

Hearings Explore Passive Restraint Record

A decade of controversy over increased auto safety climaxed this month with yet another full-scale airing of the need for passive restraints to protect drivers and front-seat occupants from the tragedy of deaths and injuries in frontal car crashes.

This time the discussion spanned two Capitol Hill forums: the Senate Consumer Subcommittee and the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance. In overlapping hearings the subcommittees heard advocates and critics of passive restraint systems praise and attack the June 30th decision of Transportation Secretary Brock Adams requiring phasing-in of passive restraints during the 1982-84 model years.

Among those testifying in support of Secretary Adams' ruling were spokesmen for the insurance industry, motorists' service organizations, the President's consumer advisor, the National Committee for Automobile Crash Protection (a coalition of safety advocates), air bag component suppliers, consumer advocates, and executives of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Opponents included some Congressional critics of Secretary Adams' policy, spokesmen for the auto manufacturers, and representatives of the safety belt manufacturing industry.

After two days of hearings, the House subcommittee voted against the resolution sponsored by Rep. E. G. Shuster (R-Pa.) which would overturn the Adams decision. The issue was sent to the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce for full committee action. In the Senate the subcommittee concluded its fourth day of hearings September 21 on a similar resolution offered by Sen. Robert Griffin (R-Mich.). It was indicated that the subcommittee will pass the matter on to the full Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

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President Carter Backs Adams' Decision

The Carter Administration is fully behind Secretary Adams in his decision to require passive restraints on new automobiles starting with the 1982 model year, it was revealed in testimony before the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance.

After Esther Peterson, special assistant to the President for consumer affairs, had given a strong endorsement for passive restraints, Chairman Bob Eckhardt asked her "if you feel you are representing the President's views in your testimony?"

"Yes, I do," responded Peterson. "I know that the President fully supports Secretary Adams' position on this."

As the 60-day period for Congressional review of the passive restraint rule neared an end, it was not clear whether the concurrent resolutions will be disposed of in committee or whether one or both will reach the floor for full Senate and House action. Congressional opponents of the Adams ruling are expected to have until October 13 to veto the action by majority vote in both houses.

Even in the event that the concurrent resolutions should be approved by both houses, the action appears unlikely to settle the issue. Ralph Nader and the Center for Auto Safety have raised the question of the Constitutionality of a Congressional veto of an executive agency's action (see page 5). And Rep. Bob Eckhardt (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance, has expressed doubts of Constitutionality on different grounds.

"Any kind of veto that requires concurrence of both houses must certainly itself be subject to a veto," Eckhardt said while questioning Nader at the House hearings. "Under the provisions of the Constitution it quite clearly states that any action requiring concurrence of both houses must go to the President and must receive his signature before the same can be effective."

But passive protection proponents made it clear in their testimony that they believe efforts to overturn the Adams decision should be rejected immediately without allowing it to become involved in technicalities.

"I urge the Congress to reject this infamous resolution and concentrate on ways to achieve a humane, efficient automobile and truck fleet that reflects the wisdom of the 1966 law and subsequent enactments," said Nader. "Congress could start by requiring that the vehicles purchased by the government include passive restraints. It strains the credulity that now one has to urge Congress to avoid blocking the saving of lives on the highway."

Said William Haddon, Jr., M.D., president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety: "Were the passive restraint issue not of such overriding importance for the health and safety of the American people, the groundless technical claims by which opponents seek to undermine DOT's rule might be amusing. But the issue is far too grave, and the outcome of any reversal of the rule far too perilous, for amusement. If Congress were actually to revoke the DOT passive restraint rule, it would be going out of its way to send thousands of Americans each year to hospital beds, wheelchairs and graves."

Donald L. Schaffer of Allstate Insurance Co. commented: "If Congress is satisfied with belt usage in the 20 percent range, with no achievable programs to substantially increase that factor, with active belts not required to be crash-tested or meet injury prevention criteria, with present levels of vehicle occupant deaths and injuries of 35 percent as we move to lighter and smaller cars to meet our energy goals — it will veto Secretary Adams' ruling.

"If the Congress is dedicated (as we believe it is) to continued improvements in vehicle safety performance . . . and to get on with the job of saving 9,000 lives and preventing hundreds of thousands of injuries — the Congress will reject the resolutions and thus support Secretary Adams' efforts."

