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OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Thursday, June 5, 2003

TICKET THIS

'Click It or Ticket' campaign a waste of taxpayer money and police resources

Only a week into summer vacation, many students found themselves staring at a now-familiar "public service announcement." In it a young man in his vehicle pulls up to a stoplight. Casually, he glances to his left and freezes for a moment, seeing a police officer next to him, realizing he's broken the law. A look of fear washes over his face as he sinks down in his seat, attempting to hide his crime from the officer. It is, however, too late. sirens blare as he cringes, knowing he's caught.

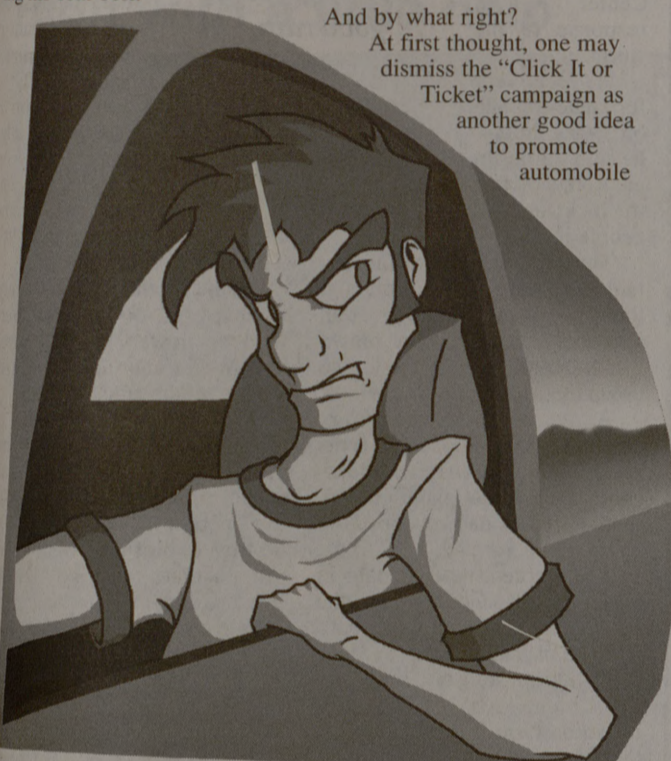
Was he driving a stolen vehicle, or maybe had a kidnapped woman in the passenger seat? Did he have a murdered body in his trunk? No, this man was being stopped by the police for not wearing his seat belt.



MIKE WALTERS

And by what right?

At first thought, one may dismiss the "Click It or Ticket" campaign as another good idea to promote automobile



safety by a group such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving. This would be an excellent campaign were that the case. It's no secret that wearing your seat belt properly decreases your chance of being injured or killed in an auto accident. The fact of the matter is, this is not a campaign led and funded by a private organization — it's a statewide operation using tax dollars from the federal government. According to the Texas Department of Transportation Web site, it's using 4.2 million of them.

The "Click It or Ticket" campaign promotes a concept that, while meaning well, operates in manners and principles that infringe on the valued freedom America was founded upon. According to the Insurance Institute for highway safety, only 18 states and the District of Columbia have primary seat belt laws, meaning that police can stop vehicles and ticket them solely for seat belt law violations. However, the use of federal tax dollars to fund this campaign quietly forces the other 32 states to help implement a law they don't even have. It uses federal tax dollars to fund a state law, which means that citizens who live in states without seat belt laws are paying for a campaign to promote our own law.

Besides paying for advertisements and road signs, the funds include the requirement of state and local officers to work overtime and sit beside streets and highways for the sole purpose of stopping automobiles whose passengers are in violation of seat belt laws. While these officers sit on the roads, theft, murder and rape can conceivably occur behind their backs. This same tax money could be better spent funding overtime pay to watch for these more serious atrocities.

