

Н В

105

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AFFAIRS

RECAP OF
HB 105

Mandatory Seatbelts

Received January 20, 1989
by Reps. Cotten, Ulmer, Zawacki, Gruenberg and
Hanley

Heard January 31, 1989

Passed Out of Committee January 18, 1989
4 Do Pass
2 No Recommendation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HB 105: Mandatory Seatbelts

- Item 1: HB 105 by Cotten, Ulmer, Zawacki, Gruenberg and Hanley
- Item 2: Letter of Intent and Public Safety Fiscal Note
- Item 3: State Newspaper Editorials
- Item 4: Seatbelt Coalition Backup Materials Submitted by Frank Bickford
- Item 5: HESS Position Paper

BILL NO: HB 105

DATE: January 26, 1989

TITLE: "An Act relating to mandatory use of safety devices in motor vehicles."

CONTACT: Ellen Moore
Highway Safety Planning Agency
465-4375

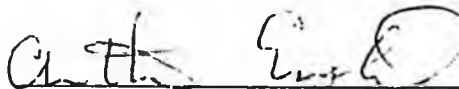
DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC SAFETY

The intent of this legislation is to reduce deaths and serious injuries to occupants of motor vehicles by promoting the great use of safety belts by the motoring public.

Thirty-one states have enacted bills requiring the use of safety belts. Jurisdictions that have had the longest experience with their laws have found that the greater the level of increase in seatbelt use, the greater reduction in fatalities and serious injuries.

House Bill 105 has the potential to save as many as 35 lives in Alaska each year. This figure assumes a 70% compliance rate and a 50% effectiveness rate. Because the bill allows only "secondary" enforcement, it may be difficult to achieve this level of use; however, surveys conducted since 1985 by Hellenenthal and Associates indicate that approximately 80% of the Alaskans surveyed will wear safety belts simply because such a law exists.

We recommend passage of HB 105 as written.



Arthur English
Commissioner



FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: _____
Title: Mandatory use of safety devices
in motor vehicles
Sponsor: Representative Cotten, et al
Requestor: House State Affairs

Agency Affected: Public Safety
BRU: Highway Safety Planning Agency.
Component: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars) (Inflation not included)

OPERATING	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

REVENUE	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
PART-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
TEMPORARY	0	0	0	0	0	0

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

No fiscal impact is anticipated. Revenue generated will be negligible. Section 3 provides for judicial waiving of the \$15.00 fine if a donation is made to the Emergency Medical Services entity serving the locale where the violation occurred.

Prepared by: Ellen Moore, Program Coordinator
Division: Highway Safety Planning Agency

Phone: 465-4375
Date: 1/26/89

Approved by Commissioner: Arthur English
Agency: Department of Public Safety

Date: 1-27-89

Tuesday, January 17, 1989

Make it mandatory

The Legislature could do a simple thing that would save lives, reduce injuries and save money. It could pass a law making the use of safety belts in vehicles mandatory.

Many people don't like the idea of mandatory safety belt laws. The use of safety belts should be a personal choice, they say. The government has no business dictating personal choices.

It's a compelling argument, but not so compelling as the harm that is done by not wearing safety belts. According to a 1987 study, mandatory use of safety belts in Alaska would save 35 lives a year, reduce injuries to more than 600 persons, save \$5 million worth of lost labor and decrease other economic losses associated with highway death and injury by \$13 million. Not just the victims, but everyone pays the cost of not wearing safety belts in terms of increased taxes, insurance premiums and health care costs.

Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have passed mandatory safety belt laws. In every state, use of safety belts has increased substantially.

Educational programs promoting safety belt use fail to provide the incentive to buckle up that a law requiring it does. We reluctantly move from a position of advocating voluntary compliances to urging the Legislature to make safety belts mandatory. They should, however, avoid some of the problems that Washington state encountered when they initially failed to provide for exemptions for certain types of delivery vehicles.

FAIRBANKS

Daily News - Miner

1.25.89
A matter of safety *Time*

THERE IS truly only one basic question to be answered when it comes to trying to decide whether Alaska should adopt a law which requires motorists to buckle up their seat belts when they get behind the wheel.

Do seat belts save lives?

And the overwhelming evidence — from all kinds of national statistics down to the doctors in the emergency rooms of Anchorage hospitals — is that they do.

It also is evident that without a law some people will not buckle up. So the law is necessary.

It is necessary in the same way that everyone who boards an airplane is required to fasten his or her seat belt.

And it is no more onerous a requirement than making it a law that motorists must halt at stop signs and red lights, yield to emergency vehicles or obey speed limits.

THIS ISN'T a debate over the infringement of personal liberties, as some opponents attempt to make it.