Esther Peterson, special assistant to the President for consumer affairs, also agreed with passive restraint advocates. "If this decision is allowed to stand," she said, "I believe that we will look back upon it as perhaps the single most important accomplishment of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. The decision is a fair one, and I am convinced that the consumers of this country will support it."

There was little new of a substantive nature revealed in the Senate and House hearings. Issues raised were familiar to those who have followed passive restraint proposals through the repeated Department of Transportation hearings, climaxing last April with the hearings on which Secretary Adams based his

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Goldmuntz, GM Studies Analyzed

Responding to a request from the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance – the subcommittee that earlier completed extensive hearings on the Department of Transportation’s passive restraint decision (see story, page 1) – the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has warned that two studies being cited by opponents of the DOT decision are “seriously defective.”

Rep. Bob Eckhardt (D-Tex.), in a letter to Institute President William Haddon, Jr., M.D., asked for comment on a study prepared by Dr. Lawrence Goldmuntz that purported to show air bags less effective than lap/shoulder belts in crashes, and one prepared by General Motors claiming, on the basis of matched crashes of air bag and non-air bag cars, that air bags are only slightly effective in reducing significant injuries.

In his reply, Haddon pointed out that the Goldmuntz study, which attempts to compute deaths and injuries per 100 million miles of travel, “cannot be accepted because crucial items of data used in the computations are little better than uninformed guesses.” Among these, Haddon said, were Goldmuntz’s estimates of the total number of miles travelled by air bag and non-air bag cars.

“Additional evidence of the unreliability of the data and methodology of the Goldmuntz study is the fact it concluded that lap belts reduce deaths more than lap/shoulder belts. This conclusion is, of course, absurd,” Haddon added.

Haddon also pointed out that the Goldmuntz study ignores “well-known biases in the data – for example, it is well known that both the average violence of crashes and, hence, occupant death rates, are much higher in rural than urban areas. Yet, despite the fact that 45 percent of the air bag crashes have occurred in rural areas, Goldmuntz has used for comparison with the air bag crashes a group of crashes involving lap/shoulder, lap-belted and unrestrained occupants that were overwhelmingly in urban areas – only 12 percent of the comparison crashes he used occurred in rural areas. In other words, by his choice of overwhelmingly urban lap and lap/shoulder belt comparison groups, he has biased his analysis against the air bag group, almost half of which was comprised of the more violent, rural crash experience.

NO ‘PREDICTIVE VALUE’

The Goldmuntz study is “worthless” and has “no ‘predictive value’ at all,” Haddon concluded.

Turning to the GM study, Haddon noted that the auto manufacturer had failed to validate the study procedure, in which air bag crashes were “matched” for comparison purposes with non-air bag crashes.

Haddon cited a quotation from GM’s own description of the “matching case” study, in which a GM official said: “Basically, it involves a comparison of injuries suffered by accident victims in air cushion-equipped cars with injuries sustained by victims who were *unrestrained* in similar type crashes.” [Emphasis added.]

Despite this description, Haddon said, GM’s own matched cases – chosen by a panel of GM engineers rather than outsiders – included “instances of lap-belted occupants in crashes matched to air bag-restrained occupants who were unbelted. Moreover, there are many other discrepancies between the file of data submitted to us by GM and information from the same matched cases submitted by GM to DOT Until GM demonstrates that its matching methodology is valid, and until it resolves such discrepancies, the GM conclusions must be disregarded.”

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decision. Testimony centered on the laboratory and real-life experience with air bags, alleged problems of inadvertent deployment or failure to deploy, installation costs and replacement costs, product liability coverage for equipment makers, the track record for seat belts and demands for mandatory seat belt use laws, and the philosophical arguments against requiring auto owners to buy safety equipment.

Underlying many of the opponents' arguments were some false allegations that were quickly set straight on the hearing record. Here is a sampling of the allegations and the facts on the record:

————— *ALLEGATION: "Using the matching case methodology, our present estimate is that the air cushion-lap belt system is only about 10 percent effective in reducing significant injuries."*

*Dr. David S. Potter, General Motors,
in Congressional testimony*

THE RECORD: "When General Motors started making its claims that its own analyses showed very little effectiveness of passive restraints, and considering that GM's claims were directly contrary to the evidence from DOT . . . we asked GM if it would be willing to reveal to us the primary data upon which its conclusions were based. We were assured almost a year ago that the data would be forthcoming. We provided them . . . with all of the primary data upon which our own conclusions were based.

