It is a proven fact that safety belts save lives and reduce serious injury. This is the overriding reason behind the introduction of Legislative Bill ("L.B.") 496, the bill which was passed in the 1985 Nebraska legislative session to require seat belt usage for all drivers and front seat passengers.

Opponents of seat belt legislation claim that by not wearing a seat belt, they are hurting no one but themselves. However, according to figures from the Department of Transportation, the cost of automobile accidents to the federal government in 1980 was $7.5 billion. In addition, $3.5 billion was spent by state and local governments. These figures include Medicaid and Medicare payments, social services, lost tax revenue from victims of accidents, sick leave, workmen's compensation payments, and all of the other costs which "we, the people" assume for our fellow citizens. Thus I believe that society has a legitimate interest in legislation which is for the good of society and which will reduce the unnecessary waste of the financial, material and human resources of all of us.

States have always exercised powers relating to the health and safety of their citizens, including the regulation of motor vehicle operation. The usual constitutional test of any law is not whether it imposes restraints on individual behavior, but whether those restraints achieve a public benefit. A driver's freedom of choice must be balanced against the rights of other people to be free from the societal cost of motor vehicle accidents.

It is true that passing legislation is not going to insure that all persons suddenly begin wearing safety belts. But statistics in other countries, and in other states which have passed legislation show a marked increase in the usage of belts once that usage became mandated by law.

Educational efforts have been tried for years to convince motorists of the value of using their safety belts. Before any state passed seat belt regulations, only approximately fourteen percent of motorists in the United States regularly wore safety belts. Nations which have passed and enforced belt usage laws have reported at least a
doubling of usage rates, with some going as high as ninety-five percent, and reductions in occupant deaths and injuries of fifteen to thirty percent. In the first six months of the New York law, usage increased from sixteen percent to sixty percent and deaths decreased by eighteen percent.

Safety belts are in place in almost every vehicle on the road today. They are already paid for. They are more effective in reducing fatalities and injuries than any other type of restraint available at any cost (if used alone). Therefore, it only makes good sense that we, as a society, do whatever it takes to insure that motorists make a habit of buckling up.