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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
JOHN A. VOLPE, BEFORE THE AUTOMOTIVE SAFETY FOUNDATION AWARDS
LUNCHEON, PLAZA HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK, TUESDAY,
JUNE 3, 1969

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to be here today on the occasion of the presentation of these most significant awards.

The work done by the Automotive Safety Foundation -- is the field of education and research for highway transportation -- is outstanding and you have my full support and commendation.

It is also a special honor for me to join in this salute to the men and women of the broadcast industry who have given of themselves that others may travel in safety. The Sloan Awards are the cream of the crop. They are meaningful awards, as all of you know. To receive one is a special hallmark of quality and human concern.

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My friends, we are here today to commend good works. We are here -- all of us -- with a sense of duty, a sense of pride, and I suspect that for the winners especially there is a feeling of valid self-satisfaction.

Yet as I stand here I cannot help but remember that during the time I am speaking to you three more Americans will die and seven hundred more will be injured on our highways. I must remember that highway accidents cost us fifteen billion dollars per year in medical charges, lost wages, property damage, claims processing, police services and traffic courts. (This does not take into consideration the incalculable loss of the lifetime earnings and taxes of the 55-thousand Americans who are killed on our highways each year.)

And I cannot help but wonder, how many of these dead might have cured a disease, ended a war, written a great law, discovered a secret of nature, or managed a great enterprise. Sadly, we shall never know. But we do know that each year we are killing and injuring many of the best among us -- the young, the productive, the energetic, the potential leaders of the next generation.

And so while we honor the winners of the Sloan Awards here today, we must also take great cognizance of the fact that the job is far from done. That there is much more to do. That we must not rest our efforts for even a moment.

Well, I want to tell you that the Nixon Administration is not going to settle for little slogans on safety while the rate and volume of accidents keep going up. Good intentions and sincere words must be followed -- decisively -- by action. The Administration has shown this commitment in many ways since the inauguration -- by seeking an early, honorable peace in Vietnam; in the President's determination to get inflation under control; in his uncompromising attitude toward lawbreakers; and by his courage in pursuing a reasonable A-B-M defense of our nuclear deterrent.

So let me state unequivocally, here today, that this Administration will not compromise on automotive safety. We're going to do everything within our power and resources to put a stop to this carnage which has already deprived us of a million and one half lives since nineteen hundred and threatens to kill off an even two million people by 1978.

No civilized people can tolerate such waste and callous disregard of human life. All this is not to gainsay the substantial progress we have been making. Indeed, the very highways on which we drive can be -- and are being -- designed to make travel safer. It has been proven statistically that for every five miles of new Interstate Highways we build, we save one life per year -- on a continuing basis. This, of course, is one very good reason why the Interstate Highway System must be completed! As we replace obsolete highways -- death traps -- with modern facilities, we save lives.

And let me also point out that our Federal highway safety laws are having a marked effect. During the five years prior to passage of the Federal acts, highway fatalities were climbing an average of 6.9 percent per year. But in the two years since passage, fatalities have risen only 2.3 percent on average despite a 6.4 percent increase in vehicle

registrations and an 8.6 percent jump in total mileage. These are averages. In some states -- and Wisconsin and Mississippi are good examples and should be singled out -- fatalities are actually declining.

My friends, I maintain that if we are to accomplish similar results in the other 48 states (and the District of Columbia too, I might add, since that's where I live) then we must have tough leadership in traffic law enforcement, we must expand driver training and counseling programs, and vehicles must be thoroughly inspected and approved before they can be operated on streets and highways where they pose a potential threat to the safety of others. The importance of the human element is proven by the fact that in one typical state -- Michigan -- violations of the law were involved in 89 percent of traffic fatalities.

The whole, broad field of highway safety continues to demand and deserve our utmost creativity and efforts. We intend to continue to attack this complex series of problems on a broad front.

In the area of vehicle safety, for example, plans call for new emphasis on the development of standards for brakes and braking systems, for vehicle handling and stability, for vehicle lighting and communications, instrumentation and controls, and improved tire standards. Research will be undertaken on anti-skid devices and on vehicle-to-vehicle approach rate detectors and proximity braking devices.

The development of tire standards will involve completion of initial standards on retreaded tires and for new tires on other types of vehicles than passenger cars. We will also be issuing a tire quality grading system. Consumers then will have a basis for comparing the products of various manufacturers, and we can eliminate the dizzying confusion that now exists in the market place as to the merits of one tire grade, quality, or brand versus another. In addition, existing standards for tire performance will be upgraded and strengthened, and will include more stringent requirements for dynamic endurance, high speed performance, strength, and tire traction.

