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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY JOHN A. VOLPE,
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, AT THE SIXTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE NATIONAL JOINT APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING COMMITTEE
FOR OPERATING ENGINEERS, AT THE EXECUTIVE HOUSE, IN
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 15, 1969, 2:00 P.M.

I appreciate this opportunity to come here and talk about a challenge we all face together. I always welcome the chance to encourage and commend job training as a step toward full and fair employment opportunity in this country. That is a goal we are all working toward.

Let me say -- I feel very much at home with the Operating Engineers. Not so much because I visited one of your training sites up in Connecticut along with Hunter Wharton a couple of weeks ago, but rather because of my own personal background

-- both as a lifetime union member and as a former contractor, and beyond that in public service:

- as a member of the Seabees during World War II,
- as Commissioner of Public Works in Massachusetts,
- as the Nation's first Federal Highway Administrator,
- and as Governor of Massachusetts until this year.

Anyone who has been responsible for moving earth and putting up buildings over the years certainly knows your concerns.

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Gentlemen, I would like to point out several things to you here today. First of all, I was most impressed by my quick whirlwind tour of the training site in Connecticut. What impressed me most of all were the comments some of these youngsters had when I took them aside and asked them to give me their own personal evaluation of the training program. Time and time again the answer came back -- "Governor, this gives me a chance to be somebody," and that's the kind of work that needs to be done.... That's the kind of talk I like to hear.

The Operating Engineers Apprenticeship and Training Programs that involve hard-core unemployed -- the minority groups -- are certainly good examples for the rest of the Nation to follow.

The second thing I would get to right away today -- is to point out that among other things, Section 22 of the Federal Highway Act of 1968 provides that:

"In approving programs for projects on any of the Federal-aid systems, the Secretary of Transportation shall, where he considers it necessary to assure equal employment opportunity, require certification by the States that there are in existence ... apprenticeship, skill improvement, or other upgrading programs ... which provide equal opportunity for training and employment without regard to race, color, creed or national origin."

Gentlemen -- it is through training programs such as the ones you have already started -- that I know such a requirement can be most effective. The International Union of Operating Engineers has made it very clear to me that if the effort is made -- if the resources of industry are contributed -- if Government at all levels will lend its support and encouragement -- then we will be able to find and train the additional 25-thousand skilled equipment operators Hunter Wharton tells me you'll need in the next five years, as well as the additional 25-thousand workers who will be required to satisfy other construction manpower needs.

You are part of the greatest industry in the world. You are builders. You are the ones who put down the strong foundations upon which the rest of the Nation places a social superstructure. It has been estimated that there will be more construction in the next 30 years in this country than in all the years that have gone before. In effect, we must rebuild this entire nation before the turn of the century.

It is a cinch that this job cannot be done with obsolete methods from the past. We're all using new equipment -- you know that.

Well, the same thing goes in manpower needs -- we need "new equipment," a new approach. If we stick with the old ways of recruiting and training equipment operators, we're just not going to get the job done.

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It takes training and dedication to be a top equipment operator -- that's why Congress put those words I read to you into the Highway Act last year. And that's why I'm so delighted to see the efforts you have been making.

If you have been following the papers and the trade journals closely in the past few months, you know that the Department of Transportation in the Nixon Administration is totally and fully dedicated to the proposition of equal employment opportunity. It's a stride that must be made.

There are thousands of men in this country -- men of intelligence and high motivation -- who would be glad to get construction and equipment operating jobs. They would leap at the chance to learn a profitable and useful new profession.

You would think that the contractors and the unions would be enthusiastic about recruiting and training such a willing group of men. But you know the true story, and I don't have to retell it here today. Too often the color of a man's skin has been a basic and brutal obstacle in receiving training to get a job and to do a job. And gentlemen, that simply has to stop -- whether it's because the Secretary of Transportation requires each of the States to certify that minority-group training programs exist -- which we are prepared to do -- or whether it's done through private initiative, such as the Operating Engineers have done. One way or another, training programs must be opened up to the people who want to do the work.

I am aware that the road to equal opportunity is not a smooth one. There are problems, confusion, disagreement. But the law of the land plainly requires that there be no discrimination in employment and training for reasons of race, religion, national origin or gender. This policy is not new, it began to evolve in World War II. However, the urgency is greater than ever. We must solve the problem of inequality in our society if this nation is to have domestic peace, progress and order.

I have my responsibility. You have yours. The contractors have theirs. I intend to carry out both the letter and the spirit of the law whether I am dealing with employers or unions. We in the Department of Transportation are prepared to be reasonable and flexible. For instance, we have replaced our contract prequalification procedure with specific pre-bid and pre-award guidelines so contractors will know exactly what's expected of them insofar as equal employment opportunity is concerned. I might point out -- although I'm sure you're well aware of this -- that one of those guidelines calls for increased cooperation between the contractors and the unions in the establishment of skill improvement and upgrading programs.

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But just because we're flexible is no indication of any lessening of our resolve to achieve equal opportunity in fact and to establish it as a way of life in all construction programs we are responsible for. I believe you will find that the law of the land -- and our implementation of it -- is fair and reasonable and imposes no undue hardship on anyone. Indeed, you have already shown that your union is a pacesetter. Our regulations will assist others in doing what you have already shown a generous willingness to do.

With your help and understanding we can achieve the goal which is the official policy of both parties in this Republic -- equal justice and opportunity for all our citizens.

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