



Text message to Jody: R U 4 real?

By Jim Waters

Political tone deafness is contagious.

Despite the message sent by Massachusetts voters last week, incumbent politicians in Washington and Kentucky don't seem to get it. I'm beginning to wonder if they ever intend to start protecting — rather than destroying — our liberty.

Unfortunately, we cannot quarantine the political elite. If we could keep their viruses from spreading, we might avoid having former Kentucky House Speakers waste the Legislature's time by filing silly bills while the state faces serious economic and educational challenges.

In the spirit of Frankfort's annual practice of wasting loads of taxpayer time and money to avoid dealing with controversial issues during the first month of the Legislature — before the filing deadline for possible campaign opponents — former Speaker Rep. Jody Richards, D-Bowling Green, secured passage of [House Bill 43](#) by the House Transportation Committee.

It's a convoluted, unenforceable bill to ban “texting” while driving.

But what does Richards care?

He loves to play legislative games and always has — regardless of the consequences. This bill, like others he spawned, robs Kentuckians of their individual liberties and ignores what voters find important.

These kinds of bills allow longtime state politicians to offer the illusion of doing something meaningful before the deadline for potential opponents to apply to the electorate for their job. Meanwhile, King Richards meanders along his way to an opportunistic politician's sizeable taxpayer-funded pension.

How does a law enforcement officer know whether a suspected “texter” is looking at a message from someone telling him or her to pick up medicine for a sick child — which the bill does *not* allow — or is looking at directions to the ball game on a GPS device, which is allowed?

“Richards said he would listen to the concerns of those who had reservations about specific provisions,” the Lexington Herald-Leader [reported](#).

Yeah, right.

His approach reminds me of an “Andy Griffith Show” episode in which Barney wants to join the church choir. But every time the choir starts to sing, he's the only one who doesn't realize he can't sing.

If he was “listening,” Richards would know that using the force of government to address texting-while-driving ranks really low on the list of his liberty-loving constituents' concerns. That's probably true for Rep. Marie Rader, R-McKee, who reportedly “dedicated her ‘yes’ vote to her four grandchildren.”

Isn't that sweet? It's apparently OK to waste taxpayer time and money in Frankfort on such bills as long as we do it "for the children."

Gee, I wonder if the Richards & Raders of the political world might consider doing something "for the children" that really matters — such as supporting charter schools that help spur genuine education reform and "right-to-work" legislation that creates more — and better — jobs for the next generation?

Richards reasoned, "18 states and the District of Columbia have passed similar (texting) bills.

OK, let's apply some of that reasoning to issues that would defy the diagnosis that Richards and his ilk suffer from political tone deafness and that could really "help the children":

- "Forty states and the District of Columbia have passed charter-school bills similar to the ones proposed during this General Assembly. **Charter schools** are helping improve the educational opportunities of our neediest children. Let's do it for the children."
- "Twenty-two of the 50 states have passed **right-to-work laws** that allow individuals, rather than the government, to determine union membership in the workplace. With our unemployment rates so high and the prospects for future economic growth in Kentucky looking sour, we should pass a right-to-work law for the children."

Richards: "R U ready 2 help?"

We'll see.

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