



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

ILLINOIS SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2000

- CONTACT: Dave Druker
or
- CONTACT: Randy Nehrt

Toby Tire School Bus Safety Program Hits The Mark With Kids in K-3

CHATHAM -- Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White today launched an innovative school bus safety program designed to keep children safe during their travels to and from school.

The *Toby Tire School Bus Safety Program* targets children in grades Kindergarten through three and utilizes an animated character to drive home a message of shared responsibility among kids and adults alike.

"Throughout my adult life I have made the health and welfare of children my work," said White, who is famous for his work with the Jesse White Tumbling Team. "As a candidate for Secretary of State two years ago, I promised to bring that commitment to my public office.

"Today we enter a new realm of service to kids with the launch of the *Toby Tire School Bus Safety Program*."

White acknowledged that traveling to and from school is fraught with danger for children, particularly those in the lower elementary schools.

"For the million or so kids who ride school buses each day, the trip to school and home again can be a dangerous experience. Our *Toby Tire* program is designed to minimize the danger of travel by driving home the message of alertness, preparedness and responsibility among kids and adults alike."

For example, the principal message of the program stresses the inherent danger of the school bus itself. White said the symbol of a cartoonish tire helps deliver the message that the wheels of a school bus are particularly dangerous to children boarding and exiting the school bus.

"Kids can relate to animated characters such as the Sesame Street gang and Barney the Dinosaur," said White. "It only makes sense that we take advantage of their attentiveness to animation to bring them this most important message."

White will take the animatron to schools and deliver his message of school bus safety as frequently as his schedule permits. Additionally, the Secretary of State's Office has printed 1 million *Toby Tire* coloring books for distribution to elementary schools across Illinois.

Teachers, administrators and parents can obtain more information about the *Toby Tire School Bus Safety Program* by calling 217/557-7218.

Toby Tire's School Bus Safety Program

Fact Sheet

The animatron. The character is operated manually or via auto-drive and includes a variety of programmed school bus safety messages. The tire is constructed of fiberglass and operates from a series of computer-driven servo-motors. Currently there are two working animatrons, one stationary, the other capable of rolling up to four miles on a single battery charge.

The unit stands 50 inches high and weighs approximately 100 pounds. It is equipped with a high-power audio system and operates in the automatic mode from CD Rom or can be overridden manually.

Cost. No taxpayer funds were used in the construction of the Toby Tire animatron. International Inc. (formerly Navistar, a Chicagoland-based manufacturer of school bus chassis, has thus far contributed \$25,000 toward the construction of the units. The animatrons were built by Robotronics, Inc. of Springville, Utah.

Vehicle Support. Midwest Transit of Kankakee has donated the use for three years of an 18-passenger school bus. The vehicle has been retrofitted to transport the animatron by removing all bus two passenger seats. As reconfigured, the vehicle has passed all federal and Illinois Department of Transportation standards and inspections. The vehicle is prohibited from transporting children. For that reason and because of the reconfiguration, a commercial driver's license is not required to operate the vehicle.