

## **HELMETS TAKE A RIDE**

Delaware's governor vetoed a bill passed by the General Assembly that would have changed current law and allowed motorcyclists to ride without carrying helmets. The existing law requires motorcyclists older than age 19 to carry a helmet, but it does not require them to wear it. "It didn't make sense to me why you had to carry it," Representative Michael Mulrooney, bill sponsor, told the Wilmington Delaware News. The governor told the online newspaper the current law at least encourages riders to wear helmets, although he said "a helmet lashed to a seat or handlebars does little, if anything, to improve the situation of a rider in an accident."

### GIFT CARD CRUNCH

Still have a few bucks on that gift card you received for your birthday? If you lived in Oregon (or eight other states) you wouldn't have to forfeit the remaining cash. Lawmakers there amended their existing gift card law recently so that no one may sell a gift card "that does not give the cardholder the option to redeem the card for cash when the face value of the card has declined to an amount less than \$5 and the card has been used for at least one purchase." California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington have similar laws.

### A BOOM IN CAYLEE'S LAWS

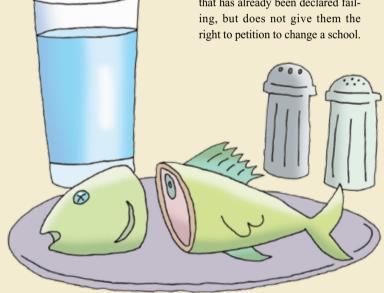
The death of Caylee Anthony and subsequent trial of her mother, Casey, have sparked an increase in legislation criminalizing the failure to report a child missing or dead within a specified time frame. By the end of July, 15 versions of Caylee's Law had been filed in 10 states, and at least 14 other states had expressed interest in filing some version of the law. The filed bills vary by the age of qualifying children (Pennsylvania-18, Ohio and New Jersey-16, California-14, New Jersey-13, Florida and Kentucky-12); the amount of time that has to elapse (most bills have 24 or 48 hours); and the severity of the crime (most propose some class of felony).

## **WELFARE TEST**

Missouri has recently joined Florida in requiring drug tests of welfare applicants. In Missouri, if a welfare official has a "reasonable suspicion" that an applicant for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families is using an illegal drug, he can order a test. If the applicant fails the test or refuses to take it, he or she will be denied benefits for three years. Those who test positive but get treatment can still receive the benefits. Florida's law requires all applicants to be tested. A Michigan law that required random drug tests of welfare recipients was struck down in federal court in 2003. The judge ruled it violated the Fourth Amendment, which protects citizens from unreasonable searches.

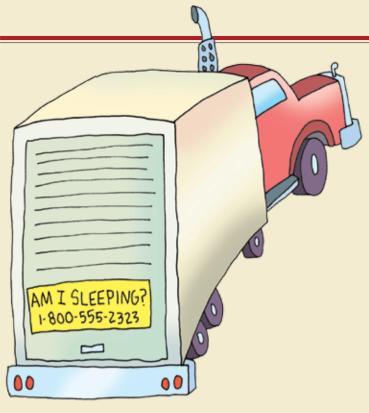
### **PARENT POWER**

The California Board of Education has issued regulations clarifying its first-in-the-nation "Parent Trigger" law that gives parents the right to petition for new staff and programs at their children's schools. The Legislature passed the law last year, and its first year in effect proved volatile. Parents at one school circulated petitions to oust the school staff and convert the building into an independently run, publicly financed charter school, which brought about lawsuits and charges of harassment. The new regulations, according to the Los Angeles Times, clarify how to draw up petitions, verify parent signatures and ensure public disclosure about the petition process. Mississippi and Texas also have parent trigger laws, and Connecticut allows parents to decide the fate of a school that has already been declared fail-



# **SUCK IT UP**

Invasive species have been sneaking into our rivers, lakes and forests for years, destroying native species and confiscating habitats. Now, an idea is catching on for controlling their proliferation. Eat them. Salt, pepper and spice 'em. New York City chefs have been experimenting with Asian carp, one of the worst offenders in the Mississippi River, and lionfish, a pariah along the Florida coast. Their Asian carp ceviche and braised lionfish filet in brown butter sauce were well-received at a recent tasting, according to the New York Times. "Instead of eating something like shark fin soup," Phillip Kramer of the Nature Conservancy told the newspaper, "why not eat a species that is causing harm, and with your meal make a positive contribution?" Bon appetit!



