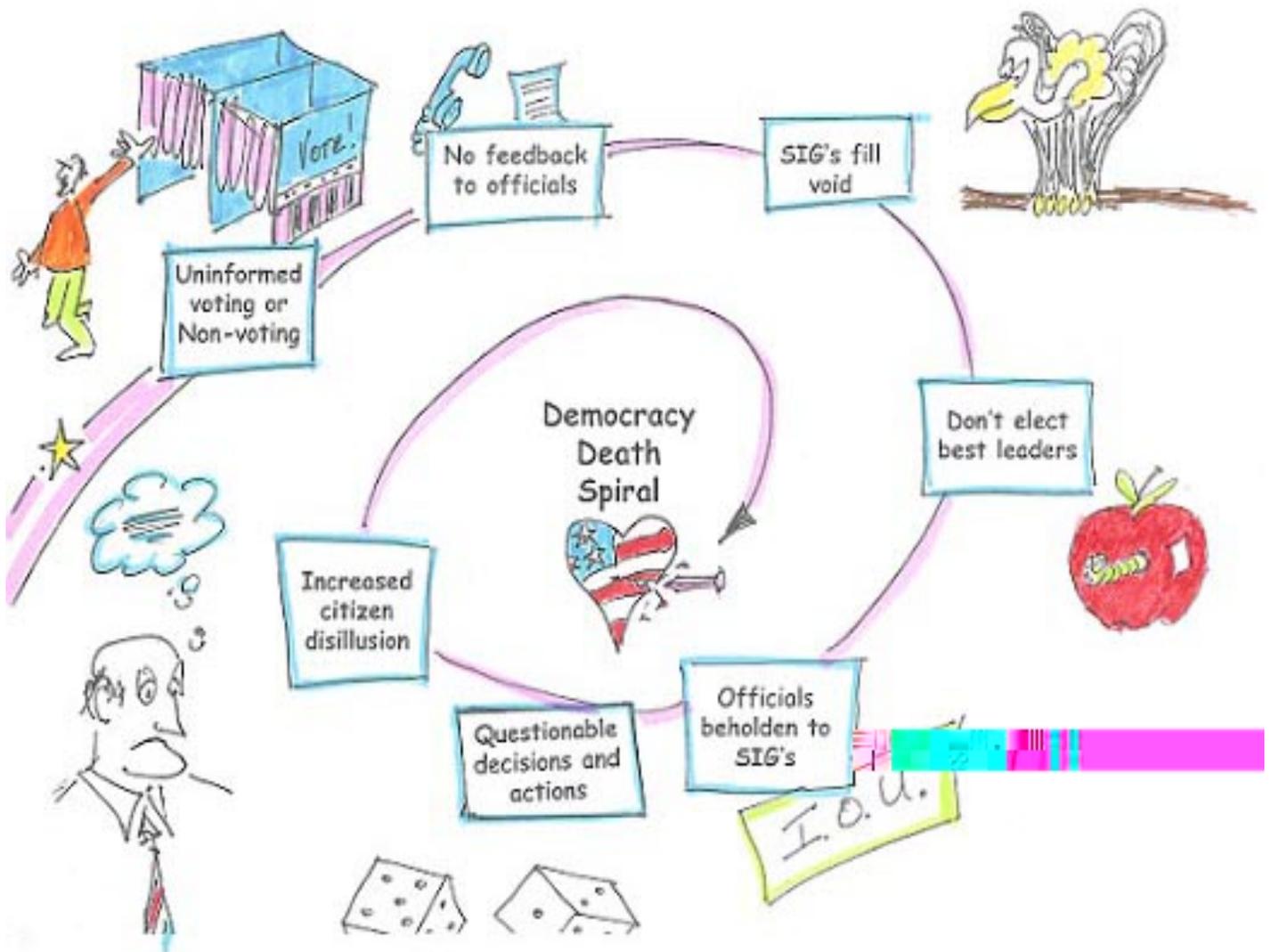


3 - The Impact of Not Caring

In a dictatorship, inaction on the part of citizens doesn't have much impact – it is the experience, morals and personal qualities (or lack thereof) of the dictator that matter. But in a democracy where the government is made up of citizens and where that government is elected by its citizens and is constitutionally obligated to act on behalf of *all* citizens, inaction by its citizens can be fatal. What happens when we don't act on behalf of the country when we need to – or really, when the country needs us to act? Cracks in the underpinnings of our democracy appear and get bigger.

