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# OPINION

Views from our editorial board, columnists and readers



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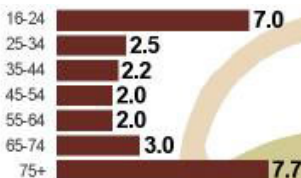
## Today's topics

- Our view on Iraq: War calls for common new direction, not more sniping
- Opposing view: Progress is being made
- Japan's uncomfortable truth
- Yeltsin leaves behind a mixed legacy
- 'Mr. Bush, tear down those Baghdad walls!'
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## ■ Debate



## Our view on highway safety: Scrutinize older drivers

### Young, old at risk

Fatal crashes per 100 million miles traveled by age group.

Source: Government Accountability Office

By Robert W. Ahrens, USA TODAY

When states fail to curb dangerous seniors, results can be tragic.

Trying to persuade Grandpa that it's time to give up his driver's license is likely to be met with an irascible, if not downright hostile, response. Seniors know that physical and cognitive abilities decline with age, but they also fiercely prize their independence. Too many are in denial about their fading driving skills and won't voluntarily release their grip from the steering wheel.

The case for that difficult intervention — if not from families then from state governments — has never been more compelling. Elderly drivers are more likely to be involved in fatal crashes at traffic intersections than are younger drivers, according to a report issued last month by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

By 2030, the number of licensed drivers ages 65 and older will nearly double to about 57 million — about one in five drivers. Yet efforts by states to evaluate the abilities of older motorists aren't nearly as stringent as new limits being placed on teens, who increasingly face restrictions on night driving, the number of passengers they can carry and other matters.

That's happening because motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds. But drivers older than 75 are even more at risk, as you can see from the chart nearby. They deserve equal scrutiny, and according to a new study by Congress' Government Accountability Office, they aren't getting it:

\*Only 16 states demand that seniors undergo more frequent license renewals than non-seniors.

\*Only 10 states require older drivers to undergo extra vision assessments.

\*Only five states require older drivers to renew their licenses in person.

\*Only New Hampshire and Illinois require road tests for those 75 and older.

In addition, little is done to screen older drivers for dementia, a condition that's likely to affect nearly half of those 85 and older. The risk of a crash for drivers with dementia are two to eight times greater than those with no cognitive impairment.

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results can be tragic.

Almost four years ago, George Russell Weller, then 86, drove his car through a crowded farmers' market in Santa Monica, Calif., killing 10 people and injuring more than 70. He mistook the car's accelerator for the brake, his attorney said.

In Dallas, teen Katie Bolka was killed last year when a 90-year-old driver ran a red light and slammed into her car. [A bill known as "Katie's Law"](#) is being considered in the Texas Legislature to impose new restrictions, including required vision tests, for elderly drivers.

Tougher regulations would no doubt be inconvenient and perhaps insulting to older drivers. But for their own safety and the well-being of others, states and families need to act to avert preventable tragedies.

Posted at 12:21 AM/ET, April 17, 2007 in [Ground transportation - Editorial](#), [Law/Judiciary - Editorial](#), [Medical Issues - Editorial](#), [Politics, Government - Editorial](#), [USA TODAY editorial](#) | [Permalink](#)

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12d ago

I am 66 yrs. old, and have no problems driving at this time. But I am preparing to be man enough to stop driving when I no longer feel safe.

I am a former police officer, and I have taken the AARP driving course every 3 years since I was 50. Someone in every class seems to justify that people need their independence, and are in denial about the aging process.

Driving is a PRIVILEGE, not a Constitutional right.

No one should object to additional testing if it would alert them to limitations that they are unaware of, and possibly save their lives.



Francis2 wrote:

No responsible person would want it on their conscience that their selfishness caused an unnecessary accident.

The Representative from Waco Tx. in today's Opposing View, is making this an issue of discrimination. He may be more concerned about being reelected, than about safety. I saw that attitude in Florida, by some elected officials.

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ZoomZoom Diva wrote: 11d ago

As a driver in my early 30's, I have no issue with requiring periodic retraining and eye exams for all drivers, possibly once every 5 to 10 years for classes and every 2-3 years for eye exams (at a DMV or doctor's office). Cars are quite different compared to when I first learned how to drive, and that gap grows far more with older drivers.