This is not the first year the campaign was run, so what results encouraged the government to continue funding it? According to the Texas Department of Transportation, last year's campaign "exceeded goals" because its observational studies recorded seat belt use at an estimated "record" of 86 percent after the campaign's launch, up from a usual 80 percent. No doubt the states without primary seat belt laws would be pleased to know that the unsanctioned use of their tax dollars went to increase seat belt use in a state hundreds of miles away by a paltry 6 percent.

One argument stands as the biggest insult to freedom that the "Click It or Ticket" campaign hurls upon our country: the idea that it is the government's right to protect people from themselves by enforcing a mandatory wearing of seat belts. The concept of a free country requires a government whose only moral purpose is to prevent the initiation of force against enemies foreign and domestic, to ensure that its citizens enjoy the opportunity for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To have any of the three, Americans must be protected against the initiation of force by fellow citizens via theft, murder or physical injury, or even by a

foreign attacker, and it should be in this realm alone that the government is free to take action.

The idea of a seat belt law stands on the incorrect principle that a moral government has the right to coerce its citizens into living their lives by doing whatever it decrees is the proper way to live. In the event of an auto accident, not wearing a seat belt hurts nobody but that person, so how can the government ethically over-

step its boundaries by insisting that it can lawfully prevent one of its citizens by acting within their constitutional rights? The concept might sound appalling at first. "You mean you have the right to hurt yourself?" As long as it doesn't involve injury to another, yes, as crazy as that sounds. The pursuit of happiness is a path on which there are usually wrong turns, and as long as your mistakes do not cause harm to another, the government must not intervene.

The government is only free to administer justice to injury between individuals, not against injury to the self, or else it takes away from the freedom of its citizens. Only when laws against freedom are repealed can we break the small chains the government has placed on unaware citizens. It's sadly fitting that such an instance as the one described here involves physical restraint. If Americans are to call ourselves free, however, we must not accept a single infraction.

Mike Walters is a junior psychology major.
Graphic by Seth Freeman.

Veil inappropriate for driver's license photo

Muslim woman in Florida must be subject to same regulations as others

The Associated Press reported last week that Sultana Freeman has gone to court alleging that the state of Florida is thwarting her religious freedoms by requiring

Freeman, a Muslim woman, to unveil for her driver's license photograph. Previously, the state had allowed Freeman to keep her veil on, so that a three-inch-wide opening revealed her eyes and a vague idea of her skin color, nothing more.

Freeman claimed that before Sept. 11, the state allowed her to remain veiled in the picture, but now a new photograph must be taken and the state is no longer willing to accommodate Freeman's religious practice. Given the circumstances, the state of Florida is justified in its actions.

Freeman's lawyer, Howard Marks of the American Civil Liberties Union, presented one expert who



MICHAEL WARD

suggested that the Koran is unwavering in its doctrine and that Freeman must remain veiled. Not surprisingly, the state of Florida presented its own Islamic leader who testified to the contrary. However, it is apparent that both sides have fallen into the trap of making this a First Amendment issue when clearly it is not. The concern in this case is whether Freeman's desire to remain veiled is a detriment to the security of the state and the nation.

Marks wisely alluded to the semi-legal status of peyote among Native American populations in the United States. Peyote, a substance derived from cactus native to the Southwest and similar to mescaline, is illegal to all due to its hallucinogenic properties except to those who use it for religious ceremonies. In the early 1990s, the Supreme Court's decision to bar all use of

peyote prompted the American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments of 1994. Passed by Congress, this act gave special consideration to the ritual use of peyote among certain religions. Justifiably, this act has been interpreted as the state granting special concessions to certain groups in the name of religion.

Naturally, it would seem that Freeman's desire to remain veiled is a harmless and crucial aspect of her religion. She is not petitioning the state for some strange or otherwise illegal concession. But as previously mentioned, this case is not about religion versus the state. If Freeman were to remain veiled in her photograph, that would present a safety issue.

As Jason Vail, assistant attorney general for the state of Florida, said, "(a driver's license is) the primary method of identification in Florida and the nation ... I don't think there can be any doubt there is a public

safety interest." He is correct.