The Democracy Death Spiral

The impact of a lack of attention by citizens works something like this:



1. Most of us don't vote or let public officials know how we feel about issues.
2. For those who do vote, many aren't well-informed on the issues or the candidates - and too many of us vote based upon party only or on what our friends think.

3. This lack of involvement creates a void. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) fill that void, influencing elections and decisions on issues by using the money and energies of their organizations and constituents.
4. We end up electing public officials who are not our most capable leaders and who have become beholden to the SIGs at some level.
5. These public officials then make decisions in the best interest of the SIGs rather than in the best interest of their school district, city, state or country. Getting re-elected becomes more important to many public officials than doing what is in the best interest of their constituents or country.
6. Our public officials are regrettably reluctant to change the laws that allow them to accept so much money from SIGs.
7. Meanwhile we, the citizens who didn't vote and get involved, become disillusioned with government and politicians. We don't believe we can make a difference so we become more disenfranchised. The cycle spirals downward until a major crisis occurs - like [9-11-2001](#).

And, it gets even crazier! In a number of states, a process has been established whereby citizens or organizations can get "initiatives" on the ballot. This process was put into place because state legislators had such a tough time tackling the important issues and simply didn't deal with many of them. The irony is that the same people who didn't vote, or who did vote but weren't knowledgeable on the candidates or issues, are then asked to become knowledgeable and vote on the initiatives issues which often are complicated and on which powerful SIGs spend millions of dollars and say whatever is needed to sway voters. A number of years ago, Arizona voters faced 11 initiatives on the November ballot, which was so complicated the state had to put together a novel-sized booklet - 223 pages - as a guide.

Our Best Leaders?

I've always wondered how many of us think we elect our most capable people to public office. I recently came across the following:

" CAN YOU IMAGINE WORKING AT THE FOLLOWING COMPANY? IT HAS A LITTLE OVER 500 EMPLOYEES WITH THE FOLLOWING STATISTICS:

- 29 have been accused of spousal abuse
 - 7 have been arrested for fraud
- 19 have been accused of writing back checks
- 117 have bankrupted at least two businesses
 - 3 have been arrested for assault
- 71 cannot get a credit card due to bad credit
 - 14 have been arrested on drug-charges
 - 8 have been arrested for shoplifting
 - 21 are current defendants in lawsuits
- In 1998 alone, 84 were stopped for drunk driving

Can you guess which organization this is? Give up? The answer is the 535 members of a prior United States Congress — the same group that perpetually cranks out hundreds upon hundreds of new laws designed to

keep the rest of us in line."

And what does it say about our national leaders when within the past 30 years...

- one of our presidents resigned from office because he helped cover-up a burglary.
- another president had an affair with a 21 year-old White House intern (which included having oral sex in the White House while conducting national business), was impeached for the actions he took to cover-up the affair and was then acquitted by the Senate.
- a former presidential candidate, and current senior U.S. Senator, withdrew from the nomination battle when it was revealed that he had plagiarized material for a campaign speech; had a serious plagiarism incident during his law school years; exaggerated his academic record during the campaign; and included a number of quotations in his speeches that had been pilfered from past politicians. Check out some [others who have lied](#) about their backgrounds while running for public office.
- one of our vice presidents resigned from office after being fined for income tax evasion. He had been under investigation by a U.S. attorney for allegedly receiving payoffs from engineers when he was a county executive and governor of Maryland.
- another vice president implied he had invented the internet and proclaimed that having access to the internet is a civil right.

