

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the safety of America's school children.

On February 27, Brandie Browder, an eighth grader at Ferguson Jr. High School in Beaver Creek, OH, was coming home from school. As she was getting off her schoolbus that afternoon, the drawstring around the waist of her coat got caught in the handrail of the schoolbus. The schoolbus started to move away. Brandie tried to free the coat, wrenched the coat free of the schoolbus and ran alongside the bus for approximately 50 feet. She lost her footing and fell and the bus ran over her and killed her.

Mr. President, just 4 days later in Cincinnati, a seventh grader from Roberts Paideia School was getting off her schoolbus when a similar event occurred. The bus dragged her for about 3 or 4 feet, ran over her as she tried to free herself. Fortunately, she only suffered a broken foot. She did survive. Mr. President, in both cases the bus driver was apparently totally unaware of the accident as it was happening.

I think we should point out at this point, before I go any further in what I am saying today, that schoolbuses are among the safest modes of transportation. According to the National Safety Council, there are about 400,000 schoolbuses in the United States, and they transport approximately 22 million students every single day. I think we all know and I think most experts would agree if the choices are between putting a child on a schoolbus or letting a teenager drive himself or herself, or ride with someone else, or even having the parents drive to school, most of us, most experts would say statistically the children are better off on the bus. I do not think there is any doubt about that.

Having said that, Mr. President, the sad fact remains that in the 1992-93 school year, 30 schoolchildren were killed in schoolbus accidents. Of these children, 5 were killed while riding on their bus. The other 25 were killed while in the process of getting on or off of their own bus. The year before that, the 1991-92 school year, 35 children were killed nationwide; 10 were riding on their own schoolbuses and 25 were killed while getting on or off the bus.

An average of 30 school children are killed while getting on or off their buses every single year. This is not a new problem. According to the National Safety Council, over the 10 years since 1983 a total of 445 children were killed in schoolbus accidents; 100 of these were passengers and 345 were killed while getting on or off their own bus.

Mr. President, there are many factors contributing to these accidents—many. Today I should like to discuss just three of them.

First, an investigation of these accidents reveals that an alarming number of them involve handrails on the schoolbus. When children are getting

off a schoolbus, they walk down past a handrail. We have all seen them. We have all had that experience. Some of them hold on to it, others do not. But I understand that there is a small space in most schoolbuses, about an inch, between the handrail and the wall of the bus.

Picture a child coming down the steps. He or she may have a backpack, strings or straps trailing off of it. Maybe he or she is wearing a coat with drawstrings that they can use to tighten around the waste—anything, Mr. President, that is trailing off of that child, like these strings and straps, is liable to catch in that small space between the handrail and the wall of the bus.

It is easy to imagine what happens next. The child is off the bus. But part of the child's clothing is stuck in that small gap and the door closes. The bus starts moving. The child gets jerked with it and tries to pry free. We have a moving vehicle and a child swinging off of that vehicle.

That is how Brandie was killed. And since 1991, at least four other children have been killed that way.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we as parents, as members of school boards, as concerned citizens, I believe, need to make sure that these handrails are as safe as possible, that all precautions are being taken to avoid these tragedies.

A second problem, Mr. President, is the danger area around the bus. The schoolbus, of course, is a very large object. It is very difficult for other motorists to see around it. It is even difficult for the bus driver to see around it. Because of this, far too many children are killed by their very own buses. We need to explore ways to make those children visible to the schoolbus driver. There are at least two companies, that produce sensors that can be attached to school buses to prevent accidents.

I have one, Mr. President, right here.

This works on the same basic principle as a home security system. It sends out a radio signal. If the signal detects reflected energy from a child in what is called a danger zone area, a frequency shift occurs which triggers an alarm and illuminates a red light in the cab of the bus.

This particular system covers the 10-foot by 10-foot area in front of and behind the bus, as well as the 6 by 8 areas on either side of the bus. There are other technologies that are involved.

We know though, Mr. President, no matter what technology we are talking about, that ultimately it is up to the schoolbus driver. I think what we should try to do is to assist those drivers, most of whom are great people, who do a great job every day protecting our children.

Maybe additional training is needed in some cases; maybe additional equipment on the bus. Maybe other things.

I intend, Mr. President, in the weeks ahead, to return to this issue, because I think it is an issue that we can have

an impact on by publicity, by talking about it, by making people aware of the opportunities they have and all of us have to save lives.

Each one of us has a responsibility—whether we put our own child on that schoolbus every day and tell that child what to be careful about, whether we are on school boards, or parents—to make sure that school system has the latest equipment, to make sure that our good bus drivers do in fact have the training that they need.

Before coming to the floor, Mr. President, I spoke to the father of the little girl who was killed. I wanted to know whether it was all right if I came and talked about his daughter's accident. His reaction was what I expected it to be—that if we could save a life by talking about this issue, that if we could make other parents aware of it, other school boards or school systems, that we should be doing that. That is why I am on the floor today.

I will return to this issue in the future, Mr. President.

At this point, I yield the floor.

Mr. DOLE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I say to my colleague from Arkansas, I believe we are about to get an agreement. The distinguished Democrat leader is still on the telephone to one of our colleagues.

The Senator may proceed if he wishes to be recognized.

Mr. BUMPERS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending business is the Dole amendment No. 541.

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to proceed for 2 minutes as if in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NCAA BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, last night the citizens of my State were deeply saddened by the loss of the University of Arkansas Razorbacks to a magnificent UCLA team in the NCAA finals. But No. 2 is not all bad. We finished ahead of several hundred other NCAA mens basketball teams.

Sometimes, none of us performs to perfection or even to our maximum abilities. Last night was not a particularly good night for the Razorbacks, but that is not to diminish the magnificent game that UCLA played.

The 1995 NCAA tournament was filled with hard-fought, competitive games with exciting finishes. Just 2 weeks ago UCLA barely squeezed by Missouri. We all remember watching Tyus Edney go the length of the court and lay one up just at the buzzer to win the game.