



## Senate votes to require backseat belts

By **JIM VERTUNO** Associated Press Writer © 2009 The Associated Press

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AUSTIN, Texas — All vehicle passengers in Texas would have to buckle up — even when riding in the back — or face getting a ticket and a fine, under a bill passed by Thursday by the state Senate.

Texas already requires drivers, front seat passengers and children under 17 to wear seat belts. Sen. Kirk Watson, an Austin Democrat, says extending it to all passengers in a vehicle "will save lives."

The Senate approved the bill 25-6, sending to the House. Its future there is uncertain with less than three weeks left before the June 1 end of the session. A similar House bill has been stuck in committee without a hearing.

Texas first passed its seat belt laws for the front seat in 1985. Although many riders consider the back seat a safer place in a collision, Watson said wearing rear seat restraints could prevent people from being ejected from the vehicle in a crash. Seventy-five percent of accident victims who are ejected in a crash are fatally injured, Watson said.

The fine for not wearing a seat belt in the back seat would range from \$25-\$50.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 19 states have restraint laws covering all passengers. A Texas Department of Transportation study in 2008 found that 90 percent of Texas drivers and front seat passengers wear their seat belts,

The bill was supported by several police organizations and medical groups. It did not have any opposition in committee and ran into little resistance on the Senate floor. Six Republicans voted against the bill.

"This is pretty much going to save the world," said Sen. Mike Jackson, R-La Porte, who voted against the bill.

Another opponent, Sen. Dan Patrick of Houston, said the bill is a government attempt to save people from decisions they make for themselves.

"I don't think government has to tell people how to do everything in life," Patrick said. "Let's hope . . . people know they should buckle up."

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The seatbelt bill is CSSB1028.

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