I have often wondered why any of us would want any of these individuals representing us in government much less close to the White House. And we keep re-electing them! A former mayor of the District of Columbia was corrupt, a drug user and alleged dealer. He pulled the District down to new lows and to the point where the Congress had to increase its oversight. Yet the residents this man had repeatedly betrayed kept re-electing him.

What kind of people are we allowing to be our voice? It's not that these individuals are evil or that they don't do some worthwhile things – one just wonders what this country might be like under the guidance of our very best.

The impact on society of a bad or mediocre individual can be noticeable, but the impact of a bad or mediocre public official is profound. They make mediocre decisions; they hire and appoint mediocre individuals; they don't have the vision needed to lead; they don't have the courage to stand up for what they and the country believe in or may not even know what they believe in; they don't have the communication skills needed to gain respect and trust of those they deal with; their integrity often is in question; and they may not handle risk appropriately.

Where the Spiral Leads

Here is what happens when a democracy is comprised of apathetic citizens and mediocre public officials.

A. Unacceptable Government Services – Our governments (i.e. federal, state and local) don't provide the services or levels of service we need, and the costs of those services, as

measured in taxes, are well beyond what they could be. Most of us are familiar with the bureaucracy.



As someone who has consulted extensively with government agencies, I have come to believe that before we make inroads into government productivity, much less "reinvent government", the civil service laws must be revised or thrown out. The current regulations make it too hard to

attract top talent and to weed out non-performers. The regulations create bureaucracy and foster mediocrity.

B. Vulnerability to Outside Influences – Our country becomes more vulnerable to groups and countries with different interests than ours. After a recent plane crash involving a foreign carrier, the foreign government and many of its citizens protested a preliminary finding that the cause may have been an intentional act by the foreign pilot. We've heard almost nothing of this crash since – pretty unusual. During the late 1990's, there were numerous stories and charges that our government had been unduly influenced by the Chinese with campaign contributions. When we don't trust our leaders, we wonder if decisions to involve us in foreign conflicts are the correct choice or if there are ulterior motives.



C. Injustices to our Citizens – Citizens, and many times companies, incur unnecessary, and sometimes outrageous, injustices. Corrupt law enforcement officers setup innocent individuals; juries and judges and attorneys with personal and political agendas use those agendas, rather than the actual law, to carry out justice; citizens, and even states, sue large corporations because they have deep pockets.



D. Loss of Trust in our Government - With the news

full of stories of corrupt public officials, elected representatives that lie, monies ill-spent etc., we lose trust in our government



— and in some way in ourselves which makes sense since they are supposed to be one-and-the-same. Trusting the individuals we elect and the individuals they subsequently appoint and hire who are in positions of power is essential in a democracy. When we lose trust in our government, we lose our government.

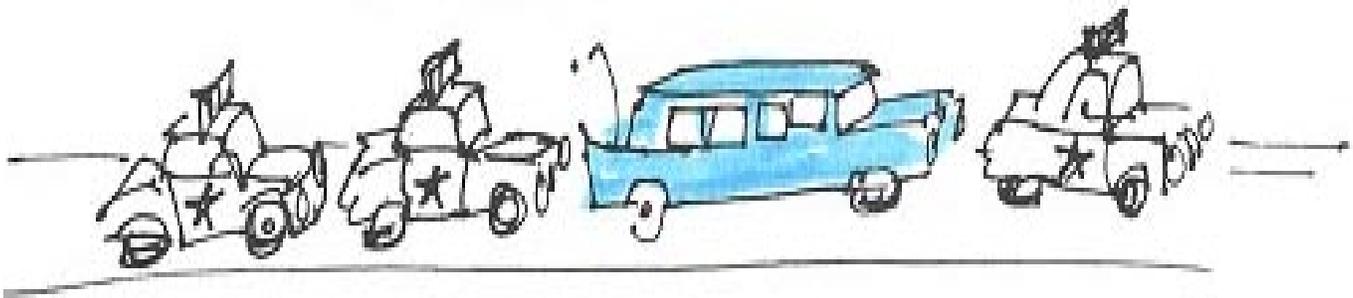
I believe one of the reasons so many bonds issues for things like new schools, protecting the environment, etc. are turned down in public referendums is not because we believe the causes aren't worthy but that we don't trust that government spends our money prudently and if they did, they wouldn't need the money they are asking for.

