

## Fighting drunken driving

Law requiring drivers convicted of a DUI to have special plates a good start



CHRIS LIVELY

One could reason that with all of the concern and attention focused toward alcohol and driving these days, alcohol-related traffic incidents are declining. Furthermore, because of new laws across the board meant to deter drunk driving by means of tougher penalties, the country as a whole must be better off than it has been.

It sounds Utopian, but it unfortunately is not. States have gone to great lengths to counter an ever present drunk driving epidemic. All states, due mostly to the federal government's intervention in recent years, do not make light of the fact that if someone is caught driving under the influence or even worse, while intoxicated, that he will suffer the consequences. Penalties generally include license suspension or revocation, fines, community service and jail time for repeat offenders. Ohio, however, has introduced a different and more controversial method in an attempt to reduce its alcohol-related traffic incidents, that of bright red and yellow license plates for offenders.

Due to a law implemented on Jan. 1, 2004, Ohio judges are now required to issue these special plates to anyone convicted of a DUI so other drivers can be more alert and know what the offenders have done. Despite the new law's opposition, it nevertheless merits a significant amount of respect as it and similar strategies to counter DUI incidents might be the solution to the increasing prevalence of alcohol-related driving deaths nationwide.

The license plates are issued only to those offenders that are allowed special driving privileges as a result of court-imposed restrictions. Rightly, the law is currently being modified so that first-time offenders can get a free ride. It is not necessarily fair for first-time offenders with a clean slate to be labeled in such a fashion. But for repeat offenders, there is obviously a reason why they are repeating their offenses as fines and community service are not taking care of business.

As the plates have been available for use on a county-by-county basis for the past 37 years, Ohio Municipal Judge John Adkins was one of the few judges to utilize the policy before the mandatory law went into effect. In a Fox News report released last week, Adkins said that the policy has been effective in reducing DUI incidents in his county. Based on this fact alone, the law should not be regarded as ridiculous and senseless just yet.

The law is also referred to as the "scarlet letter" law, referring to the classic novel where a Puritan woman is branded with the letter "A" after having an illegitimate child. Many opponents feel that shaming an offender in this manner is pre-modern and unnecessary. They might also claim that getting branded with the plates is embarrassing not only to the offender but to his family members or friends who might also want to use the vehicle. It is unfortunate that innocent people might be affected by the plates. However, it is reasonable to give other drivers advanced notice with regards to potentially

dangerous situations.

As humiliating as they might be, people just might think twice before getting behind the wheel under the influence. Sure public display of one's wrongful actions and humiliation may at first seem only historical methods of deterrence. But why did we get rid of them in the first place if people are so afraid of them, but if people feared of such laws, perhaps the laws would be more effective. People are much more apt to take up more responsibility when it comes to drinking and driving if they are threatened with these sorts of consequences.