If you think your freedom would be abridged by a mandatory seat belt law, you no doubt are in a simmering fit right now because the state requires you to have a driver's license before you can legally operate a motor vehicle.

What's the difference?

Both items, as a matter of fact, are life-saving ingredients to making our streets and highways safer. You don't want to be on the same road with drivers who are not licensed. That's a law that looks after your own safety. So, too, would one requiring you to do what you may now forget to do when you slip behind the wheel — and that's to snap the seat belt in place.

Opponents argue that the lobbying for enactment of the seat belt law is nothing more than a deceitful ploy by the auto industry to try to avoid eventually providing

air bags in all vehicles.

But so what if auto makers support the use of seat belts? So do a lot of other people, including the insurance industry, various medical societies and individual doctors, and every other motorist whose life has been saved because a seat belt was secure at the time of an accident.

Sen. Arliss Sturgulewski, the Anchorage Republican who is a prime sponsor of the seat belt law in this session of the legislature, is correct.

It's simply a matter of safety, pure and simple. Forget all the extraneous arguments. Stick to the basic reason why.

JUST THE other day, new statistics proved the point.

A study of all traffic accidents in North Carolina from 1983 to 1987 showed a dramatic drop in the number of deaths and serious injuries after a mandatory seat belt law was enacted. This report estimated that North Carolina may have 1,100 fewer severe and fatal highway injuries every year as a result of mandatory seat belt use.

A second study of 1,364 accident victims taken to trauma units of four Chicago-area hospitals showed that hospital admissions decreased by nearly 65 percent and related costs dropped 66 percent for those who were wearing seat belts. This study said the average cost of treating accident victims who were wearing seat belts was \$534, compared to \$1,583 for victims who didn't wear belts.

The Journal of the American Medical Association, reporting on the new studies, said this: "Safety belts turn out to be an economical way of trying to reduce that health-care dollar."

Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have seat belt laws.

Alaska should become the 32nd state to get on this safety bandwagon.

Position Paper

HB 105

For an Act entitled: "An Act relating to mandatory use of safety devices in motor vehicles."

This act repeals and reenacts AS 28.05.095 to require that "a person 16 years of age or older may not occupy a motor vehicle while being driven unless restrained by a safety belt."

Children under four years old are required to be in a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) approved child safety device, and children between four and sixteen must be in an approved safety device or secured by a safety belt.

This bill would exempt emergency vehicles from the requirement, vehicle operators engaged in the delivery of mail and others as determined by regulation.

The bill would establish a penalty of up to \$15 in fines which could be waived in lieu of a contribution to the local Emergency Medical Service (EMS).

The Department of Health and Social Services supports the passage of this bill for the following reasons:

- 1) Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death, injury and long-term disability;
- 2) Numerous studies have shown that safety belts and other vehicle safety restraints substantially reduce the likelihood of death or injury to motor vehicle occupants involved in crashes;
- 3) Efforts to educate the public about the benefits of safety belts have failed to convince the majority of vehicle occupants to use their safety belts.
- 4) Motor vehicle crashes are the single most frequently mentioned cause of injury responded to by EMS ambulances. The proposed donation in lieu of a fine would help to defray the cost of these services.

Background

Nationally, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death to persons between one and 35 years of age. For teenagers, car crash fatalities out-number the next five causes of death combined. Over the past decade more than 150,000 persons have died on America's highways. Every year over 40,000 persons are killed in automobile accidents in the United States, and more than 300,000 people suffer moderate

to severe and critical injuries. Many of the injured are young people who will never work again for the rest of their lives.

In Alaska, from 1980 through 1985, unintentional injuries (accidents) have been the leading cause of death for all ages. Motor vehicle crashes and drowning have been the chief causes of these deaths. In 1986 there were 101 deaths and more than 5,000 Alaskans were injured as a result of motor vehicle crashes in this state.

According to the Highway Safety Planning Agency, property damage from motor vehicle crashes amounted to over \$40,000,000 in 1986. This does not include bodily injury claims payments for private passenger non-fleet automobile liability in Alaska which totaled over six million dollars in 1983 and was over eight million in 1984. These amounts do not include paid losses from other third party payers, such as Medicare, Medicaid, General Relief Medical, Indian Health Service or Workers Compensation. Clearly, in addition to the unacceptable losses from premature death and disabilities, motor vehicle crashes create a significant financial burden which is shared by all citizens.

Worldwide, almost 40 countries have mandated safety belt use. In Great Britain seat belt use rose from about 40% to 90-95% with the passage of a mandatory use law. At the same time the number of individuals treated in emergency rooms as the result of motor vehicle crashes has dropped 15%. There were also 15% to 20% fewer fatalities in the years since the passage of the law.

