
HONORING A NATIONAL LEADER IN CHILD SAFETY: DR. ROBERT SANDERS

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor one of our nation's most important voices in the fight to protect our children: Dr. Robert Sanders.

Today it is almost impossible to imagine but, as recently as the late 1970s, there were no laws requiring that young children be buckled into safety seats while traveling in a vehicle. Dr. Sanders, a soft-spoken pediatrician from my home state of Tennessee, had seen what happens to children in an automobile accident when they are not protected. He knew that so many of those injuries and deaths were preventable. And Dr. Sanders decided then and there that someone had to speak out on behalf of children and their safety.

Starting with the Tennessee General Assembly, Dr. Sanders and his wife Pat spent countless hours presenting medical data. Their facts and their passion overcame initial doubts. In 1977, thanks to the vision and determination shown by Dr. and Mrs. Sanders, Tennessee became the first state in the nation to adopt a law mandating that all children under the age of 4 must ride in a safety seat. State by state, the rest of the nation followed. Today all 50 states require this protection for young children.

Dr. Sanders passed away on January 19th after a long illness. He leaves behind his wife, Patricia Pelot Sanders, and two children. And he leaves behind a legacy of fighting for the needs of others. Even after he had won the battle for child safety seats, he continued to speak out on issues such as the need for seat belt laws, health care reform and environmental protections. His work earned him the love and appreciation of his community and citizens across the state of Tennessee, as well as awards from groups including the Tennessee Medical Association, the Tennessee Public Health Association and the Tennessee Pediatric Society.

Dr. Robert Sanders believed that each citizen had a responsibility to help others whenever possible. Dr. Sanders lived his life doing that every day. In addition to his public policy work, he served as chief physician and director of the Rutherford County Health Department from 1969 until his retirement in 1991.

Dr. Robert Sanders will be missed in Middle Tennessee. He will be missed by many who, like me, had the privilege of working alongside him as he fought for better health care policies. And he will be missed by all of us who were fortunate to know him as a neighbor, a friend and an inspiration.

Jim Cooper

Member of Congress

