a helmet. The citizens of Texas have a right to make this decision for themselves. And the legislature needs to drop the "mom and dad" approach to lawmaking.

Secondly, I doubt many of our legislators thought about how many people (ESPECIALLY college students) ride low-powered scooters that don't go any faster than a bicycle. I know you have seen all of the scooter riders all over campus wearing helmets and looking like total GEEKS doing so. (And I know they look like geeks because I am one of them.)

How effective can a helmet be when you travel on campus at a maximum of 20 miles per hour? Can't a ten-speed bicycle go 20 miles per hour? Why don't bicyclists have to look like geeks too?

Actually, I have found that my helmet prevents me from seeing much of what is around me, lowers audibility and heats up to around 900 degrees inside so that I concentrate more on how long

it is before I can take it off than on the road. These factors could cause a serious accident! But lucky for me that if they do, my helmet will protect me.

To make matters worse, the Bryan and College Station police departments have thrown the 90 day grace period out the window, leaving the decision of whether or not to give helmet violators tickets up to each individual officer. Even the Texas Department of Public Safety is going to give 90 days worth of warnings to those speed demons on Ninjas going 115 down Texas' highways. But our friendly neighborhood policemen are out in force, tracking down every person who is DARING enough to ride a 50cc scooter without a helmet. So if anyone tells you there is a grace period in greater Bryan-College Station, tell them they're wrong.

The Texas Legislature needs to rethink its position on the helmet law. If you are old enough to make a decision about whether or not to ride a motorcycle, you are old enough to decide about whether or not to wear a helmet. And having to wear a helmet while riding a scooter that does not go any faster than a bicycle is unreasonable and could even prove to be dangerous on a heavily populated campus such as ours.

But until the legislature is inclined to change the law, helmets are here to stay. So if you want fresh air whizzing by your sunlit face as you enjoy riding your motorcycle down a rustic highway — walk your motorcycle to the state line and have at it. Otherwise, it's helmet time.

Damon Arhos is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Helmet law may accidentally save people's lives

The motorcycle helmet law has been attacked as a useless law that creates more problems than it solves. Yet I think it is a good law, one that this state and many others need.



Timm Doolen
Assistant
Opinion
Page Editor

Occasionally our government feels the need to save society from itself. That's why we have the seat belt laws, drug laws and prostitution laws. None of the vices these laws are designed to prevent directly hurt anybody except ourselves, but the government decides that we should be saved from ourselves, and so encodes those feelings into law.

I'm not saying this class of laws is right or proper, just that it exists.

The seat belt law and the new motorcycle helmet law are very similar in nature. Yet the seat belt laws in this country serve an additional malevolent purpose: they help continue to prevent the mandatory installation of airbags in cars. The automobile industry lobby has successfully challenged initiatives to have mandatory airbags installed in all new cars, because the auto industry would have to pay a little extra for the thousands of lives saved per year. Airbags in cars would save many more lives than any law about seatbelts could.

Unfortunately, airbags would do no good for motorcycle riders, so the riders must protect themselves. And the helmet law does not serve an auxiliary purpose as does seatbelt law.

The helmet law is designed to protect riders from the most dangerous part of the motorcycle riding experience — the unexpected.

I have personally had two motorcycle accidents in the past seven years. The first time a helmet probably saved my life. Six years later, the lack of a helmet could have cost me my life, had circumstances been different.

Every time I get on a motorcycle, whether as a passenger or driver, I feel insecure and scared without a helmet. When I do have a helmet, I feel safe and very secure, no matter how bad the driver.

I'm sure almost all experienced motorcycle drivers know they should wear

a helmet, simply because they do have complete control of the motorcycle when they ride, and unexpected accidents do occur no matter how careful the driver. All motorcycles are very dangerous, even the small ones, for it only one second to lose balance and possibly lose your life.

Although many people realize they should wear a helmet, many don't wear it all the time (including me), because "it's only a short trip," or "I won't be going very fast" or "I'll be extra careful because I don't have a helmet." Yet, the most cautious drivers never expect an accident to happen, it just does.

I hope the law makes those who sometimes wear helmets wear them the time and those who *should* wear helmets and don't, wear them more often.

But honestly, I hope Texas police officers are not too strict with enforcement of the law, because I know I have great disdain when police try to enforce the seat belt law. After all, it's a law designed to protect me, why should I have to pay for it? I just hope that the law causes someone to think twice about helmet when they get on a motorcycle.

Yes, the helmet is unattractive, messes up your hair, it's hot and makes it harder to hear. These are all legitimate concerns. And I can see the students who ride 50cc scooters are inconvenienced, knowing they will probably never have a wreck.

Looking like a geek and getting mugged up hair is an inconvenience to motorcycle and scooter owners should learn to live with. After all, it may accidentally save their lives.

Timm Doolen is a junior computer science major and assistant opinion page editor for The Battalion.

Mail Call

Silver Taps means Shhhh!!

EDITOR:

Last night at Silver Taps, I was very disgusted with the behavior of many people going to, attending and leaving the ceremony. I saw people laughing and talking as if they were headed to some place like the Chicken.

Silver taps is not a social gathering! The sole purpose of the ceremony is to bring fellow Aggies together to pay final respects and say prayers for the departed and their families.

Just do me one favor Ags. When you leave the dorm, apartment, etc., remember why you're going to Silver Taps. It's not to go and catch a glimpse of the Ross Volunteers or to meet new friends. The ceremony is a final tribute paid to a fellow Aggie who has passed away!

Tom Wilson '91

More parking needed!

EDITOR:

I wish to call to your attention the parking situation in the parking lot that serves the Horticulture/Forest Science building, the Rosenthal Meat Science Lab, Kleberg, the Heep Center and the new Biochemistry Building. Due to the recent completion of the Biochemistry Building, there is a sudden shortage of parking spaces.

I realize parking problems are nothing new on this campus, however I feel this problem merits special attention. First, the lot is already full. The problem is that students are able to use the first half of the lot that is reserved for staff

because the sign at the entrance to the lot still has the words, "any valid permit except park and ride" written on it.

Once this sign has been changed to read staff only, there will be less than half of the lot left for the same number of students to park in.

I do not see where we are expected to park. The fish lots are near capacity, as are the blue lots at the Medical Sciences Library and the Vet School.

I feel whoever plans the parking has been terribly remiss in their duties. This new building has been under construction for quite some time.

There should have been some new parking being constructed concurrently with the building. At least the existing lots could have been expanded on to some of the grassy areas surrounding the lots.

Expansion would not have solved the problem, but **anything** would have helped.

Who is responsible for this poor planning? I wish *The Battalion* would do a story on this problem, including the individual responsible for the planning.

I don't expect to have a place available every time I arrive on campus, but I don't expect not to be able to find one at 8 a.m.

Neal Maranto '88
accompanied by 10 signatures

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff serves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to retain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the class, address and telephone number of the writer.

STAY TOONED

Thanks for the overwhelming response to our request for cartoon suggestions. The cartoon hotline is now officially closed. The results will be published in Friday's *Battalion*.

The Battalion

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