In Canada, all provinces have enacted mandatory safety belt use laws. The effectiveness of these laws in increasing belt use has been shown to be dependent on the degree to which they are enforced. In provinces where strict enforcement has been practiced belt use has been up to 80%. Deaths due to motor vehicle crashes have declined 11% and injuries 6%, in provinces with mandatory use laws.

In this country, 31 states and the District of Columbia now have mandatory belt use laws. New York was the first state to pass such a law. Safety belt use there is now about 64%. This use rate has resulted in about a 9% drop in motor vehicle crash fatalities.

It is clear that the use of safety belts can reduce the number of deaths and disabilities due to motor vehicle crashes. A mandatory safety belt use law would go far to achieve this goal and complement existing traffic safety

POSITION PAPER/Department of Health & Social Services

POSITION PAPER, NO. 207, 1989

legislation regarding driving while intoxicated, maximum speed limits, and licensing requirements.

Position

The Department of Health and Social Services strongly supports this bill because it can result in significant decreases in the number of deaths, disabilities and injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes.

Recommended by: Elizabeth Ward, M.N.
Elizabeth Ward, M.N.
Director
Division of Public Health

Date:

Approved by: Myra M. Munson
Myra M. Munson
Commissioner
Department of Health and
Social Services

Date:

1/29/89

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: 01/20/89
 Title: "An Act relating to mandatory use of safety devices in motor vehicles."
 Sponsor: Cotton, Ulmer, Zawacki, et. al.
 Requestor: _____

Agency Affected: Health & Social Services
 BRU: State Health Services
 Components: Emergency Medical Services

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

REVENUE	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
---------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The enactment of HB 105 would have no direct fiscal impact on the Department of Health & Social Services.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Ward, Director Phone: 465-3090
 Division: Public Health Date: _____

Approved by Commissioner: Myra M. Munson Date: 1/20/89
 Agency: Department of Health and Social Services

Distribution (by preparer):

- Legislative Finance
- Legislative Sponsor
- Requestor
- Office of Management and Budget
- Impacted Agency(ies)

HB 105

exclude > less a passenger Dodge rules req.
OK to require; however, Big
Yellow Buses - NO

HANLEY

- INSURANCE CO: coverage; NO CO. Restrict
insurance because of seat belts

COTTON

DOES NOT affect BAGS REQUIREMENT
15 FINE - SECONDARY OFFENSE - POLICE
CANT Pull you over - involved in
accident can be cited req.

LAW ENFORCERS, people more likely to comply

MARK JOHNSON

EMS COORDINATOR DHSS - STATE LEVEL

DOWLEY

STATE POLICE ACCIDENTS - 1 MILL - NO
HEALTH CARE - call to state? STATE EMPLOYED
INSURANCE PAYS - WHO RESULT / EVERYONE SHARES
IN THAT COST -

What are free programs that pay under contract.

where someone has no insurance -

- Rates are adjusted for the rest of US

- State program that compensates?

Medicaid - low income - IF eligible

kick in - state contribution.

Look beyond individual rights

COUNTRIES WITH SAFETY BELT USE LAWS

Country	Effective Date	Country	Effective Date
Australia	1/72	United States and Territories	
Austria	7/76	California	1/86
Belgium	6/75	Colorado	7/1/87
Brazil	6/72	Connecticut	1/1/86
Bulgaria	1976	Dist. of Columbia . .	12/12/85
Canadian Provinces:		Florida	7/1/86
Alberta	7/87	Hawaii	12/16/85
British Columbia	10/77	Georgia	9/1/88
Manitoba	1/84	Idaho	7/1/86
Newfoundland	8/82	Illinois	7/1/85
New Brunswick	11/83	Indiana	7/1/87
Nova Scotia	1/85	Iowa	7/1/86
Ontario	1/76	Kansas	7/1/86
Quebec	8/76	Louisiana	7/1/86
Saskatchewan	7/77	Maryland	7/1/86
Czechoslovakia	1/69	Michigan	7/1/85
Denmark	1/76	Minnesota	8/1/86
East Germany	1/80	Missouri	9/28/85
Finland	7/75	Montana	10/1/87
France	10/79	Nevada	7/1/87
Greece	12/79	New Jersey	3/1/85
Hong Kong	10/83	New Mexico	1/1/86
Hungary	7/77	New York	12/1/84
Iceland	10/81	North Carolina	10/1/85
Ireland	2/79	Ohio	5/6/86
Israel	7/75	Oklahoma	2/1/87
Ivory Coast	1970		
Japan	12/71	Pennsylvania	11/23/87
Jordan	12/83	Puerto Rico	1/1/74
Luxembourg	6/75	Tennessee	4/21/86
Malaysia	4/79	Texas	9/1/85
Netherlands	6/75	Utah	4/29/86
New Zealand	6/72	Virginia	1/1/88
Norway	9/75	Washington	6/11/86
Poland	1/84	Wisconsin	12/1/87
Portugal	1/78	United Kingdom	1/83
Singapore	7/81	USSR	1/76
South Africa	12/77	West Germany	1/76
Spain	10/74	Yugoslavia	1/85
Sweden	1/75	Zimbabwe	7/80
Switzerland	1/76		
Turkey	10/84		

