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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ALAN S. BOYD BEFORE THE CONFERENCE BANQUET OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN HIGHWAY SAFETY LEADERS IN HIGHWAY SAFETY, IN THE PALLADIAN ROOM, SHOREHAM HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C., MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1968, 6:30 P.M.

I am glad to welcome you back to Washington. I am even more pleased to be able to report that substantial progress has been made in highway safety since we met last year.

I think we agreed then that women have much at stake in highway safety because they are often accused of being the lane drifters and fender benders of our free-wheeling society. As I recall, we also agreed the accusations are unjustified and maybe even unjust.

I am happy to be able to tell you tonight that we have traced this slander on women drivers as far back as Julius Caesar. He once banned chariots and wagons from downtown Rome to try to cope with the congestion. At the same time, he made it illegal for women to drive chariots on Sundays, or at any time in heavy traffic. History is silent on what Caesar's wife had to say about that.

Fortunately, the good old days of Rome are far behind us.

And today, you are playing a major part in helping America begin waking up to the menace of traffic casualties, and begin doing something about them.

Let's review our problem for just a moment to get its magnitude in perspective. Our 100 million vehicles are driven over a trillion miles each year by 100 million drivers - most of them sober, almost all of them licensed. It's hard to imagine the shape of our society without the freedom of motor transportation.

But these cars, trucks and buses are entangled every year in some 10 million crashes - crashes that kill more than 50,000 people every year and injure 4 million. The pain, the human tragedy, and the destruction are staggering. In money terms alone, crashes cost us \$13 billion a year in hospital charges, doctor bills, lost wages, property damage, claims processing, police services, and the operation of traffic courts.

Without major change in America's approach to highway deaths, this national scandal might well have grown worse in the months and years to come. There may be 300 million vehicles on the road within 30 years, with twice as many drivers as we have today.

But under the leadership of the Johnson Administration, the laissez-faire attitude toward highway deaths has been attacked head on.

During 1966 two vital acts - Highway Safety and National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety - were passed within a few months of each other. These landmark acts committed us - for the first time - to bring to bear national resources of money, research and law to the highway safety problem.

During the two years that the National Highway Safety Bureau has been in operation, we have:

--Required all cars manufactured after December 31, 1967, to have less flammable fuel tanks, stronger door locks, improved rear view mirrors, energy absorbing steering columns, crash padding, safety belts, better lighting and braking, non-shattering windshields, and improved wiping, washing, and defrosting of windshields. Some of these standards apply to trucks and buses as well.

- Published performance standards for new passenger car tires manufactured after August 31, 1969.
- Issued initial standards for state and local programs for vehicle inspection and registration, driver education, licensing, traffic codes and laws, motorcycle safety, traffic courts and records, alcohol abuses, surveillance of accident locations, emergency medical services, traffic control devices, and design, construction and maintenance of highways.
- Defined standards for cars manufactured for sale after January 1, 1969, requiring head restraints, better locks and hood latches, and safer concealed headlights.
- And within about two weeks we will release new standards for used cars, tied to a sharp expansion of state auto inspection programs. Right now, only 31 states inspect all cars periodically.

We have also budgeted \$1.2 billion in cooperation with state highway departments over the last 4 years to make "spot improvements" along dangerous stretches of roadway.

Getting safety equipment installed is sometimes the easiest part of the program. Unfortunately, not always enough. Getting people to use it is the hard part. Take the safety belt, for example.

A lot of people - many of them husbands and fathers who should know better - think it's just a strap for panty-waists.

One dealer tells about a driver who brought back his new car with its seat belts and shoulder harnesses and said, "take out all this spaghetti before somebody gets hurt."

Are the belts important? A study of 9,345 random crashes in Sweden in which all occupants wore both lap and shoulder belts showed that not a single person lost his life. Where shoulder harnesses were not fastened, however, people died at impact speeds as low as 12 miles per hour. Other research indicates that the lap and shoulder combination would cut driver fatalities substantially. Whichever figure you choose, it still comes out to a lot of lives saved.