E. Freedoms Eroded — The freedoms we cherish, and unfortunately often take for granted, slowly, ever so slowly, erode from our lack of care. The change is imperceptible, but certain. Some examples:

- **Freedom to Enjoy Events** — The Santa Monica California City Council voted to cancel the Fourth of July fireworks due to violence in previous years. In Detroit, dangerous going out on 4th night as many individuals fire guns into air to celebrate. Families aren't able to enjoy some of our professional sporting events. Some baseball teams have had to close their bleacher sections because of profanity and rowdiness. The players themselves are often the target of thrown objects. In December 2001, fans in Cleveland threw bottles and cans at referees over a decision they didn't like. After Lakers won NBA championship in 2000, riots broke out around the Staples center.

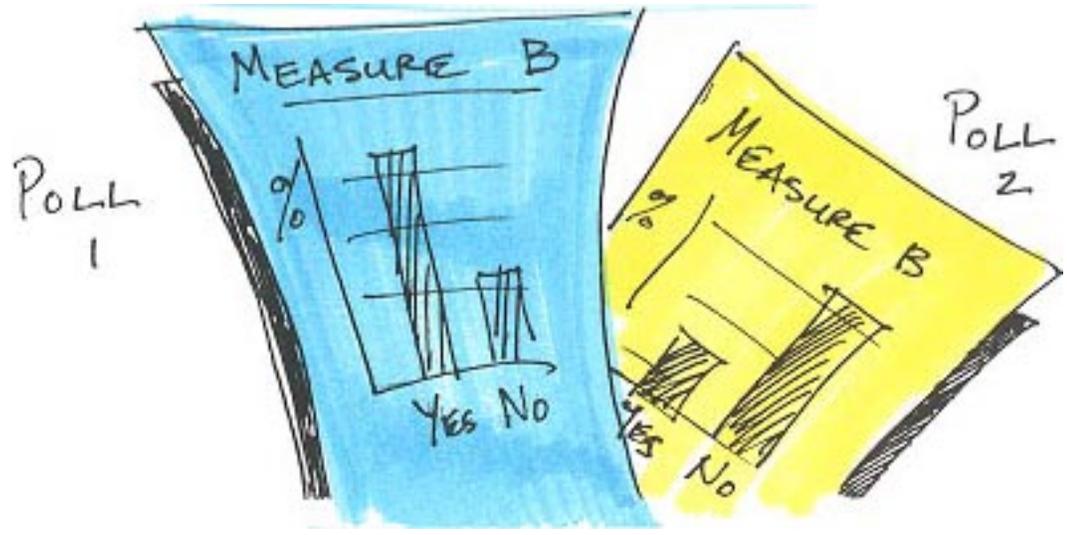


- **Freedom of Movement** — We've lost some freedom of movement.



1. Because we haven't enforced our immigration laws, travel between San Diego and Los Angeles, and other border areas as well, have delays at Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) checkpoints.
 2. Many communities have sobriety checkpoints.
 3. Movement through airports is hampered with security checkpoints.
 4. Simple day-to-day movements of some minorities, in some instances, are hampered by law enforcement individuals who abuse their power.
 5. Gated communities make visiting friends more difficult.
 6. Women at many universities must consider using security guard escorts when on campus in the evenings.
 7. In areas where convicted child molesters and sex offender are released, parents often keep their children inside rather than let them outside to play.
 8. Congestion in many U.S. cities and the surrounding urban areas significantly impacts work commutes and the ability of residents and others to get around.
- ***Freedom to Know the Truth*** – Media coverage has been propagandized, often

designed to disguise or distort the truth. All too often, national security is used to protect facts from being disclosed to the American people. Polls also confuse reality and have a big influence on the opinions of the population. Polling



organizations ask questions about which most citizens have only minimal factual information. They then publish the results of the polls with an air of reality and validity that they simply don't have. Many, if not most, advertisements misrepresent their products.