"We finally succeeded in getting the data only three weeks ago. We are still analyzing that data but I can tell you that using GM's own matched comparison files we have already determined that serious head, face, neck and torso injuries (that is, the injuries that produce the overwhelming bulk of fatal and disabling conditions) are down 44 percent. That's a 44 percent reduction in the air bag cars of these major kinds of injuries in comparison with matched non-air bag automobiles."

*William Haddon, Jr., M.D.,
Insurance Institute for Highway Safety,
at the Senate hearing*

————— *ALLEGATION: Domestic auto makers were unanimous in charging there is insufficient real-world data upon which to mandate passive restraints. The mandate, they contend, is based largely on subjective analysis and overly optimistic assumptions.*

THE RECORD: "Air bag cars have been driven approximately 500 million miles and of those only four fatalities occurred. Of those four, three could not have been saved by any kind of system that is known at all.

"Air bags have been installed in more than 12,000 production automobiles. There have been 165 deployments involving 228 front-seat occupants. All of these have demonstrated that the system is consistent, that it works and that it saves the lives of those involved.

"Of the 500 million miles of on-the-road experience there have only been two air bags that have failed to deploy under the design conditions. One of those had been mistakenly disconnected by a mechanic, and the other was a faulty solder connection. Compared with other items on an automobile this has had far more testing than any other thing that I know that has ever been done."

Secretary Adams at the Senate hearing

Center, Nader Ask For Earlier Passives

In a formal petition for reconsideration of rulemaking, the Center for Auto Safety and Ralph Nader have called on the Department of Transportation to accelerate its timetable for mandatory passive restraints in all new cars.

The petition asks that all new cars provide passive protection by the 1981 model year. The current rule requires phasing in passive restraints through the 1982-1984 model years.

The petition questions "two key elements" of Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' decision: the phase-in (based on wheelbase length) over three model years, and the delay until 1982 for the first mandatory passive restraints. The petition argues that both elements are "arbitrary and capricious in that it exaggerates leadtime requirements, and unnecessarily delays passive protection."

The petition points out that neither the phase-in nor the 1982 model year deadline were mentioned in the official Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that led to the public hearing on the standard. Thus, the petition maintains, the witnesses at the hearing were unable to comment on them. (The notice did propose, as one of three alternatives, that passive protection be required in 1981 model year cars.)

SECRETARY'S AUTHORITY

The center's petition maintains that the Secretary of Transportation lacks legal authority to require one level of protection for some cars but not for others. The petition also maintains that those who ride in small cars need protection most, yet small cars are the last to have passive restraints under the DOT requirements.

The petition said that, "overshadowing the entire proceeding was a Congressional cloud in the form of a possible legislative veto of whatever standard was promulgated. As a result, the Executive decision-making process was plainly influenced in selecting the final form of the rule so that it became politically acceptable to a few members of Congress and to the automobile manufacturers." According to the center and Nader, this fear was groundless because the concept of a "legislative veto" is unconstitutional in that it "violates the principles of the separation of powers and checks and balances."

A spokesman for DOT said that it is the agency's policy to respond to petitions within 120 days following publication of the rule (July 5). All petitions had to be filed within 30 days after publication.

Foundation Asks Court Review Of Adams' Ruling

The Pacific Legal Foundation, a public-interest law firm with an avowed interest in "limited government," has filed suit in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals to block Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' mandatory passive restraint ruling.

The group filed a petition for review charging "there was insufficient basis for the air bag decision." The Department of Transportation has 40 days from September 1 to submit to the court all pertinent records. Court officials estimate it may take six months to a year to have the case set for argument.

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————— **ALLEGATION:** *"The success of the Grand Rapids test convinced Motorists Information, Inc. that there is a likelihood that the ultimate objective of increasing the actual use of belts can be achieved."*

*V. J. Adduci, Motor Vehicle
Manufacturers Association,
in Congressional testimony*

THE RECORD: Motorists Information, Inc. — an auto industry-backed organization formed to promote seat belt use — reported belt use jumped from 29 to 41 percent in Grand Rapids, Mich., after a media campaign. But the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety made a direct observation survey to check the results of Motorists Information's telephone interview poll. The scientific survey revealed that only 13 percent of drivers observed were using seat belts.

