

Editorial: A deadly repeal

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Florida once had a mandatory helmet law for motorcycle riders. But then Gov. Jeb Bush and the Legislature decided that courting brain damage ought to be a matter of "personal freedom" and repealed it.

It was a fatal decision. In 1999, before the law was repealed, 164 people died in motorcycle accidents in Florida. Last year 402 motorcycle-related deaths occurred here.

This week the National Safety Transportation Board urged all states to pass mandatory helmet laws. The board says that motorcycle deaths are on the rise, even as other traffic-related fatalities are dropping. Last year more than 4,400 people died in motorcycle accidents in America; up from 2,294 in 1998 (when most states had mandatory helmet laws).

"Head injuries are a leading cause of death in motorcycle crashes," the board reports. "Motorcyclists who crash without a helmet are three times more likely to have brain injuries than those wearing a helmet.

"In addition to the tragic loss of life, the economic cost to society is enormous ... Medical and other costs for unhelmeted riders involved in crashes are staggering, estimated at \$310,000 per crash-involved motorcyclist. That's more than four times the overall cost of accidents involving helmeted riders."

The notion that helmets ought to be a personal choice ignores the fact that riders who sustain debilitating head injuries usually require lengthy, heavily subsidized health care. That fact alone should make Florida's fiscally conservative Legislature reinstate the mandatory helmet law.

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After reading your newspaper's grossly misleading editorial titled "[A Deadly Repeal](#)" published today, I felt that ABATE of Florida, Inc., Florida's largest Motorcycle Rights Organization had to respond.

You cited that in 1999 there were 164 motorcycle-related deaths, and in 2009 there were 402. What you are not telling your readers is that since the year 2000, motorcycle registrations in Florida have risen 102.4% (from 289,760 to 586,537 registrations). This is not even close to a valid total of the motorcycles in Florida; don't forget the hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists that ride to Florida from other states for Daytona Bike Week, Biketoberfest, Peterson's Run, and many, many other events. Although the additional motorcycles are not counted in the total bikes here, any death that occurs is.

In 2000, there were 246 motorcycle-related fatalities. As you already stated, in 2009 there were 402 deaths. For convenient purposes of your article, you have interestingly left out that with the 102.4% rise in motorcycle registrations in Florida, there has only been a 63.8% rise in motorcycle-related deaths over the same period of time. You specifically mislead readers stating that motorcycle deaths are on the rise. The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles reports that over the last three years, the death totals *HAVE GONE DOWN*, even though (with the exception of last year) motorcycle registrations have gone up.

Finally, and what I find most interesting in your reporting, is that in 2009, 53% of those killed while riding a motorcycle in Florida *WERE WEARING HELMETS*. Your paper reported that "Motorcyclists who crash without a helmet are three times more likely to have brain injuries than those wearing a helmet." The State of Florida reports that in 2009, only 37% of those involved in "incapacitating injury" motorcycle crashes were not wearing helmets....56% of those involved in the same type of crash were wearing a helmet. I'm not a math wiz, but these factual statistics, supplied by the State of Florida, directly conflicts with the statement you published.

Regarding the cost of the injuries, I suggest you contact the Florida Department of Transportation's Motorcycle Safety Coalition. At one of their recent meetings, it was discussed how small the cost of motorcycle-related injuries are when compared to many other current social issues, especially illegal aliens and others that have no health insurance when looking at the total costs to the public. I think it's only fair to have this cost you cite put into proper perspective.

It amazes me that in a post 9/11 world, with potential terrorism all around us, a newspaper who hides behind the 1st Amendment from the government demands and control, is advocating for the government to control a personal freedom the people of Florida currently have.

Next time you wish to publish statistics, be honest; publish the whole story.

Sincerely,
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For a Press Release regarding the NSTB's recent comments: please click here:
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