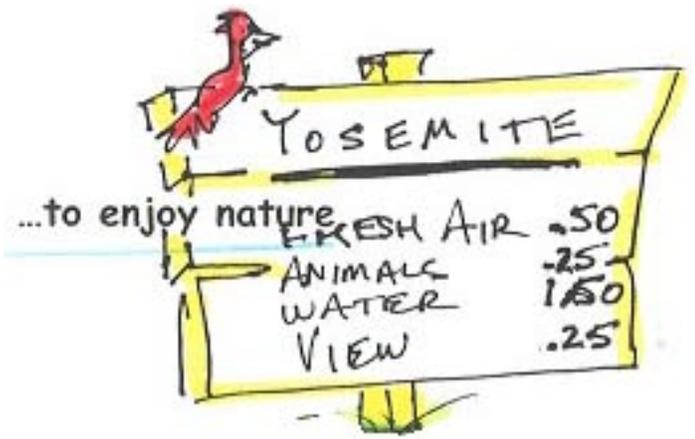
- **Freedom from Fear of Bodily Harm** – When you begin to think of all the ways fear has crept into our lives, it becomes *frightening*. There are some neighborhoods where few of us would ever go at night. Walks in our own neighborhoods alone at night are almost a thing of the past except in lighted areas. Fear for our personal safety and that of our personal property is evident with the booming security industry with locks, security alarms, personal defense products, neighborhood watch programs, gated communities and self-defense classes. When was the last time we slept with our doors or windows unlocked? Some of our children aren't even safe at home with their own parents! Who hasn't had the momentary thought that a freeway tailgater might shoot when he finally passes you? Or the sense of horror that those of us with young children feel at the prospect of having our child abducted at a shopping mall? The anger level in our society seems at an all-time high.



Here are some [Home Security Tips](#) from the Irvine, California Police Department.

- **Freedom to Enjoy the Natural World** – Light and air pollution take away the darkness

of our nights and hid our universe. Water pollution keeps us from enjoying our beaches and rivers. Development and growth transform county-sides into towns and cities and wilderness into national and state parks. As we continue to deplete our natural resources, I am reminded of the last verse of Gerald Manley Hopkins' Inversnaid.



"What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet."

- Freedom of Speech** – The notion of political correctness has eroded our ability to speak freely without threat of harm. When special interest groups hear something they don't like, they put pressure on the individual or the organization for whom the individual is associated. Many times these organizations don't have the courage to stand up for the right of an individual to speak freely and the organization often reprimands or terminates the individual, impugn reputation, let go... When we don't get involved, we let these special interest groups dictate what is acceptable. [Check out some examples.](#)



F. Deprived of Sense of Country – We've allowed the media to focus on the cosmetic and sensational rather than the substantive side of issues. And I don't know about you, but I am tired of seeing the party affiliations of elected officials, like Senator Bill Bradley (D), New Jersey, or Senator J. C. Watts (R) Oklahoma, or Governor Jesse Ventura (I), Minnesota. When does an elected official become an (A) – an American – again? And in some important way, we've been deprived of our President.



Does it bother you that the President can't deliver the State of the Union address without an immediate, televised response from the opposing political party? He is President of the United States, not president of the Republican or Democratic or Reform party.

Government "by and for" Special Interest Groups

When we don't participate, our government — of, by and for the people — impersonally becomes THE government — of, by and for special interests. When was the last time you heard someone refer to government as OUR government? It's always THE government, Washington, or the [name of the President's administration. Why? It's not *ours* anymore. Special Interest Groups act and do get involved, but on their own behalf, not ours. The country isn't their primary interest; their existence, revenue, popularity and market share are what motivate them.

