



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

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White Announces Release of Toby Tire School Bus Safety Children's Storybook

Secretary of State Jesse White today introduced the latest addition to his expanding program to keep children safe in their travels between home and school.

White's office will begin this month distributing copies of *Toby Tire and the Magic of School Bus Safety* to schools, libraries, medical facilities that treat children, and other venues that see high levels of child activity. The 32-page, full-color illustrated storybook may be the first of its kind produced by a state agency in Illinois. The initial printing of 12,000 copies was produced at no cost to taxpayers.

White made the announcement at St. John's Children's Hospital with representatives from the Illinois American Legion. The American Legion Child Welfare Council awarded a grant to pay for printing and production of the storybook. Copies of the book are being donated to the hospital for use in a new literacy program they launched recently for pediatric patients.

"Thanks to the benevolence of the American Legion Child Welfare Council, Toby Tire's story will go out to children all over Illinois at no cost to taxpayers," White said. "We have watched our Toby Tire school bus safety program grow from a simple concept seven years ago to a comprehensive effort to educate our school children about the dangers of riding a school bus.

"Toby's storybook will enable us to expand the program so that our youngest kids get the message that a school bus is safe, but only when we abide by the rules of safety."

Gene Thompson, state commander of the Illinois Department of American Legion, hailed the program as innovative and interesting.

"All of us at the American Legion are excited and proud to be a part of Secretary White's efforts to keep kids safe in and around school buses," Thompson said. "There is no more noble service than helping our young people. On behalf of the American Legion, we are proud to have America's 'greatest generation' involved in helping America's youngest generation."

"We know there's a clear connection between early literacy experiences and future language development. Because we want our patients to continue to grow and learn during their hospital stay, this literacy program complements our mission to care for the physical, emotional and developmental needs of our young patients," said Dr. Tracy Lower, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, SIU School of Medicine, and Medical Director of the Inpatient Unit at St. John's Children's Hospital.

Secretary White launched the Toby Tire program in 1999, just months after he was sworn to his first term in office. Since then, the program has reached into hundreds of primary grade centers to instruct children in grades K-3 the basics of school bus safety.

In addition to personal appearances by Toby Tire robots, the office has produced a videotape of *Toby Tire's Giant Steps to School Bus Safety*, which has been distributed to more than 3,000 schools throughout Illinois.

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