The driver's license is used for things from admission into a movie theater or bar, to employment application and identity verification. A three-inch-wide opening in Freeman's veil does not allow for adequate identification. In fact, a veiled picture is worthless. Facial features, hair color, skin tone and any other defining characteristics of the person are hidden behind the veil.

Her refusal to remove her veil presents far more issues than just her inability to obtain a valid driver's license. For instance, if she were pulled over by a police officer would she then be required to take off her veil? If not, the officer would be unable to tell whether the person with whom he was dealing was Freeman, or even a woman at all.

Interestingly, lawyers for the state of Florida asked how Freeman would reconcile the Islamic command that she must make a pilgrimage to Mecca, which would require her to

unveil for her passport photograph, with the contention that Islamic law will not allow her to unveil.

Fortunately, while Freeman's lawsuit is not frivolous, it is erroneously conceived and reasoned. Her religious freedom would clearly be impeded — for the 15 seconds that it would take to unveil and take the picture — but it is an impediment necessary to the safety of the state and nation.

Freeman is a recent convert to Islam and while it is commendable that she is willing to practice her faith in such an open way, it would seem that she is oblivious to the fact that in most Islamic countries, she would not even be allowed to drive, much less voice her grievance in court. And it is with this in mind that Freeman should happily unveil for her picture.

Michael Ward is a senior history major.

World rooted in anti-American sentiment

(U-WIRE) LUBBOCK, Texas — Why do they hate us? Since 9/11, no question has so desperately sought an answer as why so many people could so loathe us that they would make our destruction their unifying purpose in life. And more baffling still, how could such active hatred make us its focus without our realizing it until planes started crashing into buildings? How couldn't we have known?

The media's coverage of the attacks, and our consequent actions, have given occasion to a contentious recurring theme: anti-Americanism. What is anti-Americanism, and what does it mean?

The term covers a broad

scope of sentiment and manifestations, from mild protest to violent terrorism. Anti-Americanism can be as harmless as an Austrian university student casually suggesting over coffee that America is too big for its breeches, or as hateful as an Iranian mob screaming for death unto the Great Satan. By and large, within the American media, anti-Americanism is understood to explain away anything even mildly negative that is done or said in opposition to our nation or any of its policies. Oftentimes, anything less than beaming adoration and unflinching support is deemed anti-American.

As for how our great country has fallen into disrepute, theo-

ries abound. Some say it's pure envy that evokes resentment.

We have the coolest cars and the most cable channels, and we're hated for it. Some see a struggle between freedom-haters and freedom-lovers.

We can do and say what we please, and some people find that threatening. Others allege that the

immodesty of our women is to blame, or our culture's unembarrassed love of money. And

still, others suggest that through our influence-peddling among the Arab states and Israel, we have painted ourselves with a big, red bull's-eye. And of course there's Iraq, a topic for another column.

"Some say it's pure envy that evokes resentment. We have the coolest cars and the most cable channels, and we're hated for it."

Since I am not a disenfranchised third-world Ameriphobe, I can't say with any authority which it is. I believe that, as with most things, the roots of anti-Americanism are complex and

interwoven. Religious fervor, justifiable anger and politics, as well as ignorance and raw envy, all add to the stew of anti-Americanism.

I chose to address this topic because of what I see as chronic over-simplification going on at a certain popular news network. I realize that a large swath of the American public simply does not want meaningful analysis of complex events. To many, the arena of world affairs is just more entertainment, and as with any action movie, it's fun to root for the invincible, bullet-dodging hero taking out faceless enemies for the cause of freedom and democracy. Hence, the incredible popularity of Fox News, which even its

most loyal fans faintly realize is not a "news" source in the truest sense.

So yes, we are hated because of our freedoms, our prosperity, and our unfathomable power.

As I said, anti-Americanism is a complex phenomenon, too complicated for simple, jingoistic explanations.

Though our country doesn't deserve one-tenth of the condemnation that comes its way, we must recognize that the world is no longer willing to give us the benefit of the doubt for even minor hypocrisies.

Brian Carpenter is a columnist at Texas Tech University.