



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Seatbelts on Buses

SPEECH

Monday, 31 May 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 31 May 2010 Page 122 Questioner Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
--	---

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (7.20 pm)—I rise to speak on the motion by the member for Gilmore concerning seatbelts on buses. In so doing, I say ‘Good evening’ to our guests from the Bus Action Group from Ulladulla. The member for Ryan was quite right. On 20 August 2001 I stood in this place to support the then member for Forde on a motion with very similar sentiments to those outlined by the member for Gilmore. I do congratulate her on her motion and on the substance of the motion itself.

I am really wondering what happened in that decade because, when I look at a number of the so-called state road safety websites, I am very surprised by how little comment there is supporting seatbelts on our buses, particularly those used to transport our schoolchildren. That is a great pity. I fully appreciate the argument of the industry when they say that this is a major cost factor, but new buses come with new standards and new requirements. Governments, both state and federal, are always raising the bar on the safety and technical requirements of these buses, so it should not be news that we would mandate that these buses contain seatbelts.

One of the other issues is that, if you cannot allow more students on a bus than can be seated, that is going to have serious cost imposts. I appreciate the argument, but it must of course lead to questions not just of general safety but of sheer comfort for students on buses. In 2001, that infamous year, I actually did a survey of students in Circular Head on issues relating to buses. I know that I may get different responses today, but I do wonder whether they would actually change much in substance. One of the things they talked about was that the buses were uncomfortable—three and four to a seat. They even went on to say—and I think this brings out some of the issues here, not just for comfort but for safety as well—‘If we went to school from grade 1 to grade 12 on the bus, we would sit in uncomfortable positions of three to a seat for two hours a day, five days a week, 40 weeks a year for 12 years.’ This equals, according to their survey, 200 full days—that is, 24 hours—sitting cramped in a bus seat over a student’s school life. So they are uncomfortable and they feel unsafe because of the lack of comfort in the bus.

What I found interesting, though, is that when they were surveyed back in 2001—and I am sorry this is so old—the one thing they split fifty-fifty on was whether they should have seatbelts. They were really concerned that they were uncomfortable and they were worried about behaviour on the bus. Behaviour, I would add, may be affected by whether they are wearing a seatbelt, quite frankly, because if they are wearing one they are at least fixed hopefully in a sculptured seat designed for them. That is a very important safety issue as well. But they were really concerned about behaviour more than anything. That does raise the whole issue of school buses, not just for seatbelts. I do support the advocacy of mandatory regulations for seatbelts.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 41. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member for Braddon will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.