

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE GAZETTE

Death penalty? Iowa has had one since 'Roe'

In her Jan. 10 guest column, Margaret Holmgren, Iowa State associate professor, expounded at length on the "high value we put on human life." She cited Justice Brennan's "basic idea" that "humans have intrinsic value."

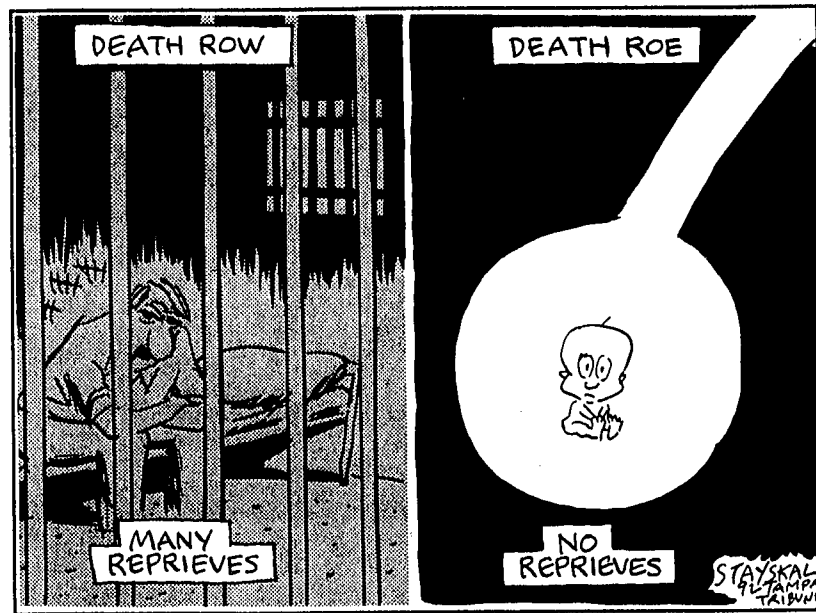
Was Holmgren defending the thousands of unborn citizens who are suctioned from their mothers each day? Was she reproaching the abortionists who make millions of dollars under the guise of "a woman's right"? Was she demanding that the full truth be told to desperate young girls: that they will likely suffer guilt and depression when they later realize the "product of conception" is doubletalk for "unborn baby"?

No, she was foaming and fomenting over the fact the Iowa Legislature is considering discussing capital punishment! The human lives she has such high regard for are those among us who commit murder! And she teaches philosophy to our college youth! (Do you recall ex-Justice Brennan's many decisions? He, too, valued the life of the killer criminal, but he never met an abortionist's lawyer he didn't agree with.)

It is impossible for me to take the guest columnist's views seriously. Her writing reflects a perverted sense of right and wrong.

Lois Edmondson
Sigourney

I am glad to see Iowa finally has someone in the House of Representatives with the wisdom and foresight to reinstate capital punishment in this state.



It was a big mistake to take it off the books in the first place.

Some people cringe when you mention capital punishment, saying it is cruel or unusual, and all the other catch words. But if it is applied to the right people, like murderers, kidnapers and child molesters, then you are protecting society. You cannot do it with life sentences, even with no parole.

I think of a case in Anamosa a few years ago. A convicted murderer was given a leave or pass from the reformatory, and he murdered again while on leave.

If he had been given the death penalty, lives would have been saved. That is why capital punishment deters crime; they can't do it if they are dead.

But in reality Iowa has had the death penalty since 1973 when murder by abortion was legalized. Now is the time to transfer the death penalty from

innocent babies to convicted murderers. I want to commend and encourage Chuck Larson for introducing this legislation.

Neil Cantonwine
Route 2, Vinton

At a religious rite, the sermon was about our "religious" new president and indications the recession might be less severe. During the "peace offering" I shook hands and said, "Stay healthy, stay usable, stay wanted, if you expect a safe life under Clinton."

Later, a friend mentioned that God might perform a miracle. I explained that God usually uses us as his instruments. We should pray as if things depend on God and work as if things depend on us.