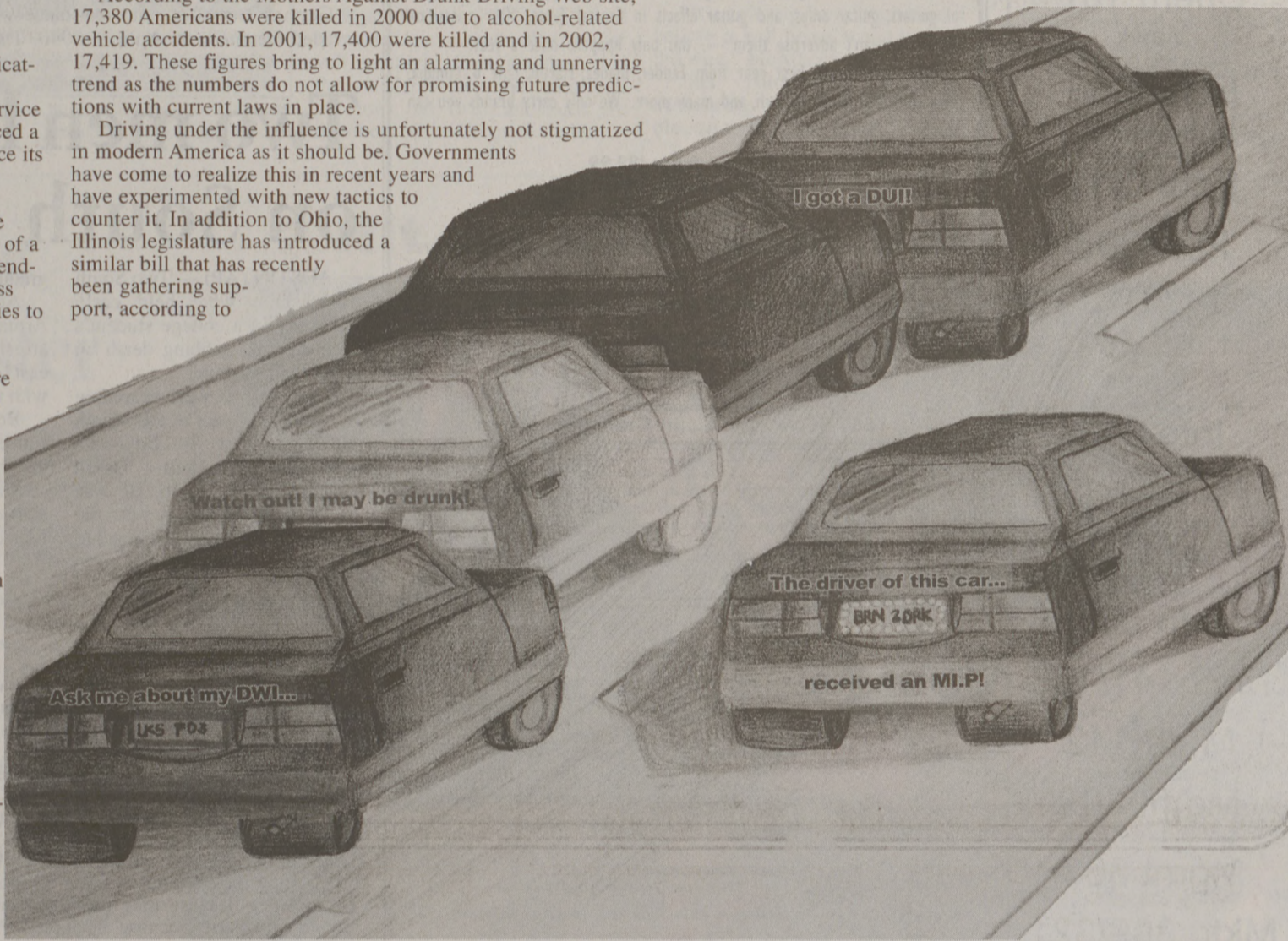
According to the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Web site, 17,380 Americans were killed in 2000 due to alcohol-related vehicle accidents. In 2001, 17,400 were killed and in 2002, 17,419. These figures bring to light an alarming and unnerving trend as the numbers do not allow for promising future predictions with current laws in place.

Driving under the influence is unfortunately not stigmatized in modern America as it should be. Governments have come to realize this in recent years and have experimented with new tactics to counter it. In addition to Ohio, the Illinois legislature has introduced a similar bill that has recently been gathering support, according to

the Boston Globe.

As Judge Adkins mentioned, the policy has already been effective in his county. Consequently, other states may need to follow if results turn out significantly in favor of the law on a statewide scale. If this is the case, more pragmatic methods of preventing DUI incidents such as "scarlet letter" labeling should be explored, even if they come at the cost of humiliation.

Chris Lively is a senior sociology major. Graphic by Rylie Deyoe



### MAIL CALL

#### America was built on federalism, capitalism

In response to an April 1 mail call:

The pro-heterosexual group holding banners on campus both Tuesday and Wednesday was not the Young Conservatives of Texas. YCT was however passing out flyers on conservatism.

In response to Mr. Palmer's Thursday mail call, he is wrong if he believes that the system of federalism, where there is a balance of power between state and federal government, and capitalism, where there is private ownership of production and capital, contradict each other. America was built on both of these principles and could not be the greatest country in the world today without them. Of course, a small flyer with a list of principles is intended for those who already understand those concepts or those willing to stop and learn.

Mr. Palmer could use a lesson in those items and should engage in a discussion with YCT members passing out those flyers before writing a mail call suggesting someone other than himself is illiterate.

Weston Balch  
Class of 2007  
YCT officer

#### Affirmative action is a superficial solution

In response to a March 31 mail call:

I'm afraid Nick's arguments for affirmative action doesn't hold much water when subjected to a little scrutiny, although he certainly does a better job of presenting his case than Matt Maddox. The statistics that quoted made no mention of the relative qualifications of the candidates or of anything else save for the genetic background of those involved. If we found that there were fewer redheads being admitted than blondes or brunettes would we need to intro-

duce quotas based on hair color? Also, the definition of racism as "is a system designed to advance the majority at the expense of the entire minority" is simply false. Webster's dictionary defines racism as "racial prejudice or discrimination" and makes no mention of mention of whether the oppressed is the majority or the minority.

