

Various Lawmakers Are Proposing to Make It Easier (or Harder) to Drink and Drive in Connecticut

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The Connecticut Legislature is back in session, saving us from ourselves (and each other). And the collection of proposed bills this session, numbering in the hundreds, includes many that would affect our state's transportation laws.

Once again lawmakers are debating our state's "open container" law as Connecticut is one of only 10 states where it is legal for a passenger in a car to have an open can of beer, hard cider or even a bottle of Jack Daniels as the vehicle drives along.

Of course, the driver would never be drinking, just the passengers — so that would keep us all safe, right? At the same time, some lawmakers want to extend the pandemic happy hour law to keep allowing "to go" drinks from bars and restaurants. That makes sense too, eh? Let's all keep partying after staggering out of the bar onto the streets or into our cars?

And of course there's the annual battle to make booze even cheaper and more available by allowing wine sales in grocery stores, not just our state's 1200 package stores — an idea popular with consumers but not liquor store owners.

Is it just me, or all these bills sending mixed messages? While the CDOT's "Vision Zero" program tries to stop the carnage on our highways, lawmakers seem to be heeding constituents' cries to allow them to stay

high on the highways.

You've seen the stats on highway and pedestrian deaths, soaring to 40-year highs. And lawmakers too have felt the pain of this roadway slaughter with the recent death of State Rep. Quentin "Q" Williams in a wrong-way driver crash on Rt 9 after he left Governor Lamont's inaugural ball. (By the way, where are the toxicology reports on that crash's two victims? Why is it taking so long to find out who had what in their bloodstream?)

But the most interesting bill of all is one submitted by Senate President Martin Looney regarding unhelmeted motorcyclists who die in traffic accidents: Looney wants their organs harvested without their permission.

Looney received a kidney transplant in 2016 from a donor, which is admirable. But to start dissecting corpses of motorcycle riders because they were not wearing helmets seems a bit extreme.

The motorcycle lobby points out that this would violate the rights of those whose religious beliefs prevent organ donation. Even New England Donor Services, which runs the New England Organ Bank, seems skeptical.

While the Looney bill certainly raises awareness of the need for more organ donations, does he really think this plan would incentivize bikers to play safe and wear head protection? Or is this just a way of finding more, badly needed organs for transplants?

I have a corollary bill to suggest:

Each time a truck collides with a bridge on our parkways, the truck's contents should be up for grabs for the first scavengers and looters who can reach the rig — unless they have open containers of alcohol in their cars.

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