## **CRITICAL FOR WHOM?**

Late on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the Minnesota government's shutdown, a judge rejected the Minnesota Trucking Association's petition to reopen the safety rest areas. The judge said they didn't qualify as a critical core function of the government even though roadside enforcement of commercial vehicles continued during the shutdown, according to Landline magazine. Truck drivers argued that taking their mandatory 10-hour breaks before they entered Minnesota was difficult because neighboring states' rest areas filled up fast.

### **EMERGENCY ROOM DETOUR**

Rhode Island lawmakers created a special Senate commission this year to study ways to divert people suffering from substance abuse from going to expensive emergency rooms for treatment. Caring for patients in the ER can cost up to seven times more than visits to a health center. Since states often are stuck with the bills, they are trying various ways to curb unnecessary ER visits. In Maryland and West Virginia, for example, a number of hospitals are working with health centers to develop diversion programs that guide patients, when appropriate, away from the ER and into a primary care health center.

## **WELFARE LIMITS**

Michigan lawmakers have capped welfare benefits at four years. Representative Ken Horn, sponsor of the bill, told the Saginaw News, "It's good to have a safety net, but it shouldn't be a lifestyle. Michigan is the only state in the region that has not adopted reasonable limits on how long welfare recipients can continue receiving assistance. This reform effort maintains a strong safety net for those who truly need assistance while making our welfare system affordable for Michigan taxpayers." Supporters hope it will save the state \$77 million. Nearly 13,000 families will lose benefits beginning Oct. 1. Critics voiced concerns that the time limits would hurt vulnerable children, spur crime and increase poverty.

## **PARTY ON IN ARIZONA**

A new political party has received enough signatures to qualify for official recognition in Arizona. The Americans Elect Party is already established in Alaska, Kansas and Nevada and has plans to expand to all states. Its main focus, according to its website, is to give every citizen the power to nominate presidential candidates over the Internet. "We have no ties to any political group—left, right, or center," it says on the website. "We don't promote any issues, ideology or candidates. None of our funding comes from special interests or lobbyists. Our only goal is to put a directly nominated ticket on the ballot in 2012." We're not sure how the party feels about state lawmakers.

# NOT YOUR FATHER'S POLYGAMIST

In order to qualify for statehood, Utah outlawed polygamy back in the 1890s. But that didn't eliminate the practice, and the law has recently come under attack by a polygamist family that is suing the state over it. Kody Brown and his four wives are claiming it's unconstitutional to be persecuted based on their religious values. No doubt you have been riveted by "Sister Wives," the reality TV show in which this family recently starred. Brown, along with his wives and 16 children have recently moved to Nevada. According to National

Beer Wine Shots FOODS Public Radio, there have been more than 100 challenges to polygamy laws, and all have failed.



### **OHIO SERVES UP**

The Ohio Capitol has a new café with treats to sip, sup and swig. For the first time, a full-service bar will be available to the public at certain times inside the historic building. Beer, wine and liquor will be offered, but none will be on display. The café will also host special events and private happy hours. According to NCSL's blog, this is the only place that allows a restaurant inside a capitol to serve liquor to the public. Several states ban alcohol altogether in the capitol, and some allow it only for special events. And there are a few remaining state capitols that have unofficial bars in leaders' offices that "still lubricate the legislative process behind closed doors," according to blog writer Karl Kurtz.

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