SOURCE: University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

Anchorage Daily News



Winner, 1976 Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Public Service

Gerald E. Grilly
Publisher

Howard Weaver
Managing Editor

Michael Carey
Editorial Page Editor

Katherine Fanning, Editor and Publisher 1971 to 1988
Lawrence Fanning, Editor and Publisher 1967 to 1971

Founded in 1946 by Norman C. Brown

A way to prevent needless deaths

This year, the legislature has a chance to help fight one of the most serious health problems in the state — and it can do so with very little money or effort.

The health problem is accidental injuries. They are the second leading cause of death for all Alaskans — and the leading cause among young Alaskans. Too many of these deaths come in motor vehicle accidents — some 231 over the past three years.

There's a simple way to cut this carnage on the state's highways: Require people to wear seat belts. Of those 231 victims, 201 were not belted in.

A bill to mandate seat belt use passed the state House last year but never made it to the Senate floor for a vote. This year, with new legislative leadership, prospects for a seat belt law look much better.

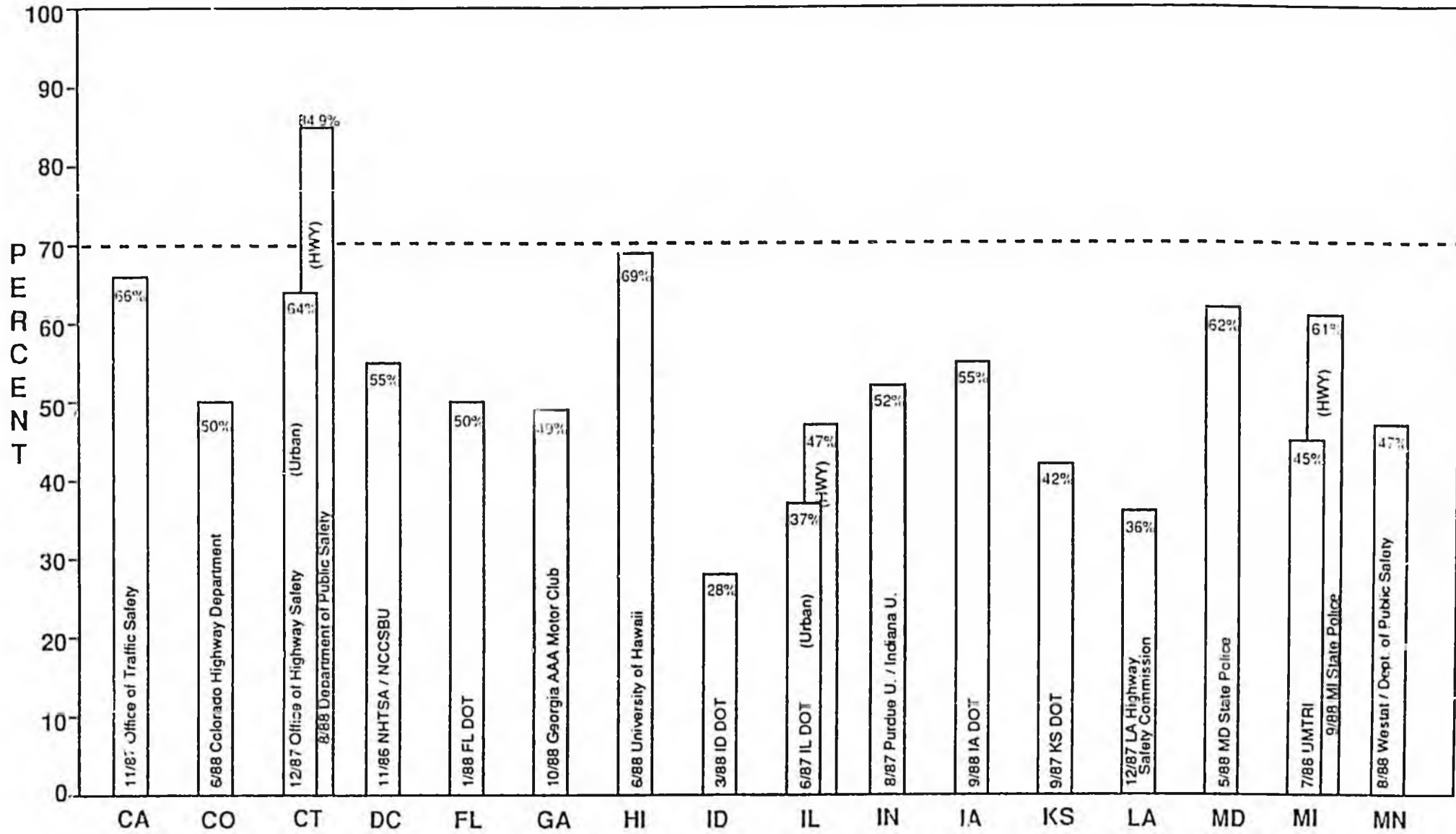
In the past, some people have resisted a seat belt law because they see it as an infringement on their personal freedom. Why they object is a mystery. The resulting "intrusion" into people's lives is on a par with a parking ticket — and has considerably more justification. When a parked car overstays its welcome, there's just one less parking space available. When car passengers fail to buckle up, they invite serious injury and death, and increase the costs we all pay for emergency services, insurance and health care.

