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Can new seat belt law save more people than previous auto regulations killed?

Feds want local police to stop you for seat belt violations

WASHINGTON, DC — Uncle Sam wants you to wear a seat belt . . . or else.

But the government's new campaign to mandate the use of seat belts is an attempt to save face — not save lives, the Libertarian Party charged today.

"Instead of passing new laws, federal bureaucrats should undo the damage they've already done, and *repeal* anti-safety laws that are killing thousands of Americans on our highways each year," demanded the party's national chairman, Steve Dasbach.

His comments were triggered by a new campaign announced by the Department of Transportation, which seeks to boost the percentage of Americans who use seat belts.

The bureaucrats' strategy: Threaten to withhold federal funds from states that don't pass so-called primary seat belt laws — which would give police the power to stop and ticket motorists who don't wear seat belts. Currently, only 11 states have primary seat belt laws.

But the Libertarian Party says that passing new laws *isn't* the answer.

"At best, seat belt laws will only save as many people as are currently being killed each year by *previous* federal automotive legislation," Dasbach charged.

The evidence: According to the Department of Transportation, as many as 4,000 lives could be saved if seat belt compliance went up to 85%.

But that's *equal* to the number of people who are being killed annually by the government's Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) laws, which required car manufacturers to build smaller, lighter cars — which are less resistant to crashes.

A recent study by scientists at Harvard University and the Brookings Institution calculated that the average weight of automobiles has decreased by 500 pounds because of CAFE laws, killing up to 4,000 Americans every year.

"With CAFE laws, politicians traded better gas mileage for human lives, and mandatory seat belt laws won't bring them back," Dasbach said.

"Yes, seat belts save lives — which is one reason why 68% of Americans already use them," he said. "But the real issue is: Who decides? Libertarians know that *individuals* must be allowed to make life-and-death safety decisions — not politicians in Washington, DC.

"In fact, based on their miserable track record on auto safety, it's clear that *politicians* are the biggest danger on America's highways."

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