GOLDEN STATE HANGS TEN

Two California lawmakers, Assemblyman Al Muratsuchi (D) and Assembly Majority Leader Ian Calderon (D), introduced a bill in January to make surfing the state’s official sport. Surfing has made California beaches world famous, from Humboldt Bay on the Redwood Coast north of San Francisco to South San Diego. It’s lured dozens of surf-goods companies to establish headquarters in the state. And the sport generates more than $6 billion in annual retail sales. “Nothing represents the California Dream better than surfing,” Muratsuchi says. Not all states have an official sport, but California would join Alaska (dog mushing), North Carolina (NASCAR) and Texas (rodeo) if the bill passes.

SICK DAYS? PLEASE

Medical professionals and some employers encourage people to stay home when they’re sick. But not everyone can afford to take unpaid leave from their workplaces. With no federal law mandating that employers provide paid sick leave to their employees, eight states and the District of Columbia have passed laws requiring employers to offer it. Those states are Arizona, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

NO NEED TO TEXT BACK

To reduce the number of people missing court appearances, some of Colorado’s municipal courts want to send reminders to defendants via text message. Colorado Representative Pete Lee (D) plans to introduce a bill that would create a pilot program to let courts try texting and track the results to see whether it helps. As one reform advocate put it, “Most people who miss a court date haven’t fled the jurisdiction. They’ve misplaced the summons or they didn’t put it on their calendar. Or they don’t have a calendar.”

DOGGING AND DRIVING

Although 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands ban text messaging for all drivers, it’s perfectly legal in every state except Hawaii to drive with a pet sitting in your lap or moving around freely in the vehicle—something safety advocates say can be as distracting as texting. In the last five years, laws introduced in about a dozen states to prevent driving with an unrestrained animal have failed as many lawmakers and the public view such measures as overreach. Four of the five bills considered so far this year have died; one (in Pennsylvania) is pending.
RESCUE ON THE MENU

Kansas Senators Ed Berger (R) and Dan Goddard (R) were having dinner together during a reception at the Topeka Country Club, when Berger suddenly realized that Goddard was in trouble. As Berger told the Wichita Eagle, "He was choking and struggling and I asked, 'the Heimlich?' and he said 'yes.' So I gave him the Heimlich maneuver and was able to dislodge what he was choking on." It was the first time Berger had attempted the first-aid technique. "It was pretty simple," he said. "I just hope I didn’t hurt him." Hardly. As Goddard told the newspaper, "I feel real good today. I am a happy camper."

SAY WHAT?

Colorful language can cost you in Virginia, where it’s a misdemeanor to "profanely swear or curse" in public. A slip of the tongue can result in a $250 fine, though the law is rarely enforced. For the third time in as many years, Delegate Michael Webert (R), who farms for a living and admits to letting "brightly colored" language slip on occasion, has introduced a bill to wipe the swearing law from the books. "Every once in a while the farmer comes out in me. I’d rather not get hit with a misdemeanor," he says. So far, his colleagues have been reluctant to repeal a law some see as promoting decency.

INFECTION AWARENESS AT SCHOOL

Sepsis, an extreme reaction to infection that spreads via the bloodstream, kills between 250,000 and 500,000 people in the U.S. annually—more than AIDS, breast and prostate cancers, and stroke combined. Yet fewer than half of Americans have heard of it. New York Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan (D) worked with a foundation run by the family of Rory Staunton, a 12-year-old who died of sepsis after a fall at school, to develop legislation that creates a sepsis awareness and prevention program for school districts. Rory Staunton’s Law was enacted in November, making New York the first state to provide K-12 health teachers with resources to teach children about the deadly disease, how they can prevent it and when to seek help from a trusted adult.

BAD HAIR DAY

A federal appellate court dealt Missouri’s African-style hair braiders a setback when it upheld the state’s law requiring them to undergo 1,500 hours of cosmetology training before they can work. The training, which can cost more than $12,000, includes no instruction in African-style braiding. The court acknowledged that requiring braiders to spend time and money on training they don’t need “is imperfect, but not unconstitutionally so.” The two St. Louis-area hair braiders who challenged the law plan to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. Missouri is one of 14 states that require hair braiders to have a cosmetology license.