The survival rate is also being given a boost by the new energy absorbing steering assemblies, which appear to reduce fatalities in certain crashes by as much as 70 percent. It is estimated that if all cars had them, as many as 12,000 lives per year might be saved.

Likewise, despite a marked increase in motorcycle registrations, the death rate there is declining too - 22 percent during the last year. In one state which enforced our rules for cycle licensing and wearing of helmets, fatalities are down from 90 in 1966 to 52 last year. In another state without these requirements, fatal crashes rose from 319 to 326.

We have just begun, of course. To instill a sense of safety on the road is going to take some doing, but this Administration has taken the first, most difficult steps. We are asking questions about a lot of sacred cows and demanding irreverent answers.

During our last talk with each other in November 1967 I asked how we could improve teenage driving habits. I raised the question of how to deal with the age-old problem of the drunk driver. I asked what we could do to improve emergency medical services along the roads and streets of America.

Some of the answers are now taking shape:

- We are financing studies of the use of helicopters as experimental air ambulances to cut highway mortality rates. Right now we can get a Marine wounded on a Vietnam battlefield to a naval hospital offshore faster than we can get first-aid to an injured driver on the Capital Beltway.
- Our National Driver Register is filing the names and characteristics of drivers whose licenses have been denied, suspended or revoked. These names are available to states to make sure that a person refused a license in one state cannot get one in another.
- We support the growing move in the AMA and in a number of states to establish medical advisory boards to inform licensing authorities whenever a patient suffers an impairment that would endanger his driving skills.

--We support the 29 states that have passed implied consent laws permitting withdrawal of a driver's license if he refuses to take a simple chemical test after being arrested for drunken driving. This is an important step, for recent studies show that alcohol is implicated in more than half of all fatal highway crashes, and in 75 percent of cases in which a single car leaves the road. The English have gone so far as to impose an automatic one-year suspension of his license when a driver fails a test of blood alcohol concentration. As a result, fatalities and crashes have declined precipitously.

--There is increasing evidence that our heavy investment in high school driver education programs may not be making much of a dent in preventing the bad habits adopted by the average graduate. Many of these habits are learned from parents.

I have no doubt that with persistence, money, and public support the cloud of tragedy over the streets and turnpikes of this country can be lifted. It is a matter of national integrity and national will.

Your role is most important - to be gadflies - to nudge the consciences of those citizens who lack sensible safety habits. By helping to publicize the problem and its unnecessary cruelties, you take us a step closer to a solution.

You can see there is virtually no aspect of American society that does not at some point come within the purview of the Department of Transportation. Transportation itself is so intricately tied up with all other aspects of our complex, rapidly evolving, technological society.

Ultimately, we are a consumer agency whose responsibility is to create a transportation system that is fully responsive to the needs of a democratic social order.

This view of transportation as a glorious opportunity instead of a permanent and irremediable pain in the neck is something new. It is a product of the kind of original social thinking that has characterized the Kennedy-Johnson years and transformed national policy, sometimes against great odds and bitter resistance.

This has been an exciting period during which we have:

- Raised personal income 67 percent and the GNP by 70 percent;
- Lifted 5 1/2 million citizens out of the sullen ranks of poverty;
- Created 1.5 million new jobs each year; 10.5 million jobs altogether;
- Provided medicare for 20 million old people;
- Expanded community health centers to serve 10 million Americans ;
- Upgraded schooling for 12 million boys and girls from poor families;
- Helped 1.5 million young people with grants and loans for college;
- Acted to preserve our heritage of natural beauty, expanded our park system, and initiated the first battles of the war on air and water pollution.

In no other 7 year period has so much been done to make the promise of America into a reality. We live in a troubled society with many disappointments - that is undeniable - but it is a society in which foundations have been carefully laid and investments made. What we need in this time is mainly confidence, for those investments will be paying off in a world that is more rational, orderly, and humane.

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