Alaska's proposed seat belt law offers us all a gentle reminder to do what's good for everyone. The violation would be a secondary offense, meaning that drivers cannot be cited unless they are stopped for some other violation. The fine would be a mere \$15. If violators don't want to send their checks to the government, they can donate the \$15 to emergency medical services.

Seat belts save lives — but only if people wear them. A mandatory seat belt law is a reasonable way to get more people to buckle up.

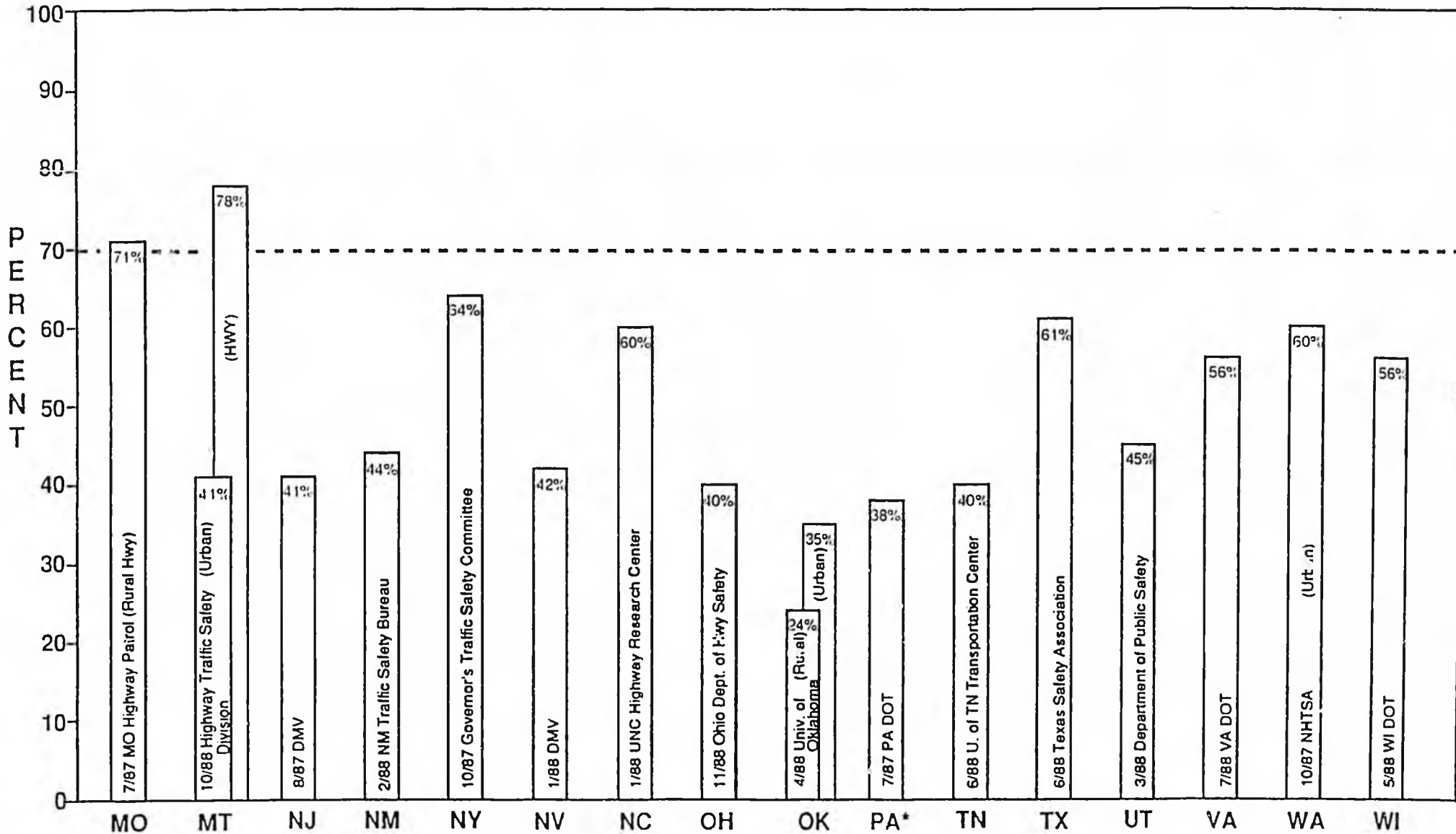
AGENDA
89

COMPLIANCE RATES IN POST-LAW STATES



COMPLIANCE RATES IN POST-LAW STATES

Page 2



* Use rates prior to law taking effect

Facts and Attribution

- * Safety-belt use has saved 10,938 lives since 1983. Of those, state safety-belt-use laws were credited with saving 6,906 lives. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 1988
- * The probability of being involved in a motor-vehicle injury accident during a 75-year lifetime is better than 86 percent. NHTSA, 1987
- * There were 41,435 fatal accidents resulting in 46,386 fatalities in 1987. (Includes drivers or passengers in all types of motor vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists.) NHTSA, 1988
- * There were 25,144 passenger-car fatalities and 8,042 light-truck fatalities in 1987. NHTSA, 1988
- * Approximately 3,896,000 people were injured in traffic crashes in 1986. (2,835,000 in passenger car accidents alone.) NHTSA, 1988
- * The severity of approximately 100,000 injuries is reduced each year as a result of states having passed safety-belt-use laws. University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, 1987
- * In 1986, an average of one person was killed in traffic accidents every 11 minutes. NHTSA, 1988
- * Unrestrained passenger car occupants are twice as likely to receive moderate to critical injuries in the event of a crash as restrained occupants. NHTSA, 1987
- * On a national basis, each 10 percent increase in safety-belt use results in 30,000 less serious and moderate injuries and a savings of approximately \$800 million in direct costs to society
David A. Sleet, San Diego St. University, 1986
- * Traffic crashes rank as the No. 1 killer of Americans ages 1-40. NHTSA, 1988
- * In terms of years of life lost to Americans (based on life expectancy data), injuries as a result of motor vehicle accidents exceed cancer by 1.1 million years and top heart disease and strokes by 900,000 years. Institute of Medicine, National Research Council and the National Academy of Sciences, 1985
- * Of motor vehicle-related deaths, 82 percent occur during normal weather conditions. NHTSA, 1988
