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Mississippi Lives Being Saved through Increased Seatbelt Usage

What one simple act can each of us do and, in the process, save a life? Buckle your seatbelt and those of the ones you love.

Last week, I joined Commissioner David Huggins of the Department of Public Safety and Colonel L. M. Claiborne, Jr., to announce the results of the recent “Click It or Ticket” seatbelt campaign. The results were what had been hoped and worked for.

This effort, supported through a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, was a cooperative one involving several surrounding states. A total of 25 different law enforcement agencies around the state received \$10,000 grants to help cover the costs of their increased efforts. Targeted at one of the busiest travel times of the year – Memorial Day – this campaign focused on the importance of seatbelts in protecting lives.

Due to the hard work of the Department of Public Safety, the Mississippi Highway Patrol and other law enforcement agencies, seatbelt usage has increased 26.5 percent. And, even more importantly, there were no fatalities on Mississippi Highway Patrol roads over the Memorial Day weekend.

If we continue to buckle our seatbelts, we can save 68 lives over the next year. Those lives represent people who contribute to the quality of life in Mississippi – people who might start a new business, set a record in sports, write a book, or just be a family member or friend.

I can tell you from first hand experience that buckling up does make a difference. It saves lives. It saved my life five years ago.

The statistics on seatbelt usage reveal that despite the recent improvements, we've got work to do. Last year, 82 percent of the people killed in automobile accidents, people between the ages of 16 and 34, were not wearing seatbelts. In that same year, 116 young people under the age of 17 died in traffic accidents. Of those 116 young men and women, 59 percent of them were not wearing seatbelts.

That is a tragedy we cannot afford to let happen again.

I have been talking a lot lately about the promise and potential for our great state. We have such bright, intelligent, and eager young people here, and they are the ones who will build on the foundation we set for them. We cannot put the promise and the potential embodied in those young people at risk because we didn't teach them about buckling a seatbelt.

In fact, it is the law for all children under four years of age to be buckled into a car seat. Further, all children under the age of eight are required to be buckled into their seats. There is nothing more frustrating than to see a young child climbing around in the back seat of a car, and knowing what could happen if an accident occurred.

And, I support making failure to wear a seatbelt a primary offense. It is not a matter of being told what to do. It's simply a matter of doing what should be done to protect lives, and protect our future. Why would we want to do anything to risk the life of a family member or a friend?

Our goal is to see the percentage of seatbelt use continue to climb in the coming months. It is a goal that, by reminding each other every time we get into a car, we can easily meet. Let's make it happen and enjoy seeing the realization of our promise and potential.