In the vital area of crash injury reduction, we will give priority to the development of standards dealing with all aspects of structural design of the vehicle. Particular attention will be paid in the coming months to the development of standards to limit side and top intrusion from outside impact and in roll-overs. Front end energy-absorption will also receive major attention. We are beginning to discover how very effective the energy absorbing steering columns and the new laminated, penetration-resistant windshields are in reducing fatalities and injuries.

At the same time, we will be pushing efforts to develop more effective occupant restraint systems. In this connection, we hold great hopes for the near future for the development of the airbag concept, which promises

a major breakthrough in injury prevention. This concept was demonstrated for me just last Thursday, and I was most impressed. These are devices which stow in the steering wheel hub, in the dash for the front passenger and behind the rear of the front seat, which are inflated in less time than it takes to blink when a vehicle is involved in a crash. The bag billows

out in front of the driver and the passenger and prevents them from colliding with any part of the interior of the vehicle. As I say, these are still in the research stage, but I am informed that they are now far enough along that they can be made available in passenger cars in another year or two if it is decided to proceed with the project.

Another important area of vehicle safety concerns school buses. We have several research programs underway which are being given high priority, so we can focus on the special operating requirements and problems of school bus safety. The protection of the some 17-million school children transported in school buses every day cannot be over-emphasized.

To improve the survivability of those who are involved in crashes, we will be focusing on the development of standards for emergency bus exits, for lessening the flammability of interior materials used in vehicles, for improving the integrity of fuel tanks and fittings to lessen the chance of fire, and for the development of systems allowing escape and rescue from crashed vehicles.

And while we protect our youngsters, we are working to educate them as well. And this is where the broadcasters play an important role.

We highly value the cooperation the National Association of Broadcasters gave us in persuading advertisers to modify commercials which showed motorcycle drivers without safety helmets. We are looking forward to changes in the code to encourage more car ads where the driver is not only attractive and engaging, but securely buckled up as well. The outstanding work being honored here today is proof that the broadcast industry has the professional capacity and creative talent to generate such commercials.

And such efforts will pay off. One Swedish study showed that not one fatality resulted in more than nine thousand accidents where driver and passengers wore shoulder harnesses. Without such restraints, however, people died from twelve mile per hour impacts.

We have advanced to the stage in automotive safety where we are no longer ignoring the problem or pretending that it can't be solved. But we must do more to put our good ideas into action. We should try new methods of training drivers, tighten standards for drivers' licenses, and vigorously enforce the laws to catch the misfits and malefactors who endanger all of us. We can do even more to improve the design and maintenance of highways; we should be thinking more about how we can gradually automate the flow of traffic.

The DOT is funding studies of such measures, but will not study them to death. We can't wait until the year 2000 for perfect solutions.

Above all, we should keep constantly in mind that human beings are naturally prone to make mistakes and we should act to minimize the consequences of these mistakes. That is why the safety performance of the automobile itself is so important. Industrial leaders should insist that their cars be designed from road to rooftop as mobile safety systems. I would hope that the auto industry will recognize the problem, as it has begun to do, and give as much serious consideration to safety as to beauty, comfort and power. If all of us -- industry, government and the public -- work together to set new goals and apply what we already know, I would hope that we could save perhaps 15,000 American lives per year.

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My friends, I envision the role of the Department of Transportation as being a catalyst to help the industry pioneer successfully on this troublesome frontier of automotive leadership. DOT is totally committed to safety on our highways. I have been personally committed -- as a private individual, as a businessman in a safety-conscious industry, as Governor of a State -- for many many years. In fact, I am delighted that my home state has been able to participate so fully in the Interstate program, because it has given Massachusetts miles of safety-engineered highways.

What we need now, what I would like to see (if you will pardon the metaphor) is a crash program to achieve highway safety.

If we cannot halt accidents entirely, then we must make sure that all accidents at least become the kind you can walk away from. This is a realistic approach. It is no fantasy. It is within the reach of our technology.

And I am sure that this goal is within the automobile industry's fabulous management, engineering and financial resources. Safety should carry no price tag, for who among us can determine the value of a human life? Safety is worth whatever it costs. While we are certainly aware that we must get a full one hundred cents' worth of value out of every precious safety dollar spent, we are all aware that safety is an investment that pays off in a better America.

It is the duty of my Department -- and your great opportunity as broadcasters -- to bring that prospect into reality. Starting now.

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