- * Less than one half of 1 percent of all injury-producing, passenger-car collisions involve fire or submersion. NHTSA, 1988

- * Safety belts reduce the likelihood of fatal or serious injuries by 40 to 55 percent. NHTSA, 1988
- * Automobile accidents cost employers an average of \$120,000 per death and \$1.9 billion annually. National Highway Users Federation and the American Safety Federation (HUF), 1985
- * The cost of all traffic deaths and injuries in the United States during 1986 was about \$74.2 billion, including:
 - \$27.4 billion in property damage
 - \$16.4 billion in lost productivity
 - \$ 4.1 billion in medical costs
 - \$26.3 billion in other costs (such as insurance administration, legal and court costs and emergency services.) NHTSA, 1988
- * People thrown from their cars are 25 times more likely to be killed than if they stayed in their vehicle. About three out of four people involved in a fatal crash who were thrown from their vehicles in 1984 were killed. NHTSA, 1986
- * Of the total passenger-car fatalities, 92 percent occur in the front seat. NHTSA, 1988
- * Three out of every four traffic accidents happen within 25 miles of the home. National Safety Council, 1986
- * The overall fatality risk of back-seat passengers is reduced by 24 to 40 percent through lap-belt use. NHTSA, June 1988
- * Safety-belt-use legislation has been passed in 31 states and the District of Columbia, covering nearly 207,000,000 persons. Traffic Safety Now, Inc., 1988
- * It is estimated if 70 percent of passenger car occupants regularly wore their safety belts in 1985, 7,400 lives would have been saved and 135,000 moderate to severe injuries would have been avoided. NHTSA, 1986
- * NHTSA estimates lap belts in the rear seat could have saved an estimated 660 lives and prevented 10,200 serious injuries in 1987 if use were 100 percent. NHTSA, 1988
- * Safety-belt use among drivers has risen from 14 percent in 1984 to more than 43 percent in 1988. Among states with safety-belt-use laws, 51 percent of motorists observed in 1987 wore their safety belts compared to only 27 percent in states without laws. NHTSA, 1988

SAFETY-BELT FACTS: JUDICIAL DECISIONS

TEXAS

- The Texas First Court of Appeals ruled that the legislature can regulate highways. The judgment was in response to a suit which claimed front-seat occupants should be exempt from safety-belt-use laws because the law excludes postal workers. (Richards v. Texas, 1987)
- The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals refused to review an appeal of the state's belt law by attorney R. D. Richards, who claimed the mandate infringed on his personal liberties.

