

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Leave the Speed Limit Be

THE 55-MPH NATIONAL speed limit was enacted in 1973 as a way of saving fuel in response to the Arab oil embargo. It took full effect in the spring of 1974. That year, highway traffic deaths declined by 9,109, or about one-sixth, from the year before. Part of the decline was due to less traffic; the oil shortage kept people off the roads. But the lower speed limit is thought to have saved between 3,000 and 5,000 of those lives. While speeds have crept up since, it is still thought to save between 2,000 and 4,000 a year, plus 2,500 to 4,500 serious injuries. It is hard to remember another federal regulation that has had a clearer effect.

Still there is opposition. This is particularly strong in the West, where distances are greater, traffic is lighter and the federal government is unloved. Now there is a highway bill in the offing, and this is an election year. In the Senate especially, where the less populated states are stronger, westerners are pressing to amend the speed limit, which is a condition for receipt of federal highway funds. A leading proposal would let states raise the maximum on rural roads to 65 mph. Two western Republican senators who went to see President Reagan last weekend—Steve Symms of Idaho, who is chairman of the Senate transportation subcommittee and up for reelection, and Chic Hecht of Nevada—say he, too,

favors relaxing present law. There is no surprise in that. The president is a committed deregulator, and repeal of the 55-mph limit was part of the 1980 Republican platform. Even so, the oblique announcement of his position may help the amenders' cause.

Those in favor of amendment say that there is a different cost-benefit ratio to a low speed limit in the emptier states (fewer deaths and injuries averted, more time lost) and warn that there is already less enforcement, partly because the rule is unpopular but also because there are better ways to use state troopers. They argue that the government can't make people drive slower on expansive highways any more than it could enforce Prohibition, and that in the interests of respect for law and states' rights, it shouldn't try.

But this is a terrible distortion. Doing one thing you lose time on the road, doing the other you lose a life. Maybe the minutes work out the same; the values don't. It's true that people violate the 55-mph limit, and up to a point the police look the other way; average highway speed is now said to be around 62 mph. But lift the limit 10 miles an hour and the average will go up too, as will the divergence of speeds on the highway at any given time, itself a major cause of accidents. Here is a simple law that works. The cost is mainly inconvenience. It should not be sacrificed to politics.

September Surprise?

REPUBLICAN STRATEGISTS, who like to complain that the intricacies of election and districting laws help their opponents, are quietly hoping that a couple of unusual election laws may enable them to spring a September surprise or two—and win two offices to which a Republican has never been elected. The first race, on Sept. 20, is a special election in Hawaii's 1st congressional district. The second is the race in Louisiana on Sept. 27. In both cases the odds are somewhat against the Republicans. But they have a chance in both, and they can be counted on to pour money and expertise, in hopes of winning victories that could change the landscape. The Hawaii race is a toss-up between Cecil Heftel, a candidate for governor, resigned in deference to a state law, and a top finisher wins, regardless of party.

Henson Moore. Mr. Long announced his retirement last year, leaving Mr. Moore, as a member of the Ways and Means Committee poised to consider tax reform, in a position if not to print campaign money at least to raise a lot of it; this June 30 he had \$1,123,000 in cash on hand, compared with \$283,000 for the leading Democrat, Rep. John Breaux. With three other Democrats in the race, Mr. Breaux cannot win 50 percent; Mr. Moore, who has been getting in the 40s in polls, can. If he wins, he'll be the first Republican senator from Louisiana, and the Republicans will enter November's contest for control of the Senate with a net gain of one.

With one or both of these September surprises, Republicans will be tempted to claim, as they did in 1985, that there's a political realignment in their favor. That would be stretching it, and not only

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In the second article in a series on U.S. defense policy, [How U.S. Came to Rely on Israel's Lavi Fighter Plane] has left out important information provided in the July 20 Week & Space Text. The Lavi project's current attitudes to significantly differ from those in 1977. ■ Development of the Lavi started until Israel refused—in 1977—to accept a request to build the plane under license. Israel's Yitzhak Rabin, saying an agreement had been reached, would have developed its specific needs. ■ Israel Aircraft Industries is forming a partnership with Boeing for future development of the Lavi. U.S. aerospace contractors reported by Mr. B. ■ Participation to date by U.S. contractors or vendors. ■ Israel's defense industry has agreed to consider the use of native fighters to t

Peter Se

As a Washington theatergoer, I was interested to read in David Shields' article that Peter Seidman began a year-long project to examine the American theater and its staff writers for at least the past 20 years.

From its very beginning, the American National Theater has been for me a breath of fresh air in the Washington theater world. It is what I think of as the theater company of the future, but Mr. Seidman brought an important dimension to the theater.

