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A wise call for road safety

CALIFORNIA has included a couple of sensible restrictions on young drivers to help keep their attention on the road. For example, a newly licensed driver is not allowed to transport passengers under the age of 20 unless accompanied by a parent, driving instructor or other adult age 25 or older. Also, drivers under 18 are not allowed to be on the road after 11 p.m.

On Thursday, the state Senate voted 23-14 to add another restriction on under-18 licensees: Under SB33, authored by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, it would be illegal for them to use any type of cell phone, pager or text-messaging device while driving. Violations would be an infraction - which would not count as a "point" against the driver's record - subject to fines of \$20 for a first-time offense and \$50 for each subsequent offense.

Various studies bear out the dangers of driver distraction, especially when the person behind the wheel is inexperienced. The California Highway Patrol has identified cell-phone use as the No. 1 source of "distracted driver-related accidents," the Personal Insurance Federation of California

pointed out in support of SB33. Moreover, a Ford Motor Co. study found that teenage drivers are "four times more distracted" than adult drivers by cell-phone use, the insurance group added.

Such evidence has led the National Transportation Safety Board to urge restrictions on cell-phone use by young drivers - and 14 states and the District of Columbia have responded with laws.

The bill now goes to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has not taken a position on SB33, though he once told The Chronicle editorial board that he strictly prohibits his own children from using cell phones while driving. The governor also signed legislation last year that will require all drivers to use hands-free devices when talking on the phone starting in July 2008.

Opponents of SB33 made the predictable complaints about "nanny state" legislation. In this case, lives are at stake. This isn't just about making sure teen drivers make the responsible decision. It's about protecting all the pedestrians and motorists who would be in their paths when they are gabbing away or trying to compose a text message.

THE DAILY JOURNAL

Leading local news coverage in San Mateo County

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Guest Perspective

Teen driving distractions should be eliminated

By Joe Simitian and Bonnie Garcia

It's time for California's teen-aged drivers to put down their cell phones, pagers and PDAs, and pay attention to their driving.

Year after year, car crashes are the number one cause of death among teenagers. In fact, the fatality rate for drivers 16-19 years old is four times that of older drivers in the 25-69 year-old age range. Across the country, more than 6,000 teen-aged drivers a year are killed on our nation's streets and highways.

Among the culprits: cell phones, pagers and PDAs. The young drivers who are using these devices while driving are putting not only themselves at risk, but all of us as well.

That's why we authored Senate Bill 33, which prohibits new drivers under the age of 18 from driving while using a

cell phone or pager, or while text messaging. For ease of administration, the new law would take effect on July 1st, 2008, when other drivers, 18 and older, will be required to drive "hands-free" if they're using a cell phone.

We know that driver inattention is the leading factor in most crashes, and that cell phone use is the most common distraction. And most alarmingly, teen-aged drivers are four times more distracted than adult drivers when using a cell phone.

Precisely why that's the case is not clear. Maybe it's because new drivers



have not yet grown proficient at multi-tasking while driving. Or maybe, as some research suggests, it's because the region of the brain that inhibits risky behaviors is not

fully formed until after the teenage years.

Whatever the reason, we know that putting cell phones into the hands of young drivers is a formula for disaster. Does a two year wait make a difference? Absolutely! In fact, the crash rate for 16 year olds is five times greater than it is for 18 year olds.

Asking young drivers to wait until the age of 18 before they pick up that cell phone is a modest imposition that

will save lives. That's why the National Transportation Safety Board recently put a cell phone ban for young drivers on its list of "Most Wanted Safety Recommendations to States."

And that's why Senate Bill 33 is supported by the California PTA, driving schools, law enforcement, auto and health insurers and even AT&T.

After they reach the age of 18 there will still be plenty of time for California's young drivers to talk on their cell phones — if we can keep them alive 'til then.

SB33 aims to do just that.

State Sen. Joe Simitian, D - Palo Alto, is the author of Senate Bill 33. State Assemblywoman Bonnie Garcia, R - Cathedral City, is the principal co-author of Senate Bill 33.