I heard on the radio recently that many consider this Congress to be one of the most heavily influenced by special interest groups. It shouldn't be a surprise as Congress is heavily funded by Political Action Committees (PAC) — just one of many types of SIGs. Do you know there are approximately 4,200 PACs providing one-third of all campaign financing and that almost exclusively to incumbents. How many bills passed by our local, state and federal governments do you think are in the best interest of the country? It can't be many, considering the strength of PACs and the fact that only about 40% of the people vote. You have to believe that our elected representatives have some interest/obligation to that special interest groups' cause. Citizens are supposed to be, and *need* to be, the Special Interest Group for America.

Former Senator Paul Trible surprised Virginians years ago by announcing that he would not seek a second term. One of the reasons he cited was that "...for all the Senate's greatness, much of the important work of the nation doesn't seem to get done."

In an LA Times article, former U.S. congressman Dan Lundgren, who was former California Governor Deukmejian's nominee for State Treasurer, gave a similar view: "If people want to know why we get deficits, it's because all the special interests beat up on their elected representatives and say, 'We need to have the deficit spending.' To hell with the rest of the country."

They are right. Special interests stagnate the country. They divert our energies and take us off track. They push us toward mediocrity.



Home Security Tips

- Always keep doors and windows secured while at home or away.
- Never answer the door to strangers. Educate children to never answer the door without an adult present - even if they know the visitor.
- If you don't already have one, install a viewer (peephole) in your door.
- Insist on identification from repair and sales persons. If in doubt, call their company to verify identification.
- Keep your home well lighted, both indoors and outdoors.
- Never come home to a dark residence. Have porch lights and indoor lights set on a timer.
- Never leave spare key(s) hidden outside. Instead, issue spare key(s) to a trusted neighbor.
- Place a wood rod or dowel (3/4 inch) in the top track of sliding glass doors or windows.
- Use secure locks on windows and doors.
- If you have a door leading directly to your home from your garage, keep that door locked and secured at all times.
- Do not admit persons asking to use your telephone. Offer to make the call for them.
- Know your neighbors and your neighborhood. Call your local law enforcement agency for information on joining Neighborhood Alert or starting a Neighborhood Alert Program in your neighborhood or apartment complex.
- Identify your belongings by engraving your driver's license number on your possessions.
- If you return home and find a door or window open, or see signs of forced entry, do not enter. Go to a neighbor's home and immediately phone your local police department.
- Use automatic timers to turn lights off 14 hours before you leave.

newspapers, or advertisements left on your door or entry gate.

- If you live in an apartment or condominium, be attentive and careful if you are alone in the laundry room or garage.
- Have all locks re-keyed when moving into a new home.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers near the telephone.
- Teach children the proper use of 9-1-1- for police, fire or medical emergencies.

Examples of Our Lose of "Freedom of Speech"

Saturday, March 16,
2002
FOX NEWS

SOUTH ROYALTON, Vt. — The fight over "vanity plates" is heating up around the country, with DMV officials and drivers duking it out over license wording like "IRISH1" and "ATHEIST."

In Vermont, a few days before St. Patrick's Day, a woman dressed from head to toe in green argued before the state Supreme Court that she had the right to have "IRISH1" emblazoned on her license plate. The Department of Motor Vehicles said the plate violated its rule against references to ethnic groups.

And DMV employees in Florida have suddenly decided to revoke the "ATHEIST" plate they issued to the vice president of Atheists of Florida 16 years ago, on the grounds that the label is "obscene or objectionable."

It's a battle seen in several states grappling with where to draw the line between free expression and words that might offend or serve as an invitation to trouble.

The Vermont "IRISH1" driver, Carol Ann Martin, made her case before the Supreme Court in a pale green dress and bright green headband decorated with shamrocks and a leprechaun.

