

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

May 16, 2003

LB 303

support Senator Byars' amendment and so forth. I found interesting an article from the New York Times of April, the 22nd, of 2003, talking about fatalities. It says, both the fatality rate of motorcycle riders and actual numbers of deaths have risen sharply in the last five years, and it hit their highest levels in more than a decade, a traffic safety official said today. Regulators cannot say precisely what has led to the reversal because of the lack of financing no comprehensive study of motorcycle deaths have been done since the 1970s. More and more people are dying on motorcycles and we need to figure out why, said Rae Tyson, a spokesman for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and a motorcycle rider himself. The nearly 60 percent increase in death rates reverses years of decline. Federal regulators see several potential causes. Only 20 states have laws requiring all riders to wear helmets, down from 47 in 1975. The medium age of riders has risen from 24 to 38 since 1980, as baby boomers start or return to riding; older riders have a harder time recovering from serious injuries. Horsepower is increasing. DaimlerChrysler is even considering producing a small number of motorcycles that top 300 miles an hour. Safety programs have been cut back and drunken driving is a perennial trouble spot. Deaths rose from 21 per 100 million estimated vehicle miles traveled on motorcycles in 1997 to 33.4 in 2001, compared with just 1.3 deaths per passenger car occupants, or according to the traffic safety agency. The rise in motorcycle fatalities rates comes while the death rates of a car and truck occupants are declining. Motorcycles are the only major motor vehicle category in recent years in which death rates have risen. Without doubt, the most controversy surrounds helmet laws. In 1995, Congress stopped threatening to withhold federal highway financing from states without mandatory helmet laws. Since then, five states with mandatory helmet laws, Florida, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and Kentucky, have weakened them, leaving only 20 states with mandatory helmet laws for all riders. Safety researchers say they believe that only universal laws are effective because others are difficult to enforce. There have been a number of studies that have looked at states that have repealed helmet laws and the number of injuries to motorcyclists is skyrocketing says Jane Stutts of the University of North Carolina. But many diehard riders view helmets as an infringement upon their liberty that threatens the very sanctity