"It has definitely been shown," Ralph Nader told the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance, "that merely exhorting people to wear seat belts and shoulder harnesses, barring some discovery of a new behavioral insight, has not been successful at all. I think the thrust of the 1966 Act is to build engineering safety in the automobile so that it comes in a more protective manner when the auto is purchased."

————— **ALLEGATION:** *Most air bag systems employ sodium azide, which is an explosive, poisonous, "mutagenic and most probably carcinogenic" material that will pose a hazard to the auto owner.*

Rep. E. G. Shuster at the House hearing

THE RECORD: "Sodium azide is not an explosive and will not detonate. Sodium azide is also used in pharmaceuticals, herbicides and wood preservatives. Approximately 1.0 to 1.5 million pounds of sodium azide are manufactured annually for these purposes Although sodium azide has been manufactured for over 50 years not one death has been recorded among persons producing it or using it. . . . Talley Industries has used sodium azide in pyrotechnic gas generators since 1970. During this period operators have directly handled several thousand pounds of sodium azide. Operators had daily skin contact with sodium azide without one case of poisoning or even skin rash. . . ."

Talley Industries of Arizona, Inc.,
submission at the Congressional hearings

“Sodium azide is not the only means of inflating air bags. Air bags can be, and have been, inflated with hybrid inflators. A hybrid inflator consists of argon gas [a minor component of the air we breathe] and a small amount of non-azide propellant material.

“Gentlemen, hybrid inflators have a proven track record through their use in all 10,000 passenger-side inflators for the 1974-1976 General Motors optional air cushion restraint program. Hybrid inflators can inflate the bag as well as azide inflators, and can meet the required injury criteria of the passive restraint standard. As a result of recent developmental efforts, the hybrid inflator can now be packaged in the same space as an equivalent azide inflator, and can be produced at roughly the same cost. We believe that hybrid inflators provide the best means of inflating bags that is available today and have proposed this method to the car companies.”

Edgar S. Brower, Allied Chemical Corp.,
at the Senate hearing

————— *ALLEGATION: Air bags are designed to work “only” in frontal crashes.*

Rep. E. G. Shuster in Congressional hearings

THE RECORD: “Neither belts nor air bags are considered effective in rear-end crashes. Impacts on the side of the vehicle where the occupant is sitting can cause serious injury to the belted or unbelted occupant. Impacts on the opposite side from the occupant produce a situation where the belt is very helpful and important to prevent the occupant from being pitched in that direction. Side impacts from the opposite side which substantially alter the forward motion of the automobile can inflate air bags — and in a number of cases this has occurred and thrown the driver into the passenger’s air bag protecting against injury.

“Flying glass and debris are a real crash hazard against which belts offer no protection. In many crashes air bags have offered complete protection against flying glass and metal.

“Yet air bag opponents make it sound like buckling up guarantees no deaths and no injuries. The public is entitled to facts.”

Donald L. Schaffer, Allstate Insurance Co.,
in Congressional testimony

————— *ALLEGATION: The air bag system will cost the consumer “approximately \$250 more in today’s dollars than he would pay for proven safety belt protection.”*

*S. L. Terry, Chrysler Corp.,
in Congressional testimony*

THE RECORD: “We have broken down each of the components used and the cost involved in each one and that way arrived at the figure of \$25 for passive belt restraint systems and \$112 for air bag passive restraints.”

Secretary Adams at the Senate hearing

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September 26, 1977

————— *ALLEGATION: “The air-bag order chips away needlessly at our individual freedoms.”*

*Rep. E. G. Shuster in a statement
attached to his Congressional hearing
testimony*

THE RECORD: “Motor vehicle deaths and injuries are not just a major *health* problem. They are a major *public* problem. They absorb large portions of our tax dollars and our limited public resources, ranging from blood to hospital beds to rehabilitation services and extended care. They involve public highways — our most important public transportation system. As a public problem as well as a health problem, their solution requires that the right decisions be made by public officials.

“I emphasize this point because the question of individual freedom has been raised. APHA is concerned about freedom too, yet some things cannot be left for individual decisions. We have building regulations that keep people from being burned to death, rather than allowing the owner to take chances with the electrical system. Our product safety standards now give parents no freedom to choose a crib with widely-spaced rails that could strangle a baby.