"The people of this state want to have words or phrases on their license plates that are positive and meaningful to them," Martin said after the hearing. "What's wrong with 'Irish?'"

The Florida man arguing for an "ATHEIST" plate, Steven Miles, has been cruising around Gainesville for more than a decade-and-a-half and said the license plate is a valid form of self-expression.

But last month, the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles wrote him a letter telling him it now considers the license tag "obscene or objectionable."

That puts the personalized plate on the department's blacklist, right up there with epithets, expletives and words describing certain body parts.

"The plate must be canceled," the letter stated. Miles was ordered to send the plate back in the letter.

Miles, 55, said giving up his tag is out of the question.

"It's kind of disconcerting to know that the United States is based on freedom of expression, yet in actuality, it's quite restrictive," Miles, an electrical engineer at the University of Florida, told the *St. Petersburg Times* in an article published Thursday.

The review was prompted by a complaint signed by 10 people, said DMV spokesman Robert Sanchez. A supervisor in the Bureau of Titles and Registrations in Tallahassee sided with the protesters and decided to yank the plate.

Department officials routinely refuse to issue blatantly offensive personalized tags. But pulling them off the street is rare.

In Ohio, the fight has been over a proposed plate saying "H8 MICH," a criticism either of nearby Michigan or its sports teams. The motor vehicle agency automatically rejects all requests for "hate" — "H8" — plates, as well as those that include profanity, drug references and ethnic slurs.

"WINE" was the license plate at issue before the Oregon Supreme Court on Thursday. Michael Higgins, a 65-year-old retired wine merchant, went to court after his applications for plates saying "WINE," "IN VINO" and "VINO" were rejected. Oregon's motor vehicle agency bans references to alcohol, tobacco or drugs, along with vulgar or sex-related words.

Higgins' question is this: "Why shouldn't people be able to put anything on a vanity plate that they can put on a bumper sticker?"

Bonnie Rutledge, Vermont's motor vehicles commissioner, said license plates are state property, and their main purpose is to identify vehicles.

"That is not really the purpose of a license plate — to put out your own personal message," she said.

Under Vermont law, the commissioner can reject an application for a vanity plate that "might be offensive or confusing to the general public."

For example, Paula Perry of East Montpelier recently lost her bid to have "SHTHPNS" on her license plates. It's not what you might think: Perry said it stood for "shout happiness."

At issue are rules the commissioner issued interpreting the law. Barred are "combinations of letters or numbers that refer in any language to a race, religion, color, deity, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, disability status or political affiliation."

Rutledge said the rules are stricter than they used to be — "IRISH" is on a set of Vermont plates right now, for example.

At the Vermont Supreme Court hearing, Chief Justice Jeffrey Amestoy asked if a strict reading of the word "color" on the forbidden list might bar someone from having a plate that said "BLUE."

John Bloomer, Martin's lawyer, expanded on that point in a later interview. "Under the current rule you

can have 'GO SOX' but not 'GO RED SOX' and not 'GO YANKS," he said.

The hearing had its lighter moments, including when Justice James Morse asked about more indirect ethnic references and referred to the word "SHAMROCK" on a license plate.

"I think this close to March 17, it probably would be fine," Griffin said to a laugh from the audience.

He needn't worry: "SHAMROCK" is eight letters and vanity plates are limited to seven.

Atheists of Florida's Miles thinks his First Amendment rights are being violated. He said he intends to fight back and has been in touch with the American Civil Liberties Union.

"For the department to claim or state that the word 'atheist' is offense or objectionable is something to be upset about," he said.

Sanchez said a letter in support of Miles is prompting the DMV to take a second look. But if Miles is unsatisfied with their final decision, he has an alternative, Sanchez said.

"There is a venue for people's free speech on automobiles and that's a few inches below the license plate," he said. "That's a bumper sticker."

The state once tried to keep offensive material off bumpers, too. But that effort was thrown out by the courts.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.