As much as I believe that government has no right to require you to sacrifice Constitutional rights when you drive, driving in and of itself is not one.



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tuarim wrote: 11d ago

As a person who has been hit 3 times while biking (2 from folks racing out of drive ways and one from behind) and as an avid walker, I can personally say that in Contra Costa County, CA, those under 40 should be watched closely.

Though, I have a better solution. Every 5 years, everyone takes the written exam and every 10 years a physical driving test. And not some 30 minute test to see if one can parallel park, but a thorough 2+ hour driving test through cities, parking, suburbs...the works. If a person can not score higher than 70%, they will need to take a driver's education class. Plain and simple. Then, compare the older crowd to the younger crowd and tell me who are the worse drivers.

Sean Kleen,
Martinez, CA
Age 35



F-Rod wrote: 11d ago

We absolutely need to tighten up the restrictions on older drivers. This will be a growing problem in the next decades. I can remember some terrible riding experiences when driving with some fabulous grandparents and great uncles. You can be a great person but you don't deserve the right to endanger others on the roads. Strict strict guidelines should be made on people over the age of 65.



EdEuph wrote: 11d ago

Maybe we need to design more pedestrian-friendly communities where older people could walk to church, the store or other activities.



Montalvo wrote: 11d ago

Setting tighter licensing requirements for older drivers is age discrimination, plain and simple...and I'm in favor of it!

I'm 62 years old and a former cab driver (on that basis alone, I should have lost my license years ago!). But I was discriminated against on the basis of age when I applied for a driver's license at the age of 16, because younger drivers, in general, have a greater potential for accidents due to their inexperience (OK, and their hormones).

Likewise, older drivers have a greater potential for accidents based on the decline in the reaction times and alertness. Although statistics indicate that they have fewer accidents, studies show that they experience more chargeable accidents per mile driven. Because of the medically proven decline in required capabilities and proven risk profile, we should discriminate against older drivers just as we do against the younger drivers and set more stringent licensing requirements.

Look, it's not like we're saying you can't drive at 90...IF you can demonstrate the capability to do so safely.



antielvis wrote: 11d ago

Drivers should be tested yearly. 15 years ago a senior driver made a left turn in front of me never slowed just turned into me. His car was totaled. While he was being interviewed by the police officer he says speak up I cant hear and my eyesight aint what it used to be!!



**ZoomZoom Diva** wrote: 10d ago

Where do you propose the DMV obtains the resources for annual driving tests or 2 hour + driving tests, and scheduling these during hours when government offices are open?

Passing a private driver's course would perform the same objective without causing further bloating of government bureaucracies.

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**Montalvo** wrote: 10d ago

ZoomZoomDiva, DMV resources for testing older drivers is the easy part: simply pass the costs on to the older drivers. You want to drive at 90? Then open your wallet and pay the cost to verify your capability.

I'm not saying that it couldn't/shouldn't be outsourced but if that was done, you'd still need to have the DMV certify the certifiers, at the elder drivers' expense, of course.

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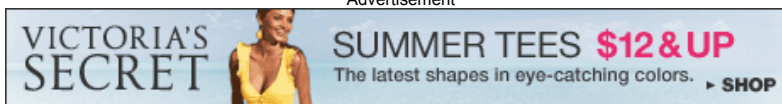
**KarenRonniesMom** wrote: 9d ago

Upon reading this article I was brought back to June 4, 2004 which is the day I lost my son Ronnie to an elderly driver, age 79 who was not injured in the least but took my sons life in an instant. This woman was told by her Dr that she should think about giving up driving after having an accident 9 months before killing my son and she still didnt give up her license until 6 months after Ronnies death. I have never heard a word from this woman since she hit and killed my son. It was a nice sunny day, weather was not a problem it was the fact that this woman should not have been on the road but was not willing to give up her so called independence...If you want to read the article that was written one the one year anniversary of my sons death go to google.com and type in; ronnie hetu nashua telegraph. and below the story there is a link to another story that was run that day called; a year later, mother struggles with the ultimate loss.

Now it is going on 3 years and I still struggle with the loss of my only son, my youngest child. I dont think elderly people that shouldnt be driving any longer will ever get the fact that the damage they can do not only can kill but devastate the lives of the family left behind to go on day to day handling this grief.....

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