“Yet some people ask, ‘Should the government limit our freedom to buy any kind of car we want?’ If your answer is no, then the public should be free to buy cheap electric tools that can kill us for want of adequate insulation, or to buy new cars with old-style windshields that rip open faces. If your answer is no, then God help us — because you have just forfeited the public’s right to freedom from unreasonable risk of injury.”

Susan P. Baker, M.P.H.,
speaking for the American Public Health
Association, in Congressional testimony

And Donald Schaffer of the Allstate Insurance Co. added in his testimony:

“The adverse reaction to the interlock has also conditioned many people to oppose the air bag as a similar bureaucratic ‘Big Brother’ concept — when, in fact, the air bag is automatic, concealed and involves no compulsion or inconvenience.

“So some allege that the move toward passive restraints raises the specter of ‘Big Brother’ government. We believe just the opposite is true. Present rules require every car purchaser to buy a belt system and pay for it. Eighty percent reject the system by not using it. The 20 percent who use the belts have no proven test of their performance.”

————— *ALLEGATION: “More people are buckling up their safety belts today than ever before.”*

*S. L. Terry, Chrysler Corp.,
in Senate testimony*

THE RECORD: The most recent seat belt usage survey conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration directly refutes this statement. Observation of about 54,000 drivers in 11 cities revealed that only 19.8 percent of those driving 1977 model cars were wearing their safety belts. This compared with 21.1 percent of those driving 1976 models, 24.2 percent of those driving 1975 models, and 29.2 percent in 1974 models.

ALLEGATION: Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.) charged recent tests conducted by Calspan for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration "raise extremely serious questions and concerns about the safety of air bag devices."

THE RECORD: The tests in question, William Haddon, Jr., M.D., president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, told the House Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Finance, were head-on, off-center collisions between 1973 Chevrolet Impalas at speeds of 30 miles per hour. Various combinations of cadavers and test dummies were placed in the crashing vehicles, some protected by air bags and some with lap/shoulder belts. "Unlike the real-world situation where the inertia reel is used, the belts used were fixed belts," Haddon explained. "So this was not a test of real-world systems in the first place."

Results of the dummy tests for both air bags and seat belts were very good, said Haddon, but two of the air bag-restrained cadavers showed injuries. One showed three rib fractures and one a rib fracture and two leg fractures.

"Now, cadavers have been known as long as I have been in medicine to be, as far as their resistance to forces, very, very capricious and unreliable in their performance characteristics," Haddon explained. "There is no brain working any more to tell the muscles whether or not they should stay tight and brace the joints and so forth.

"The tissues have variously deteriorated. The diseases — and it gets relevant in this case — from which they died, or from which the people whose cadavers they were, were suffering, can often be very relevant and can often mess up test results.

"Now, one of these cadavers — these two in the air bag positions but not in the belt positions — had evidence of external heart massage immediately before or about the time of death. As is well known, as physicians and paramedics, ambulance personnel and so forth are always warned, external cardiac massage — and it is a very small price to pay — can easily and not infrequently does fracture ribs.

"The cadaver in this case, it is said, had been x-rayed. But frequently fractures of this sort are missed on such X-rays beforehand. In other words, there is no assurance that those three rib fractures were not present before rather than as a result of the test, and cadavers are not a good thing to use in the first place

"Now, with respect to the other cadaver in the air bag position, the one that had one rib and two leg fractures, the report states: 'The cadaver was highly osteoporotic in the lower extremities.' "

This condition, as Haddon explained, is a deterioration of the bone structure commonly associated with a calcium deficiency and often is found among the elderly. He also noted that when present it usually involves all of the skeleton.

"So this is an inappropriate set of data, inappropriately obtained," Haddon concluded, "and should not be taken as far as the cadavers are concerned as opposed to the dummies as the basis of one more attempt to raise a technological red herring on the part of people that are, as I mentioned earlier, philosophically opposed to the government saying to manufacturers, 'Thou shalt not make cars which are technologically backward and don't properly protect their users.' "

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————— *ALLEGATION: "Air bags won't significantly reduce automobile insurance premiums, and anyone who says otherwise is trying to pull the wool over the public's eyes."*

*S. L. Terry, Chrysler Corp.,
in Congressional testimony*

THE RECORD: Leslie Cheek, vice president of the American Insurance Association, had this comment:

"Quite clearly, the savings possible on automobile bodily injury coverages alone will heavily outweigh any increase in automobile collision insurance costs resulting from the full availability of passive restraint protection."