ILLINOIS

- Elizabeth Kohrig of Illinois was convicted of failing to wear her safety belt. She appealed, claiming a safety-belt-use law violates a motorist's right to privacy. The case went through several courts in Illinois. Kohrig's claim lost at every level, including the United States Supreme Court which said safety-belt-use laws do not pose a "substantial federal question."

HAWAII

- The Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals rejected Diana Darnell's challenge to a citation for driving without a safety belt. The court said the "enormous social cost of unnecessary death and injury" justifies the safety-belt-use law. (Darnell v. Hawaii, 1987)

NEW JERSEY

- The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled defendants in accident litigation can resort to a "seat-belt defense" to reduce their financial responsibility. Juries are given a formula by which they can reduce a financial award if the plaintiff was not buckled up when involved in an accident. (Waterson v. General Motors, 1988)

FACT SHEET:

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Effects Of Mandatory Safety Belt Use On Hospital Admissions"

August 1988

This study assessed the effects of Michigan's safety-belt-use law on more than 8,000 motor-vehicle injuries which resulted in hospitalizations at 14 area hospitals.

It was conducted by the University of Michigan School of Public Health from data collected through the Michigan Inpatient Database from January 1980 through October 1986. Major findings of this study include:

- The Michigan safety-belt-use law passed in July 1985 has resulted in a 19-percent reduction in hospitalizations due to automobile accidents.
- There were 20 percent fewer injuries to body extremities following the passage of Michigan's belt-use law.
- Hospitalizations lasting more than one week decreased nearly 25 percent after the law went into effect.
- After the state safety-belt-use law went into effect, minorities experienced 22 percent fewer injuries.
- A 32-percent decline in injuries occurred among patients using public-health insurance after passage of the state law.
- With regard to the contention that safety belts may cause injuries, researchers concluded "the benefits of restraints far exceed the risks associated with them."

* * *

12/27/88

WHY ALASKA NEEDS A SAFETY BELT USE LAW

By Frank Bickford, Executive Director
Alaska Safety Belt Use Coalition, 360 W.
Benson #101, Anchorage, Ak 99503, 907-
561-7525.

One thing alone can save 35 lives a year, reduce the the hardship and costs of over 600 injuries, save \$5 million worth of lost labor, and decrease economic losses associated with highway death and injury alone by as much as \$13 million (Estimates from The Alaska Highway Users Study, 1987): Wearing The Safety Belts Already In Our Cars.

These facts are just four of the reasons Alaska needs a law requiring safety belt use. Although a major purpose of a Alaska Safety Belt Use Law would be to promote the safety of drivers and passengers using their safety belts, such a law would also:

- promote the safety of street and highway travelers other than safety belt users;
- promote the public welfare and safety by reducing highway deaths and injuries and public expenditures

In other words, if Alaska requires safety belts to be worn -- everyone can benefit!

Belt use laws that have been passed in 31 States and D.C. motivate people to buckle up. Those states found that voluntary use was low and through legislating the use of safety belts the incentives to use them have resulted in significant numbers of lives saved and costs reduced.

Educational campaigns promoting safety belt use have been launched here and across the country. Safety belt usage increases temporarily during the campaign and then returns to a low percentage. The amount of money spent is great and the residual impact slight. Safety belt use laws and an aggressive educational campaign must be combined to achieve maximum use. In the absence of a law even with an educational campaign, less than 32% of the population will buckle up. However, a Hellenthal statewide poll (Alaska) last year showed that 81% of Alaskans would wear safety belts if required by law.

A safety belt use law is the incentive to establish the safety habit in those who otherwise wouldn't buckle up.

If a person is killed or injured, it affects more people than the victim. Persons are not allowed a "freedom to choose" to pay the health care costs of those who "choose" not to wear their safety belts.

The cost of needless fatalities and serious injuries are paid by all persons - not simply the victim- in increased taxes, insurance premiums and health care costs.

Unbelted occupants cause injuries to other occupants by becoming "unguided missiles." Thus, the "freedom to choose" to wear the belt does affect others directly.

Other similar traffic - safety laws protect motorists and others, such as speed limits, drinking and driving and driver licensing. Safety belt use laws are consistent with these and other laws.

Traffic accidents do not happen on personal highways and streets ---- the costs to society in terms of medical, rehabilitation, unemployment and welfare services supercede the "right" of people to seriously or fatally injure themselves or others by not buckling up.