Voting for a president who promises the Freedom of (Mom's) Choice Act and the premeditated paid, professional,

painful killing of pre-born children (PPPPKOPC) in his "health" plan was NOT working as if things depend on us. Some killed children would have been able to help support a health plan today.

"But he's our president," she said.

"He's not mine," I responded.

I explained that there are some places where civilized people draw the line and that the PPPPKOPC is one. Once we violate the sanctity of human life, we continue making one more exception.

I forgot to ask my friend if she would say "Heil Hitler" and kill Jews. Also, slavery and abortion are similar.

Although each being might be biologically human, he's not a legal person.

A black human gains legal personhood when freed — a pre-born child, when born.

Nobody forces you to have slaves or abortions. Don't "force" your morality" on others.

A man should control his property — a woman, her body.

Aren't slavery and abortion merciful? Every black man or pre-born child should be protected or wanted rather than sent ill-equipped or unloved into a cruel world. (Spoken by someone free or born.)

An amendment overturned *Dred Scott*. Justices or an amendment need to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*. Will the correct "president" and Congress be there?

Joyce Evans
200 22nd St. NE

Public or private, too much is wasted

How much is the national debt? How much interest are we paying on it per day?

How much was spent on the Clinton inauguration? How much on fireworks alone? How many hungry and homeless could have been fed, clothed and sheltered with what was spent on fireworks alone?

Just wondering.

Robert J. Kelchen
917 Regent St. NE

OK to be an Arab; OK to be American, too

In her Dec. 30 article, Leila Gorchev, media coordinator for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, laments the "distorted image" of Arab culture that has emerged in recent years, and cites the Disney movie "Aladdin" as an example of this distortion. She concludes her commentary with the words, "It's OK to be Arab."

To a large degree, her complaint is valid. However, there do exist opportunities for the Arab-American himself to improve the image of Arab culture. He can, for starters, boldly proclaim disdain for hate-filled Arab criminals such as Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat and the

inexplicably large numbers of Arab terrorists. The refusal of Arab-Americans to hold accountable those Arab brothers who commit acts of violence against humanity sends a frightening message to Americans at large.

The Arab-American can improve the image of Arab culture by clearly demonstrating that it's OK to be American. That America is not "the devil," as a preponderance of Arabs evidently believe.

Then, non-Arab-Americans can, with facility, echo the words of Ms. Gorchev, "It's OK to be Arab."

Don Marion, Tipton

GUEST COLUMN

Why Iowa must reject motorcycle helmet law

As a motorcyclist, I ride up to 10,000 miles per year. I have ridden with and without a helmet. And for the last 20 years, I have opposed mandatory helmet laws.

Helmets can restrict hearing and sight. They can be hot and heavy. They give a false sense of security. And they can cause accidents. With over 90 percent of motorcycle riders opposing mandatory helmet laws, it is time to explain our position.

In 1967, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) forced states to enact motorcycle helmet laws. Iowa refused. Finally, threatened with withholding of federal highway funds, the state relented.

Three states stood their ground, saying their fatality rates were lower than states with helmet laws. Congress got involved and called the NHTSA into a hearing, asking the agency to prove helmet laws saved lives.

The reply: "We don't have that information and don't know anyone who has compiled it."

With this statement, Congress repealed this statute, and President Ford approved the repeal in 1976.

Over 30 states, including Iowa, repealed their helmet laws over the next few years. In 1989, federal legislation again was passed to force states to pass mandatory helmet and seat belt laws. A small percentage of highway construction money would be withheld and used for safety programs for states that did not comply. Currently 25 states are without helmet laws and 10 states without seat belt laws. In 1992, a bill to again repeal the seat belt and helmet requirement was introduced. Sentiment is strong for again returning these decisions to the states.

