

Wolfe: Understanding freedom to use phone and drive



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Gavel to Gavel: The right to text and drive

The numbers are compelling. Understanding the problem and how to fix it is intuitive. And yet ... nothing.

The studies make it clear – texting and driving is a killer combination. The most recent report estimates that 3,000 teens die and 300,000 are injured while texting and driving. Compare that to 2,700 teen deaths and 280,000 teen injuries from drinking and driving.

Thirty-nine states have banned texting and driving. Other states are considering it. Bills have been proposed in the Oklahoma Legislature multiple times – and they have all failed.

Personal freedom and liberty. That's what you often hear as the reason texting and driving continues to receive the stamp of approval from our legislators.

The First Amendment, often cited as the source of various liberties, is generally recognized as including five of the most important: religion, speech, petition of grievances, peaceful assembly and press. Where's Waldo?

The familiar, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as referenced in our country's Constitution has become something of a rallying cry. However, historically those words have been considered tied to the right of due process, religious freedom and the right to bear arms. I'm still drawing a blank.

When you drive your car, you are required to wear seat belts. Why? One reason is that if the driver isn't belted, he or she is much more likely to lose control of a car in an accident. Thus, even if your ideal of liberty is marginally compromised, it's probably worth it if you prefer someone behind the wheel in an out-of-control accident.

You can't drink and drive. Why not? Seems obvious – a drunk driver is dangerous. We, as a society, don't like that.

Why don't seat belt laws and drinking and driving laws infringe upon our personal freedom? Well, they do. But we've made a societal choice to give up some freedoms (such as the unmitigated joy of yelling "fire" in a crowded theater) to protect innocents.

The problem is that seat belt and drinking laws were passed in a less politically caustic time. Now, there seems to be a perpetual race among our paid politicians to one-up each other on subjects that supposedly reflect conservatism.

Reminds me of Matchbox Twenty's Mad Season slightly edited question to the politicians who are opposed to laws banning texting and driving: "So someone tell me why, why, why do you feel stupid?" I think I know.