

You've a right to be stupid too

I've ridden motorcycles, and I've examined motorcycle accident statistics. And in my opinion, anyone who would ride a motorcycle without wearing a helmet is nuts.

**Jim
Harris**



In fact, the only good thing I can see about helmetless riding is that the practice tends to weed out some of the congenitally reckless and stupid among us, thus improving the human gene pool.

Nevertheless, a lot of motorcyclists want the option of riding without helmets. Some claim helmets are actually dangerous, that they obstruct peripheral vision. Others just like the feel of the wind in their hair (and, I suppose, the bugs in their faces).

Regardless of their wishes,

however, motorcyclists in Georgia must wear helmets at all times. In 1966, the Georgia General Assembly passed the nation's first mandatory helmet law. Since then, attempts to alter or abolish that law have failed.

The latest such attempt came from Sen. Max Brannon (D-Calhoun), who recently sponsored a bill to allow motorcyclists age 21 or older to decide for themselves whether or not to wear helmets.

Sen. Brannon's bill was overwhelmingly defeated. Yet in his arguments for the bill, Brannon raised some profoundly important points—points that go beyond the narrow issue of motorcycle helmets and address some of the most fundamental of all political questions.

"After a person gets to age 21," Brannon told the Senate, "then they're on their own. If they (don't) want to wear a helmet, they should have that right.

"This is freedom of choice legislation. If you want to give folks the opportunity to have freedom of choice after they reach 21, you'll vote "yes" on this legislation.

"You're saying to them: You

are capable of making your own decisions."

Freedom of choice. Brannon hit the nail on the head. When a motorcyclist rides without a helmet, he risks only his own well-being. He doesn't harm or threaten anyone else.

The central question in the helmet law debate, then, is whether people have the right to take freely chosen risks with their own lives and property. Or, as the title of a recent movie put it: Whose life is it, anyway?

Those Senators who voted against Brannon's bill are saying, implicitly or explicitly, that people don't really own their lives—the government does, at least to a substantial degree. People are merely wards of Big Brother.

This idea is paternalistic and offensive—and extremely dangerous. It is totally inconsistent with any belief in inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, in ways that others consider to be dangerous, foolish, or otherwise objectionable. Tolerating that is an integral part of living in a free society.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the idea that government should forcibly interfere in the private

affairs of individuals "for their own good" becomes the moral and intellectual justification for totalitarianism.

That's why the principle inherent in helmet laws is so very dangerous, and why it should be fought whenever it arises.

Sen. Brannon is to be commended for confronting this unwise and dangerous concept. However, I challenge him to go further—to explore the full implications of his freedom of choice rhetoric.

Motorcycle helmet laws are but one example of laws that prohibit adults from taking actions that threaten no one but possibly themselves. There are numerous Georgia laws that tell adults what movies they can see, what books they can read, what substances they can ingest, what is permissible in the privacy of their bedrooms, and what they can and cannot do with their own property.

Such laws flagrantly violate freedom of choice for which Sen. Brannon argued so strongly. You showed considerable political courage in attacking the helmet law, Senator. Now how about taking on some of these similarly tyrannical laws?

(Line omitted. Add: } Some people will inevitably pursue happiness