Filmsy material

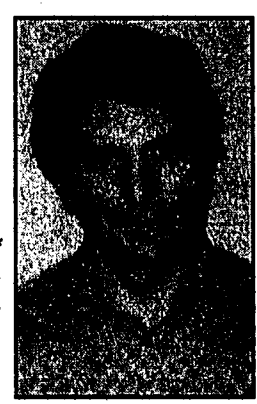
The test for determining the effectiveness of helmets is truly amazing. The current federal standard is designed to duplicate the impact of a 150-pound person striking his head at a speed of 4.5 mph. If the helmet does not break, it passes. Currently no helmet manufacturer warrants its product as being capable of preventing a killing head injury at speeds in excess of 15 mph.

A helmet is a quarter inch of plastic or fiberglass along with some padding on the inside. It is designed to prevent cosmetic injury or a skipping type of head injury, where the rider is propelled along the road and does not come into direct contact with an obstacle at a speed above 15 mph.

We hear about the motorcycle fatality rate. Helmet laws are not designed to pre-

KEVIN KELLY

of rural Tipton is a tree farmer. He is a member of ABATE and the American Motorcycle Association.



vent accidents, but rather to reduce the seriousness of injury once an accident has occurred. The only relevant statistic in judging helmet law effectiveness is the number of fatally injured motorcyclists per 100 accidents. When using this fatality rate, states without helmet laws had 2.56 deaths per 100 accidents and states that had a helmet law for all riders was 2.94 deaths per 100 accidents.

This indicates helmet laws are simply not effective and most of us vastly overrate the protective qualities of helmets, possibly because of an overdose of propaganda. California has shown a 10 percent increase in fatalities since passing a helmet law last year, according to the CHP, and a repeal of the law has been introduced.

Have helmets saved lives? Yes, but they have not lowered the fatality rate when compared to states without helmet laws.

Iowa motorcycle fatalities reached a high of 83 in 1979. In 1992 there were 29 fatalities, and 40 percent of these were auto drivers' fault. Motorcycle riders have done more than any other drivers on the road to reduce fatalities. And it was done by experienced cyclists with their own lives at stake — not by bureaucrats who do not drive motorcycles.

The mandatory-helmet advocates are quick to argue that head injuries affect others through cost to society. Motorcycle injuries are responsible, by best estimates, for less than one-tenth of one percent of the nation's health care cost. Hardly what could be called a social burden to society. No state has ever shown a decrease in its "social burden" by passing a motorcycle helmet law.

The safety establishment, led by the insurance industry, now says we, as a society,

should not have to share risks. In fact, they have gone one step further and suggested some risks be eliminated. What they hope to do is criminalize the use of an individual's discretion in matters that potentially affect an individual's welfare. They forget that this literally covers just about every aspect of our lives and freedoms.

Shortly after the Iowa helmet law took effect Sept. 1, 1975, Iowa Judge Thomas Renda ruled the law unconstitutional. He said, "The law does not bear a substantial relationship to protecting the general public, but serves only to protect the cyclist from himself, violates a person's right to privacy and freedom of choice to select his own apparel for his own safety, and was not passed for the public good, but merely to acquire federal highway funds."

The Iowa Constitution, in the Bill of Rights section 6, states:

LAW'S UNIFORM: All laws of a general nature shall have a uniform operation; the general assembly shall not grant to any citizen, or class of citizens, privileges or immunities, which upon the same terms shall not equally belong to all citizens.

The Iowa seat belt law applies to all vehicles on the road that have seat belts. If helmet advocates really believe helmets are for safety, they would quickly conclude that helmet laws must be applied to all users of the highway system. The Iowa Constitution says we all must abide by the law of this nature or none of us has to. Are non-motorcyclists ready for a helmet law in their vehicles?

Facts, not emotion

This year we will again be trying to convince the Legislature with facts — not emotion — not to pass a helmet law. We know helmets can cause as well as prevent injuries and deaths. We will never prevent our freedom of choice on this issue to a federal government whose laws are based mostly on politics, not safety.

Those obsessed in their belief that highway safety can be improved by forcing all motorcyclists to wear helmets could better direct their energies toward rider education, motorist awareness, improved licensing and testing, speed law enforcement and the reduction of alcohol abuse.

