

No to Driver's Licenses for Snowmachines, Boats and ATV's

By: Rep. Vic Kohring, April 14, 2002

Earlier in the session, Outdoor Editor Craig Medred of the Anchorage Daily News wrote a satire critical of my legislation, [House Bill 397](#), that would delete the state law requiring a driver's license to operate a snowmachine. The bill was expanded to include boats and ATV's, and has been successfully moving through the committee process, including passing the House Floor by a 34-3 vote.

I wish to set the record straight with facts and evidence. First, Mr. Medred spoke of snowmachines traveling at 100 mph and later another speeding at 120. Very few snowmachines are driven that fast. To do so, you'd have to have a long, straight, flat surface like a river or large lake. The fact is, most drivers operate their machines under 40 mph, especially on trails and wooded terrain. Besides, not only is this part of his satire an exaggeration, it has nothing to do with the legislation.

Second, the main venue I'm referring to is Rural Alaska. For years, snowmachines and ATV's have been Bush residents' primary means of transportation because of a lack of roads. Here is where nearly everyone uses such off road vehicles because there are no state highways. It's *already* illegal to drive a snowmachines and ATV's on a state road, much less a major highway. So all of Mr. Medred's exaggeration amounts to nothing.

I'm talking common sense. Most Alaskans were surprised to learn when they read a recent article in the Daily News that it's against the law to operate off road vehicles without a driver's license. Many in law enforcement were not even aware of the law. That's because people consider snowmachines and ATV's *off-road* devices that don't mix with car and truck traffic on highways or city streets, and thus shouldn't require a standard motor vehicle driver's license.

I wish to bring legality back to where most already thought it was. I wish to decriminalize peaceful acts by law abiding people. Driver's licenses are for motor vehicles on public highways and city streets, not for off-road use.

This is where I am at one with people of the Bush. Suddenly, after years of watching kids drive around villages, will public safety officers now have to start enforcing a non-common sense law? We do not need to involve law enforcement where they did not intervene before and where many locals don't think it's needed now. Some people discovered a dead letter law and now wish to resuscitate it.

Such a law should stay dead. Better yet, it should be officially abolished as *unnneeded*. In simpler words, "why fix something when it ain't broke"?

Mr. Medred is right about one aspect of this debate. That is, people should be instructed in *how* to drive snowmachines, boats and ATV's safely. But the real question is by whom? Why must

government control the process? What happened to parental instruction and supervision? How about snowmobile and boating associations, and outdoor and recreation groups who offer safety training and certification?

To ape Mr. Medred, should we direct government to require us to have a license to *eat*? Should they come into our homes and teach our kids to walk? How about teaching us to go to bed at a decent hour? That would be after the Director of the Division of Governmental Coordination on Tooth Brushing leaves the house. And best of all, a State Regulator on Outdoors Newspaper Commentators who write like lawyers without a factual case?

For years, snowmachines, boats and ATV's have proven useful and fun, and we have treated them as off-road, no-drivers-license-needed devices. Suddenly, government is demanding that a law be enforced for no perceived need. Busybody laws are not for Alaska. We have better things to do with our time.

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