



### MOPED MANIA

A moped driver really has no chance against a car in a crash. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) says annual moped fatalities doubled between 2005 and 2009. State laws on mopeds, or motor scooters, vary widely. Some states define mopeds by engine size, while others define them by their maximum speed capabilities. According to NCSL, 29 states require a driver's license or a special moped license, to operate a motor scooter. Thirty-six states have no specific passenger restrictions for mopeds, and 27 do not require helmets.

### GUNS IN BARS

Lawmakers in Ohio passed legislation in June to allow people with concealed-weapon permits to carry guns into bars, restaurants and some stadiums that serve alcohol. Lawmakers there also are considering a proposal to allow anyone who "qualifies" for a concealed-weapon permit to carry a gun without having to get the permit. It also would allow firearms in colleges, churches, child-care centers and government buildings, according to The Columbus Dispatch.

### HOT POTATO IN IDAHO

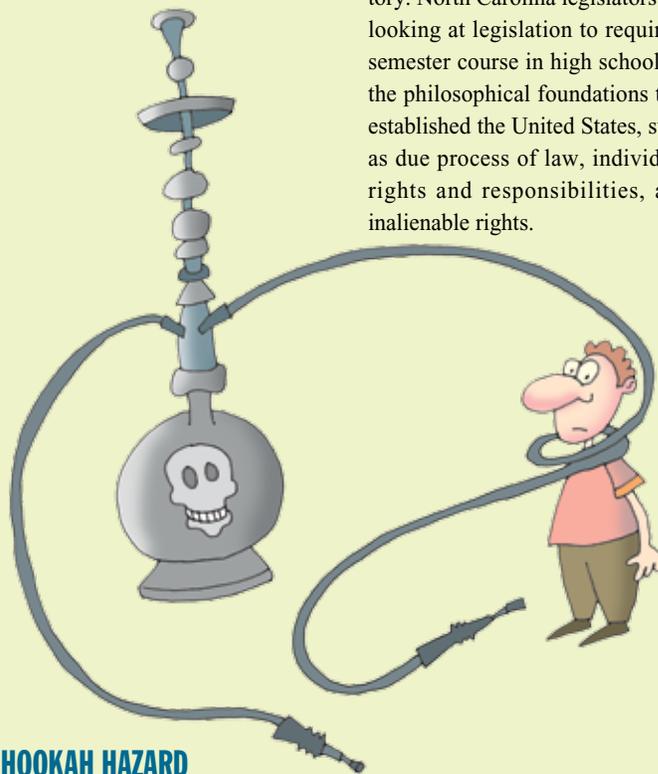
Idahoans for Responsible Education Reform turned in enough verified signatures in early June to put three repeal measures on the November 2012 ballot targeting education reforms passed in March, according to The Spokesman Review. "The people of Idaho will finally have their say on these widely unpopular laws," Mike Lanza, a parent who led the effort, told the newspaper. The laws limit teachers' collective bargaining rights, require a merit-pay system, and reallocate money from teachers' salaries to classroom technology.

### FOCAL POINT, USA

It's official. Plato's it. The center of "The Republic." Well, the center of the U.S. population anyhow. Plato, Mo., is about 23 miles southwest of Edgar Springs, which held the bull's-eye distinction after the 2000 Census, and 873 miles from Chestertown in Kent County, Md., the center in 1790.

### CIVICS SMARTS

Several state legislatures have debated measures to require more—and specific—civics instruction in public schools, according to Education Week. Utah's new law requires schools to teach that the country is a "compound constitutional republic," and to cover key historical documents, such as the U.S. Constitution, The Mayflower Compact and certain Supreme Court decisions. California has a bill that would require public schools to incorporate the contribution of homosexuals to our nation's history. North Carolina legislators are looking at legislation to require a semester course in high school on the philosophical foundations that established the United States, such as due process of law, individual rights and responsibilities, and inalienable rights.