Those sincerely interested in the safety and lives of motorcyclists will understand, and we are confident they will aid us in seeking true motorcycle safety.

The Gazette
An independent
Newspaper
established in 1883

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GAZETTE EDITORIALS

Cameras catch action

THE ONLY question Cedar Rapids authorities should be asking themselves today is, "Why did we wait so long to do this?" Forget hindsight — that's always 20/20 — and be gratified that the surveillance cameras installed in certain businesses are proving so effective.

It took a terrible tragedy — the brutal murder in September 1989 of Brian Lee Schappert at a Cedar Rapids convenience store — to get the ball rolling. Marion officials were first to respond, completing council action in January 1990 to require installation of those unobtrusive cameras in certain businesses.

It spread gradually into Cedar Rapids, becoming fully implemented Jan. 1 as businesses met the city's deadline for installing cameras.

Benefits began accruing almost immediately, Cedar Rapids officials said. Most dramatic, of course, was this week, when authorities used videotapes to identify a suspect in three convenience store robberies, one each in Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and Coralville. That's outstanding.

Businesses confronted with the local mandate to invest in, then install the cameras, may well have resented the additional cost imposed by city government. Resentment might have been particularly higher in establishments whose employees have never experienced the terror of an armed hold-up. May their good luck continue.

Regrettably, far too many thugs are on the lookout for easy money. While those who engage in such crimes aren't mental giants, most should be clever enough to know a camera peering down on the scene of their crime is an open invitation for authorities to come calling.

We don't anticipate cameras will deter all crime; nothing seems to accomplish that. But we expect merchants who installed them, even reluctantly, are taking comfort in the recent developments.

And well they should.

Death penalty mulled

AS EXPECTED, a proposal to reinstate the death penalty was among the first major pieces of legislation to hit the desks of Iowa lawmakers last week. The call for capital punishment was included in Gov. Terry Branstad's legislative wish list, and the apparent sentiment among Iowans is such that legislators were quick to respond to the request.

The time for speed is now over. A bill has been introduced (indeed, at least two bills have been drafted), so the mission now should be a deliberate — ultra-deliberate — examination of every conceivable aspect of the question. Go beyond merely public emotions that ebb and flow on this particular issue according to recent events. Nothing like a grisly murder to generate instant support for executing the criminal.

Perhaps proponents are right. Before making that fateful decision, however, lawmakers must commit themselves to the same degree of certainty the law demands of jurors who impose the death penalty. Know, *beyond any reasonable doubt*, that its availability not only is morally correct, but that it will accomplish what proponents desire. Begin the examination by knowing what it is meant to accomplish: Is it vengeance for vile crimes against society, or a deterrent to those who might be tempted to commit such crimes? Under what conditions should a criminal's life be forfeit?

To their credit, those who would reinstate the death penalty — abolished in Iowa in 1965 — have chosen lethal injection as the method of execution, rather than more barbaric options, such as hanging.

That, however, is just the first of many troubling questions that must be asked — and answered — before Iowa joins other states that have reinstated capital punishment.

Always a princess

MOVIE FANS 50 and over felt a bit older this week upon receiving the news about Audrey Hepburn. She was forever young — the princess in "Roman Holiday," (1953), vibrant Natasha in "War and Peace" (1956), indomitable Eliza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady" (1964). Yet the slender, elegant actress was 63 when she died of cancer Wednesday in Switzerland. Where *had* the years gone?

To her enduring credit, Ms. Hepburn spent those later years most productively. Remembering the hard times in Nazi-occupied Holland, the Brussels-born Hepburn became a UNICEF ambassador of good will. As UNICEF Director James Grant put it, "The children of the world have lost a true friend, and an important and eloquent advocate." She carried that advocacy onto the world's editorial pages, including this one.

Film-goers knew her best as a fragile, yet spirited princess. Even when wearing grubby clothes, as in the revisionist Robin Hood tale "Robin and Marian" (1976), she always epitomized grace and charm.

It will be a pleasure remembering Audrey Hepburn and seeing her fine work on film and videotape, where she remains eternally enchanting.