

legal compulsion to increase seat belt usage? Until we have answers to questions such as these, I cannot but regard Bill C-35 as premature and likely to endanger the ultimate achievement of its own commendable objectives.

Specific studies are going on. I obviously cannot anticipate in any detail the results of such studies as I have mentioned. But it seems to me that there are likely to be at least three distinct types of objection to the use of seat belts which demand separate consideration in drafting any law requiring their use. The first of these might be characterized as rational objections based on personal observations. For example, it is unfortunately all too common to find that if one wears the diagonal shoulder belt, one cannot reach the parking brake release or the window-winder, or perhaps some more vital control. And to get into this situation one has to pass a small test of engineering knowledge; you need co-ordination of hand and eye to fasten the belt in the first place.

I think the public may legitimately press for improvements in the convenience and comfort of seat belts. I hope that the improvements which have been introduced into the motor vehicle safety regulations for the 1974 model year will result in substantially increased rates of seat belt usage. I think that any government is bound to examine very carefully, before introducing legislation requiring the use of seat belts, the practicability of such a requirement. In a recent, well-publicized study conducted by three students of industrial engineering at the University of Toronto it was found that the seat belt design in a number of current vehicles significantly limited the driver's access to vehicle controls. These findings are also being confirmed in the continuous evaluations of current model vehicles being conducted by the government, in addition to its testing for compliance with the motor vehicle safety regulations.

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We must also anticipate a considerable number of rational objections based on misinformation. Questions are asked such as, "But what if I'm strapped into a burning car following a collision?" "What if my car ends up in a river or lake?" Both of these occurrences are quite rare. In both cases a restrained occupant has a far better chance of remaining conscious during the initial phases, and consequently of extricating himself. A seat belt buckle is simpler to release than to fasten, and except in the most improbable circumstance that the buckle itself is damaged in the collision, it will unfailingly release the belt when required to do so. Objections such as these should be countered by an appropriate public information campaign before any law requiring the wearing of seat belts is introduced, if it is to obtain the support which is necessary.

A further factor which would necessitate a public information campaign is the general lack of understanding of the importance of correct positioning and adjustment of the seat belt. Within the practical constraints imposed by the necessity to fit a large range of sizes and shapes of occupant, the seat belt normally falls in approximately the correct position on the body. It can, however, be significantly affected by the seated posture of the occupant. At best, an incorrectly positioned seat belt is less effective than it might be, and at worst it may be lethal. In particu-

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lar, it is important that the lap belt should be positioned as low as possible so that it does not bear on soft abdominal tissue. Fatal internal injuries have been caused by lap belts worn high on the abdomen.

Similarly, the importance of not twisting the belt is too little known. The width of the belt plays a vital part in distributing the collision forces over an area. A twisted or rolled belt applies a more concentrated and potentially more injurious force to the body. The importance of ensuring that this type of information is available to every vehicle user before the introduction of a law requiring seat belt use need hardly be stressed.

Finally, one must expect to encounter entirely irrational objections to the wearing of seat belts and these may be the hardest of all to take into account in legislation. I believe that any law requiring the wearing of seat belts must provide for certain exemptions. An irrational fear of being so restrained would seem to justify such exemption, if it can be medically certified. Exemptions might well be required on a number of other grounds, in particular that of physical deformity of the driver or passenger.

While I have treated the problem of gaining public acceptance of the type of law envisaged in Bill C-35 in a necessarily abbreviated way and have barely touched upon a number of other important questions, I hope I have said enough to persuade this House that the real objectives of the bill are most unlikely to be achieved by instant legislation.

The introduction of a law requiring the wearing of seat belts is a matter necessitating the most careful planning and preparation. I think it is easy to be misled by the Australian experience in this area, to underestimate the preparatory work which was done there and to overestimate the ease with which such legislation can be translated for Canadian use. I also fear, Mr. Speaker, that we may soon see in France some of the unfortunate side effects of a somewhat limited requirement for the use of seat belts; one, moreover, which was introduced by regulation and apparently without any prior effort to inform the public of its intent and objectives.

In my concentration on the issues involved in the introduction of a law requiring the use of seat belts I have so far ignored the alternative methods which are available to achieve the underlying objectives of Bill C-35, namely, to increase the safety of vehicle occupants through the use of occupant restraint systems. However, it is important that we do not disregard these other options.

As I have tried to indicate, we cannot yet consider seat belt wearing legislation to be a panacea. For this reason, the government is also undertaking a basic study to determine the relative effectiveness of the various alternative types of restraint systems which are now available. The study will provide data which, hopefully, will enable us to compare a wide range of alternative technical and legislative policies, including some which would undoubtedly fall within areas of provincial authority.

In conclusion, I should like to reaffirm my support for any measure which results in improved utilization of seat belts. I have, however, endeavoured to show that there are very serious dangers in attempting to bring about such improvement through piecemeal legislation introduced