

Legislation Contemplation

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last November, all across the United States candidates were elected to various offices at all levels of government. By now, all of these newly elected officials have taken office and are busy at work carrying out their various civic duties. One of the most important civic duties falls on the legislative branch – creating and drafting new laws that address tough social issues and make our country and safer and better place to live.

An example of such a law was drafted in Virginia, where lawmakers decided that their constituents were wearing their pants too low, exposing their underwear. Therefore, they proposed a bill that would result in a \$50 fine for anyone who displayed his or her underpants in a “lewd or indecent manner.”

Many Virginians have complained to their Congressman about being offended by the ‘low-riders’ that seem to be popular with high school students and young adults. Like Nancy Reagan, Virginia wants it youth to ‘just say no’ to crack. Opponents of the bill claim that the style is nothing more than a rebellious fashion statement, like long hair in the ‘70s, spiked mohawks in the ‘80s or body piercings in the ‘90s. The Senate ultimately agreed, and struck down the bill.

Meanwhile in Berlin, Connecticut, a local ordinance was declared illegal after a tavern owner filed suit against the Town. Town officials warned the owner that under this ordinance, he would be subject to fines or arrest if he carried out his “Naked Karaoke Night” without a permit.

In an attempt to stir up some business, the proprietors of the Berlin Station Café placed a sign in their window advertising a bogus “Naked Karaoke Night.” Thinking it was serious, neighbors of the establishment complained to Town Hall, resulting in the warning about the nude crooning. The tavern owner, also an attorney, filed suit claiming the ordinance did not apply because the activity is completely voluntary – he’s not paying the singers, so no permit is required.

After the victory, 120 people have actually signed up for “Naked Karaoke Night,” although the Berlin Station Café is unsure of how many of these 120 will actually grin and bare it.

Finally, in Bay City, Michigan, frustrated librarians appealed to their local lawmakers to create criminal penalties for readers who don’t return their books on time. Inspired by the no-nonsense librarian on *Seinfeld*, Frederick Paffhausen, the new library system director, wants to “go after some of the people who owe us a lot of money.”

Hoping to “set an example” with these offenders, Paffhausen requested permission from the Bay County Library Board to seek arrest warrants for perpetrators with overdue books who have ignored repeated notices to return them. One such patron has 73 unreturned items, most of which are science-fiction books. Because the patron has not ‘beamed them up’ back to the library for more than a year, he has accrued almost \$1,200 in fines.

According to Paffhausen, taxpayers must pick up the tab for the \$25,000 worth of overdue materials that patrons check out of the library system each year, resulting in the library having to buy new copies to replace them. These replacement costs come out of the library’s budget, using funds that were originally slated to buy new books, CDs and DVDs. Apparently, if you can’t return it on time, then you’re going to do some time.

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