Richard G. Chilcott, senior vice president of the Nationwide Insurance Co., testified:

"How much would policyholders save in auto insurance premium dollars when air bags are installed in all cars? Based on 1975 industry data, our actuarial calculations show that annual auto insurance premium savings to policyholders would approach \$1.9 billion annually, once air bags were installed in all cars for all front-seat occupants. This averages out to nearly \$25 per insured car per year. In less than half the normal 10-year lifetime of a car, the premium savings would pay for the cost of the air bags — estimated at \$112 when mass produced.

"What about air bag repair? Accident damage is paid for by collision insurance. Nationwide provides payment for inadvertent deployments under its comprehensive coverage as a matter of administrative practice. This protection is provided at no additional cost to the policyholder."

Auto Makers Plan Passive Protection Options

Although Secretary Adams' automatic protection decision will not require installation of the systems until 1982 models of full-sized cars, some auto makers have announced that optional equipment will be available earlier on a limited number of auto lines.

"We propose to make available as soon as practical an automatic-belt restraint option on three representative car lines," T. A. Murphy, General Motors chairman, notified Secretary Adams. "We have already selected a subcompact and a luxury car as two of the cars for the program. The third car line will be selected on the basis of engineering evaluations now being conducted.

"We hope to be able to offer some of these automatic belt restraint options by the start of the 1979 model year, or earlier if possible. Beyond this, we intend to offer an air cushion restraint system as an option across-the-board on our full-size cars as soon as practical. While there are many complex technical problems yet to be resolved in this program, we hope to be able to offer this option at the start of the 1981 model year."

Ford Motor Co. also revealed plans to pursue the option approach. Herbert L. Misch, vice president for Ford's environmental and safety engineering staff, told Congressional committees: "If engineering plans are successful, we will offer a passive belt as a customer option on at least one of our mid-sized car lines in model year 1980. In model year 1981, air bags will be an option on at least one of our full-sized car lines. Also, in model year 1981, we plan to offer the passive belt as an option on a subcompact vehicle It will be in our interest to sell and get as many of these cars on the road as possible."

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The Air Bag At Work: 'A Soft Pillow'

What's it like to put an air bag to the ultimate test: an actual auto crash situation?

Mrs. Jimmie C. Daniel of Satellite Beach, Fla., who with her two small grandchildren survived a 46-mile-per-hour crash in her air bag-equipped car, testified at the Senate subcommittee hearing: "It was just like putting your head in a soft pillow. There's no feeling of hurt."

Dr. Arnold V. Arms of Kansas City, Mo., who was uninjured when his car with an automatic protection system collided with a bus at about 25 miles an hour, told Senators: "I felt that I was held in a very soft manner that was comfortable."

Neither of the witnesses nor Mrs. Daniel's grandchildren was using a seat belt at the time their vehicles were demolished in the crashes.

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Both auto makers promised that the passive restraint options will not be contingent on the outcome of current efforts in Congress to override Secretary Adams' mandatory program by concurrent resolutions.

This is not the first time that the major auto makers have announced plans to provide automatic protection systems as a buyer's option. For example, in 1970, General Motors stated to NHTSA:

"For the 1974 model year, the air cushion would be made standard equipment on those 1973 models on which it was an optional item while extending the customer option to several additional models of General Motors passenger cars. We estimate approximately one million 1974 model General Motors cars could be equipped with the air cushion in this second year. In the fall of 1974, the air cushion would be made standard equipment on all 1975 General Motors passenger cars, most light trucks (under 6,000 lbs. GVW) and certain multipurpose passenger vehicles." (General Motors Corporation, comments to NHTSA on Docket No. 69-7, Notice No. 4, August 3, 1970.)

General Motors, after putting only a few more than 10,000 luxury cars of the 1974-76 model years on the road with optional air bag equipment, canceled its production last year, blaming insufficient customer demand for the action.

Quoted Without Comment

Now I'd like to pose this question to you: We will, I suppose, argue here long and hard on both sides of the issue, each side having some statistic and each side refuting or attempting to refute some statistic. We may ultimately come to a situation where there may be some doubt. But suppose there is a doubt and yet there may be the opportunity to save about a third of the persons who would otherwise have been killed. What's wrong with trying?

Rep. Bob Eckhardt
During questioning of witnesses at
House hearing

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Status Report

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