

March 3, 1955

Honorable Walter J. Kohler
Governor, State of Wisconsin
Madison

Dear Governor Kohler:

I am taking the liberty of writing to you because of your often expressed concern for highway safety. Unfortunately, this problem is too easily ignored in the abstract; it becomes concrete in blood and tears.

Possibly you have noticed in the local newspapers a brief mention that a University graduate student, Robert E. Wright, was critically injured Monday, near Janesville. The anguish that has fallen on his family, his friends, and his colleagues is perhaps no more than has been visited on others, and it may be of little moment that he is a scientist of great promise. I am sorry to have to say that he is still unconscious, though being well cared for at University Hospitals.

The point of my letter is the nature of the accident. There does not appear to have been any culpable negligence; many autoists will drive on roads that may have scattered icy patches. But one person was critically injured; two others were unscathed, and the car itself not notably damaged. Does this not suggest that a safety belt would have helped avoid or minimize the injury? How many similar incidents must there not be?

As you know, bills pertaining to this safety measure have been introduced in the legislature. I do not know whether you have studied the matter sufficiently to wish to support or oppose these measures. I do fear that either apathy or the incidents of political partisan maneuvering may entangle the bills. I am asking that all sincerity that you lend your best offices to ensuring that these proposals be studied, both in the legislative and executive departments, in an impartial manner so that they can be presented for legislative action on their technical merits. An issue of this kind is unlikely to engage wide public interest if it is simply buried in the public routine.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
(Professor of Genetics
University of Wisconsin)