Every single play that came out of the American National Theater was a barred attempt to reach a wider audience and challenge the status quo. It is true that new theater always makes a difference, but in all



The Case for Random Drug Testing

The Post's editorial hostility to random drug testing at work [Aug. 8] appears to be based on the arguments that such tests fail an unspecified legal test and that they "will in the long run sap the society" more than drugs. The Post is wrong on both counts.

If The Post opposes random tests (without "probable cause"), does it also oppose random IRS audits of income tax returns, random stops on highways to detect alcohol-impaired drivers and random searches of air travelers for guns and bombs? Is The Post's assumption that drugs at work are less serious than cheating on income taxes, driving drunk and hijacking airplanes?

When a law-abiding, drug-free employee takes a test for drugs, as President Reagan did, the employee is contributing to the integrity of the

enterprise in the same way the honest taxpayer, the sober driver or the ordinary traveler contributes to the integrity of these other vital enterprises when he is tested without probable cause.

Random tests would deter drug use and thereby reduce the \$50 billion to \$100 billion now lost to drug use in America. Even more important, these tests would identify drug users and encourage them to overcome their drug problems.

As a physician who works directly with drug users and their families, I know the humanitarian, often lifesaving value of someone's saying no to drugs at work, in the family, on the highway and at school. We cannot say no without routine testing.

ROBERT L. DUPONT
Chevy Chase

A Few Tips for Metro

So much for Metro. Last Thursday my wife tried to go to Rosslyn from western Fairfax County by Metro instead of by driving. Since there is only rush-hour bus service in our part of the county, she drove to the Vienna Metro station. When she arrived at approximately 11 a.m., all the all-day parking spots were filled, and there were no short-term spaces for partial-day parking. She ended up parking in an illegal spot and was given a \$10 ticket.

Next time she'll just drive into Rosslyn; I'm sure she'll be able to find a parking space for less than the cost of a ticket.

My recommendations? First, build multilevel parking facilities at the Metro stations, and second, include short-term parking (possibly as with a five-hour limit) at a slightly higher hourly rate than all-day parking.

JEFFREY M. PARNES
Herndon

The management of Washington's Metro subway system could substantially improve efficiency and the tempers of many riders by adopting a simple device used in the London subway. Like our Metro, the London system has many long escalators, but most of them prominently display signs reading: "Please Stand to the Right" or "Please Keep Left Side Clear for Walking Up."

Thus the left side of London escalators normally are used by the numerous passengers who climb to speed their journey or merely to take exercise. A Metro escalator frequently is blocked by one person standing in the left lane, while the frustrated people behind the stander are too polite to push past or to ask that person to move aside.

Let's urge Metro to place signs on our escalators asking people to please stand to the right.

LANCE D. WOOD
Alexandria

Letters should be signed and must include the writer's home address and home and business telephone numbers. Because of space limitations, those published are subject to abridgment. Although we are unable to acknowledge those letters we cannot publish, we appreciate the interest and value the views of those who take the time to send us their comments. Letters intended for publication should be addressed to Letters to the Editor.

Why the disinformation campaign at Metro? My workday starts and ends on a false note: "This is Tenleytown, first stop in the District of Columbia." Since the District-Maryland border runs slightly to the north of Western Avenue, the Friendship Heights station is wholly within the District of Columbia (excluding one or two steps of the northern exits). Can we stop spreading revisionist geography to the tourists, Metrorail drivers?

WILLIAM B. HOFEMAN
Washington

Apparent Rep. Charles Schumer [letters, Aug. 11], in response to the letter by David Carliner [Aug. 4], forgot the provisions of his immigration amendment that allow for replenishment workers and that waive certain grounds for exclusion of permanent resident status that are contained in present law.

The Schumer/Berman/Panetta amendment contains a new section for determining how many additional workers will be needed by agriculture after 1990, after the original program has been implemented and the people Rep. Schumer refers to have their green cards. There are the usual studies and reports, but the bottom line is how many additional workers will agriculture need to maintain its supply of labor?

To quote directly, "The Attorney General shall, in consultation with the Secretary of State, provide such process as may be appropriate for aliens to petition for immigrant visas or to adjust status to become aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence under this subsection. Such process shall provide special consideration for aliens who have been continuously residing in the United States since May 1, 1986."

The people who originally apply for this program must fit Rep. Schumer's criteria of working 60 days in agriculture, but the next round of Schumer workers don't. The only thing that has been decided is that people who have been here since May 1, 1986, have preference.

Perhaps Mr. Carliner wasn't flat wrong after all. The live-in domestics, unlicensed foreign medical school graduates, etc., can go to Fresno to pick artichokes and avocados, get a sore back and a green card.

F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER JR.
U.S. Representative (R-Wis.)
Washington

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