I believe that the fact that minorities aren't represented as well as they should is indeed a problem, but affirmative action is hardly the solution.

The problems we face are a society is the stigmas and stereotypes associated with minority groups. Psychological studies have shown that black students do worse on standardized tests when they realize they are being tested as African-Americans rather than general students. The implications of this are that minority students are affected by stereotypes and it affects the way they perform on a subconscious level. In other words, the very act of acknowledging differences in race enforces racial stereotypes. We all dream of a society where all races and genders are treated equally, but how can we bring about a color blind society by separating people into racial profiles?

Affirmative action is, at best, a short-term and superficial solution to a problem that is rooted deep in society and will likely take decades to resolve. We need a solution, but affirmative action isn't it.

John Spencer  
Class of 2005

#### Battalion editorial board should be elected

In response to the March 31 editorial:

While students are at the polls this week they should remember another student run organization. Currently, the editorial board of The Battalion is an internally appointed board. I would propose that the positions on this board become elected positions.

Consider the negative events of which the Battalion has been so inclined to cover. Students should contemplate whether this coverage represents factual situations or a biased skew of the truth. We should ask ourselves why quality events this University is sponsoring do not receive the press coverage they deserve. The Battalion is a voice representing our University as it reaches users beyond campus via the Internet. Students should be able to voice their opinions on the board who presents this view of the University.

The only voice students currently have is through the "edited at our discretion" Mail Call. The positions on the board do not require any skills beyond those required to write for the Battalion—journalism basics, editing skills, and knowledge that bad press sells.

It is my sincere hope that as a member of the student body that my representatives in the Student Senate hear my voice. Perhaps the 18 authors of the MSC President referendum legislation would also consider this matter.

This resolution would present an opportunity for the Battalion to move toward more reform and ethics in reporting. Being a student outside of the Battalion myself, I feel that this course of action has the Battalion's best interest at heart. Though uninformed as I may be, I am sure that electing the Battalion editorial board is the right thing to do.

Steven Duke  
Class of 2003

#### Gay protests are for rights, not promotion

In response to a March 31 front page article:

The claim that the unaffiliated group "promoting" homosexuality was out there to "support their rights" is ridiculous. Homosexuals do not hold demonstrations to reaffirm their beliefs. They do so because they desire to be treated like human

beings, with all the rights, privileges, and freedoms from persecution that go with it. I'm glad that this group of pro-heteros is happy with the way that they are living, but what is it to accomplish? Do heterosexuals need more rights? In fact, let's see another rally. Let's have a rally that waves signs that says "White is right" or "Jesus was an Anglo". In their terms, that would not be a racist rally. It's just "celebrating whiteness." Give me a break. Waving signs that say "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" makes it difficult for this rally not to be associated as gay bashing. By the way, heterosexuality has not been around since the dawn of time. Life on this planet began as asexual reproduction.

I know this school loves to flaunt its traditions. But in a changing society, the world cannot only look to this type of demonstration as the only value system our school has. It was once a tradition to not admit women, or minorities. It was once a tradition for all students to be in the Corps. Times change. A restructuring of the traditional value system is what will free us from this ideological entrenchment. Tradition is the antithesis of change. And the tradition of the suppression of homosexuality (to name one group) on this campus has to stop. The same freedom of expression that protects this

elitist group's right to picket protects homosexuals' right to express their sexuality, and I'm going to law school just to make sure.

Daniel Nickeson  
Class of 2005

#### Some Aggies do have homosexual parents

To the students promoting heterosexuality: You might want to rethink your slogan "Thank your parents for being heterosexual." Did you ever consider the fact that some of us might not be the children of heterosexual parents? My father is a gay man who tried to conform to a lifestyle that society deemed appropriate for him: wife, kids, successful career. It took him almost twenty years to finally realize that he couldn't lie to himself or to his family anymore. My parents have been divorced for nine years now and are more happy today than I ever saw them during their marriage.

I don't have a problem with a heterosexual rally. Just please leave my parents out of it next time.

Anonymous Aggie and  
Proud Daughter of a Gay Father

