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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,  
JOHN A. VOLPE, BEFORE THE FOURTEENTH NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE  
CONFERENCE OF THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES DEPARTMENT,  
WASHINGTON-HILTON HOTEL, MONDAY, MAY 12, 1969, AT 2:30 P. M.

I am glad to be here today. I feel at home with the construction industry, both as a former union member -- with the plasterers -- and as a former contractor. I am also glad to be able to deliver a speech in Washington for a change, to avoid some of that airport congestion you hear about. Last week, flying out of LaGuardia in the early evening, even the Secretary of Transportation's plane was 18th in line and had to wait 45 minutes to take off! Actually, even here on the ground, traffic has a way of getting jammed up. It's getting so that the only way to solve the parking problem is to buy a parked car! I still think it's too early to follow the suggestion of a former mayor of New York. His idea was to line the cars up in the streets and pave right over them and start from scratch.

Certainly, the building and construction trades people have a great interest in the problem of congestion, not only because you suffer from it

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like everybody else does on their way to work, but because to unravel the tangled thread of transportation in this country is going to require a tremendous amount of construction -- airport terminals, highways, subways, parking garages -- you name it. Your members will be in the thick of whatever solutions we derive for our problems. In fact, without your 3.5 million members, this nation couldn't make any headway at all.

The truth is, gentlemen, that we face a condition of paralysis in transportation in this country. That is no joke and no idle prophecy. It is a real threat. Take a look at some of the facts.

By 1975 our population will shoot up from 205 to 230 million. More than seventy-five percent of our people will dwell in cities and about half of them will be living in three highly concentrated urban zones -- one along the Atlantic, one in California, and another in the Chicago-Detroit-Cleveland region. Even today seventy-five percent of the Nation's productive capacity is concentrated on two percent of our land area. Any society jammed together like this runs the risk of becoming a complex, frustrating place to work and live in.

Just take the traffic problem alone. Over the next eight years the volume of cars on the streets will increase by forty percent. The number of passengers on planes will rise more than three hundred percent. Trucking, railroads, pipelines, barges -- all tell the same story. To get out of this mess we are going to have to build as we have never built before. In fact, it is estimated that within twenty years we'll have to double our transport capacity, and that within thirty years we will be creating as many new buildings and structures of all kinds as we have put up in the entire previous history of this nation. That's like building the whole country all over again in just three short decades.

So you see we have a man-sized task ahead of us. There will be jobs for everybody. Prosperity will be a permanent feature of our construction economy. With improvements and changes in techniques, we may even be able to avoid the boom-and-bust annual cycle and schedule more work the year 'round. As a former builder myself, I know it can be done.

I must say, however, that there is one shadow hovering above this otherwise bright picture. We face a permanent, built-in shortage of skilled workers the construction industry needs. You building construction trades workers have made this country what it is -- the face of the Nation. And yet our future progress is jeopardized because you are not replacing your numbers. Hunter <sup>the Negroes, the Indians,</sup> of the Operating Engineers tells me we need twenty-five <sup>the Negroes, the Indians,</sup> and skilled equipment operators alone and I am certain we'll require a total of well above twenty-five thousand in the other trades <sup>in our society -- the Negroes, the Indians,</sup>.

I believe it is clear that we must extend our recruiting efforts and go outside <sup>disadvantaged people in our society --</sup> additional groups to find new construction talent. Many of you have already recognized this fact and are seeking new union members among the <sup>disadvantaged people in our society --</sup> the Negroes, the Indians, the Spanish-speaking Americans. This is a tremendous reservoir of unused ability. I can assure you that there are tens of thousands of men in this country who would leap at the chance to join the building trades.



If you have been reading the papers and trade journals closely in the past one hundred days, you know that the Department of Transportation and the Nixon Administration are fully dedicated to the proposition of equal employment opportunity. We think the people on the bottom rungs of the ladder deserve the same chance to rise or fall on their merits as we have had. It is the President's position, as it is mine, that we must do better in this area if we are to make democracy a reality and to provide the trained people our economy so sorely needs to continue its advance.

We mean business. In the Department of Transportation -- in the area of Federally-aided highway construction -- we have replaced our contract prequalification procedure with specific pre-bid and pre-award guidelines so contractors will know what is expected of them. One of those guidelines calls for closer cooperation between contractors and unions to upgrade the skills of minority group workers.

In view of our economic needs alone you would think that contractors and union men alike would be eager to make special efforts to recruit those who haven't had a chance in years gone by. But the truth is that too often the color of a man's skin or his accent have prevented him from getting a job or even training for a job. Frankly, to me this is incomprehensible. I know from my long experience as a union member, contractor, Federal highway administrator and Governor of Massachusetts that equal opportunity really works. It pays off for all concerned -- and not only economically in greater productivity for our country, but in terms of a clean conscience as well, my friends.

I am aware that the road leading to social justice in America is not a smooth one. There are many delays and obstacles in the nature of things. Radical militants -- whether old-time segregationists, Black Panthers or anarchist students -- do not make the job any easier. More often than not they give progress a bad name. But we must continue because fair play is the American tradition and because the law of the land demands -- it does not request, it demands -- that there be no discrimination in employment or training on the grounds of race, religion, national origin, or sex. Theoretically, a woman is eligible to drive a bulldozer!

My friends, we cannot achieve a rule of law in this country unless we first rule our prejudices. Justice and order are the co-equal parts of the great American equation.

There is no doubt that in the brief time span of this Republic we have accomplished many things. We have doubled human life expectancy, we have created an opulent standard of living, we have given our people a degree of mobility that is unmatched in the history of the world. Yet we have not achieved as much in human affairs. We must do everything in our power to make equal opportunity a reality and not just an age-old promise. Not in five years, not next year, but now.

I can hear the voices of the skeptics asking, "Can we really do it?" My answer and the answer of this Administration is that if we can put a man on the moon, we can certainly put a man on his feet.



Well, my friends, we can do this and we will do this. During the first one hundred days of his administration, the President has indicated that we have the dedication and the determination to do this. This is an administration of cool logic, calm deliberation, and sober responsibility.

I submit that we have seen these qualities in the President's resolute conduct of foreign affairs and military defense. As we do what needs to be done for the cause of peace, we must remember that we will not win the peace by being weak. That is why the President has decided to deploy a limited ABM System to defend our deterrent power. The Safeguard system is just what it says -- it is there to safeguard the way of life that we love and revere.

Indeed, since January, all of us have discerned a new confidence throughout the Nation.

The President is fighting inflation, so your hard-earned dollars will still be able to buy groceries and other needs. He has launched an anti-crime program here in Washington that could become a model for other urban areas. He has proposed new ways to fight organized crime. He is taking the Post Office out of politics. He is working behind the scenes to prevent further outbursts in the Middle East. And he is steadfastly seeking an honorable peace in Vietnam.

My friends, here is a man who can lead, who can negotiate from strength, and who is -- above all--- confident of the eventual victory of freedom over tyranny. He needs the support of all Americans -- as well as your confidence, your prayers, and your heart -- and together we shall prevail.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today, and look forward to a continued close association with all of the AFL-CIO. Thank you.

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