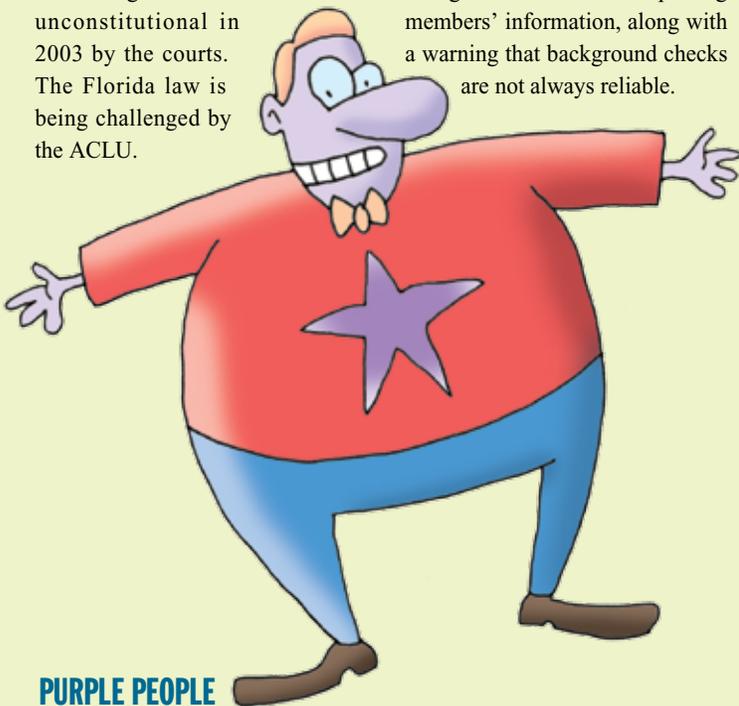


### HOOKAH HAZARD

Who's heard of hookahs? Most young people. They use these water pipes for smoking sweet-smelling, fruity-flavored tobacco, often called shisha. Many cities and states have exemptions that allow hookah bars despite clean indoor air legislation, and the pipes' popularity is spreading. Young people think smoking them is safer than smoking cigarettes. Not so, say scientists. Smoke from a hookah contains many of the same addictive carcinogenic components as cigarette smoke, according to the World Health Organization. In fact, a typical one-hour hookah session is equal to smoking 100 to 200 cigarettes. Because the pipes are heated with charcoal, they also can increase carbon monoxide to dangerous levels, according to Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights. Lawmakers in California, Connecticut and Oregon have introduced bills to ban or limit hookah bars, according to The New York Times.

## PASSING THE TEST

At least 32 state legislatures this year have considered proposals to test applicants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or food stamps for illegal drugs. The federal rules allow drug testing as part of the TANF block grant. Two states have enacted legislation. Arizona established a temporary requirement for FY 2012 to test applicants they have reason to believe are using illegal drugs. Florida's new law requires testing all applicants for TANF benefits. Florida's law is the first passed since a similar pilot program in Michigan was ruled unconstitutional in 2003 by the courts. The Florida law is being challenged by the ACLU.



## PURPLE PEOPLE

Party politics—at both the state and federal levels—would have us believing Americans are extremely polarized and divided. A study released by the Pew Research Center in May found “the public’s political mood is fractious. ... many political attitudes have become more doctrinaire at both ends of the ideological spectrum.” But according to a new study from Brigham Young University and the University of Pennsylvania, so-called red and blue states are actually various shades of purple, and the differences are much less extreme among average citizens than we may think. This study compared the degree of polarization between residents of the red state of Utah with blue New York. “Our findings demonstrate that there is only limited polarization—and a good deal of common ground—between red states and blue states,” says researcher Jeremy Pope, assistant professor of political science at BYU. “Regular voters are not highly ideological in the way political parties are.” The study appears in the summer 2011 issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

## INTERNET DANGERS

Lawmakers in Connecticut, New York and Texas are considering bills to protect users of online dating services from potential dangers. The Connecticut bill is similar to laws in New York and New Jersey that require Internet dating sites to give advice during registration on how to keep safe, such as not listing your last name, e-mail address, work place, phone number, etc. The bills in New York and Texas would add a provision similar to one in New Jersey’s law that requires dating services to disclose whether they conduct criminal background checks before posting members’ information, along with a warning that background checks are not always reliable.



## FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEKS

Some public schools in more than 21 states have shortened their school week to four days to save money. But does it? A new study by the Education Commission of the States found it does, but not as much as most think. Researchers calculated the average school district could save, at most, 5.43 percent of its total budget. And in districts that have made the change, actual savings have come in at between 0.4 percent and 2.5 percent. Salaries for teachers and administrators are seldom reduced, since hours worked remain the same, so most of the savings (20 percent) come from eliminating a day of school busing, janitorial services, energy for heating and cooling, food service and supplies, and other student supports. Often, however, schools remain open on the nonteaching day, lowering savings. Opponents of the four-day school week cite problems with long, exhausting class days and finding day care for children on the “off” day. Educational experts worry longer weekends could hurt students’ learning. How four-day school weeks affect academic achievement is an unknown, however, as there is a lack of comprehensive research.

## TEENS AND WORK

Maine lawmakers expanded the hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work during the school year from 20 to 24 hours a week, and from four to six hours a day. On school nights, they must be off work by 10:15 p.m. Debate was heated, according to the *Bangor Daily News*. Proponents argued that the state shouldn’t be in the business of making these decisions for families. They pointed out that Maine had the most restrictive laws in the country, and students needed to be able to save for high college tuition. Opponents voiced concerns that working longer hours would hurt students’ school work and was really just a way to help businesses find cheap labor. Nationally, 18 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam limit the hours 16- and 17-year-olds can work a week, ranging from 30 to 54 hours; 19 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam limit the hours allowed per day, ranging from four to 12; and 22 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam have nighttime cutoffs. In Kentucky, students’ grades determine how many hours they are allowed to work.