As a citizen and taxpayer, your rights are infringed upon by those who aren't responsible enough to buckle-up voluntarily; they leave you to pick up the tab for increased costs.

Ninety percent of those persons killed in motor vehicle accidents in Alaska during 1985, 1986, and 1987 were not wearing safety belts.

The proposed safety belt use law in Alaska is a secondary offense - requiring that a motorist be stopped for another offense before a \$15 ticket (which may be donated to Emergency medical services) can be issued for not using safety belts.

Secondary enforcement will not impose additional burdens on law enforcement officers responsible for citing motorist under this act. Safety belts reduce traffic fatalities, which are eight times as expensive to investigate as non-injury accidents. In fact, officers would have more time to concentrate on other traffic enforcement programs.

In the past three years Hellenthal & Associates (Polling Firm) have conducted extensive Statewide & Local polls that show over 65% of Alaskans supporting a safety belt use law.

In the past three years over 8,000 Alaskans have signed letters of support for the proposed safety belt use law and over 50 businesses have passed supportive resolutions.

The Alaska State House in 1987 passed the safety belt use law with bipartisan support. The Senate in 1988 failed to act on the legislation but 1989 looks a lot more favorable for passage - Reasons; The Speaker of the House for '89 is Sam Cotten who was the author of the safety belt use bill in 1987. The President of the Senate Tim Kelly has been a supporter of the proposed law and in December of '88 at the Eagle River Valley Community Council again stated his support. The Governor has also stated support for the proposed law and this year's sponsor of the safety belt use bill is State Senator Artiss Sturgelowski - Chairman of the Rules Committee.

The statistics, the public support, the editorial support (Anchorage Times, Anchorage Daily News, Frontiersman, Valley Sun, Juneau Empire), and legislative support shows that the proposed safety belt use law is one that Alaska can live with.

USA
TODAY

Life

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1988

The big benefits of buckling up

By Dan Sperling
USA TODAY

Wearing seat belts reduces car-crash victims' injuries by 60 percent and cuts their hospital costs by more than \$1,000, a new study suggests.

Dr. Elizabeth Mueller Orsay, assistant professor of emergency medicine at the University of Illinois School of Medicine in Chicago, and colleagues studied 1,364 emergency-room patients who had been in auto accidents.

Fifty-eight percent wore a safety belt when the accident occurred; 42 percent didn't.

Seat-belt wearers had a 60 percent reduction in injury severity, a 65 percent decrease in hospital admissions and a 66 percent reduction in hospital costs compared with those who wore no seat belt.

How seat-belt wearers fared compared with those who didn't:

► Seven percent of the seat-belt wearers had to remain in the hospital overnight, compared with 19 percent of the other patients.

► The average hospital charge for seat-belt wearers was \$534, compared with \$1,583 for those not wearing a seat belt.

"This study very strongly shows the benefits of buckling up, both for the individual and for society as a whole," says Orsay, whose study is reported in today's *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Car accidents are the USA's leading cause of death among people age 5 to 34, and cost the country an estimated \$57 billion a year, says Orsay.

About 3.2 million people are injured each year in car accidents. Though the government estimates that if everyone used seat belts, traffic fatalities would be cut in half and injuries reduced by 65 percent, only 31 states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring their use.

Another report, in the same issue, estimates that North Carolina's mandatory seat-belt law, enacted last year, has resulted in 1,100 fewer severe and fatal highway injuries annually.

Robert B. Atwood
President and Publisher

Elaine Atwood
Assistant Publisher

William J. Tobin
Vice-President, Editor-in-Chief

Editorials

You buckle up in Canada

IN THE for-what-it's-worth department, all the provinces of Canada now have laws making mandatory the use of seat belts by motorists.

Prince Edward Island was the last to join the national movement, putting its mandatory seat belt law into effect this past January.

British Columbia was an early member of the buckle-up brigade, enacting its mandatory law in October 1977. Alberta, among the Western provinces, joined the flock last July.

The reason, of course, is that seat belts save lives — even though their use is a habit that many motorists find hard to adopt.

Arguments that it infringes on personal rights to make it illegal to drive without seat belts are no more valid than saying that requiring a motorist to have a driver's license is an attack on one's liberties.

A bill to make it illegal to

drive in Alaska without seat belts snapped into place was killed in the last legislative session. It died in committee, despite indications that it would have passed given the chance to reach the floor.

ONCE AGAIN, the argument was that it's none of the state's business whether a person buckles up — and that without the requirement, independent Alaskans will do what's right and they don't need the state telling them what to do.

The same Alaskans, however, apparently have no reluctance to fasten their seat belts when they board an airplane — something that also is mandated by the long arm of the law.

And the fact remains that there is more danger of a fatal accident on the highway than there is in the air.

So what's the problem, anyway?