REDWOOD CITY DAILY NEWS

September 14, 2007

Time to hang up

Governor signs bill banning teen drivers from using cell phones

BY WILL ORENUS
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Hang up and drive, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger told teenagers Thursday at Redwood City's Sequoia High School.

Flanked by purple-clad student government representatives, the governor sat down at a desk in the school's parking lot to sign a bill prohibiting anyone under 18 from using cell phones, pagers, text-messaging devices or other electronic gadgets while driving.

"We want to eliminate any extra distractions so they can focus on the road and being good drivers," Schwarzenegger said.

Authored by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, the bill is set to go into effect July 1, 2008. That's the same starting date as another Simitian-backed bill that will require drivers 18 and over to use hands-free devices if they want to use cell phones behind the wheel.

The law that applies to teens goes a step further, Simitian said, because data show younger drivers are particularly prone to accidents caused by inattention.

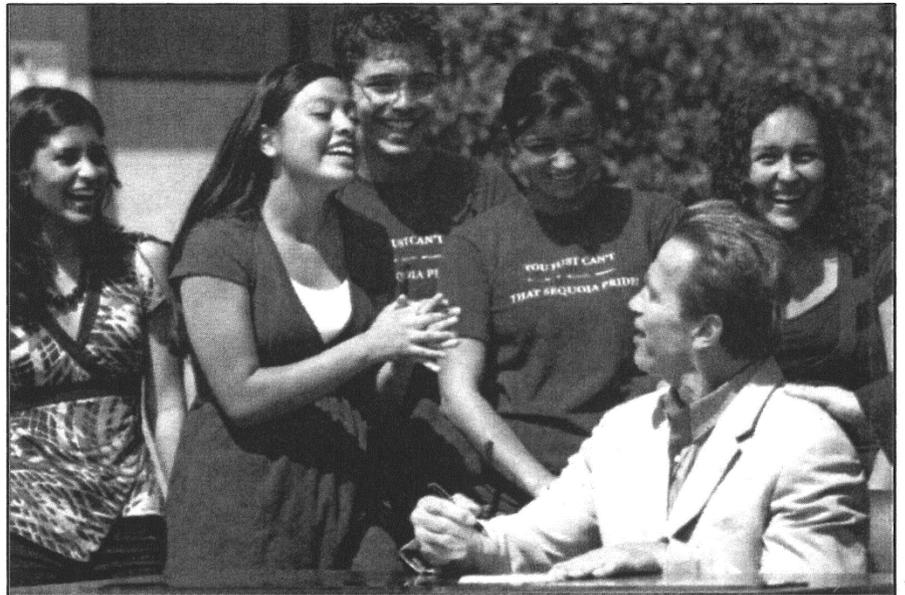
He cited a recent American Automobile Association study in which close to 30 percent of teen respondents said they talk on cell phones or text-message while driving. The California Highway Patrol lists cell phone use as a top cause of accidents in the state.

"Driving and having a cell phone are rites of passage for our children, but the two taken together really have proved to be a deadly combination," Simitian said.

A good way to remember the difference between the two laws, he added, is "over 18, hands-free, under 18, hands-off."

Violators of either law would be punished with a fine of \$20 on first offense and \$50 for each subsequent offense. The bill stipulates that police won't pull people over just to find out whether they're talking on their cell phones.

Schwarzenegger said he supports the



ABOVE: Left, Sequoia High School student Sandra Torres, 16, begs California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger for a signed copy of SB 33 and his pen Thursday at Sequoia High School in Redwood City. Schwarzenegger signed SB 33, which bans teenage drivers from using all electronic devices while driving.

LEFT: The school student body President Ally Colin, 17, Gov. Schwarzenegger and state Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto).

Konstandinos Goumenidis / Daily News

bill as a worried parent as well as a legislator. "Like everyone else, when my teenage child leaves with the car, you worry until they come back."

Far from shunning the bill as intrusive, the Sequoia students on hand were eager to get a copy.

When Schwarzenegger asked who wanted one, junior class president San-

dra Torres, 16, blurted, "Me, me please!"

Though Torres conceded that "some people may not like it," she said, "I think the law is OK because talking on a cell phone really is something that distracts people."

California joins 13 other states and the District of Columbia in prohibiting cell phone use by teen drivers, according to AAA.