



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE LICENSED BEVERAGE INDUSTRY, THE PLAZA HOTEL, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 1971 AT 12 NOON EST

The Department of Transportation has safety responsibilities in all modes -- air, land and sea.

Every time I sit down with my modal administrators, the reports come pouring in: another boating accident -- a drunk fell overboard; another small plane crash -- the pilot was drinking.

Last year more than 1300 persons died in boating accidents. We cannot be sure how many of them checked their cooler rather than their life jacket. In 1968, we had 643 general aviation fatalities. In 45 of these, alcohol was the principal cause or a related factor. That's almost 10 percent -- one in ten pilots who would be alive today had it not been for drinking.

We now have private pilot regulations which prohibit drinking within 8 hours before a flight. Most commercial and business pilots face even tougher regulations by their companies.

Our transportation system is extremely fragile. It is guided -- or misguided -- by individuals: one engineer, one pilot, one driver, one person in command of a very sensitive machine. And when you multiply each of these operations by 100 million licensed drivers, or 750 thousand private pilots, or 9 million boat owners, or countless operators of other transit systems, you begin to realize the magnitude of the safety factor. And alcohol is a key item throughout the safety equation.

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Alcoholic impairment -- in any degree -- is unquestionably contrary to safety in all modes. But the realm of greatest damage, injury and tragedy is on our streets and highways.

We are waging war against ourselves on the highways. Auto crashes have killed more Americans than all of our violent crimes and all the wars in our history. The economic loss in this year alone will be more than \$16 billion and the cost in suffering is incalculable.

An extra dimension of the tragedy is that among 150 lives needlessly lost every day are many young people, and others in the prime of their years, who might have made a great contribution to our society. It is a startling fact that in this country, automobile crashes are the chief cause of death among young people between the ages of 16 and 25. This is a tragedy that must be eliminated by every possible means. And that's the way we are approaching it.

We are improving the machine, through comprehensive vehicle safety standards for auto manufacturers.

We are improving the roadways, through better safety engineering with unmatched standards for design and construction.

And we are educating our drivers through state highway safety programs.

Improving the machine, roadway, and the driver -- that's our goal. And we are beginning to receive evidence of success. I am happy to report that in 1970 -- for the first time since 1958 -- the total number of traffic fatalities decreased substantially from more than 56,400 to an estimated 55,300. This is by far the biggest decline in 12 years. And based on the projected 1970 death rate -- which was 58,000 -- we have achieved a reduction of 3200 in just one year.

What caused this decrease? Some say better vehicles. Others say better highways. And some say better drivers.

But nobody says "fewer drunks on the highways."

Well, that's what I want them to say from now on. Because in spite of the 1970 improvement, we are still killing more than a thousand people a week and injuring 10,000 every day. In dealing with a problem of this magnitude, we must concentrate on those identifiable areas that will do the most good.

We are doing it with the car: seat belts, shoulder harnesses, padded dashes, energy absorbing steering columns.

We are doing it with highways: break-away signs, guard rails, signal lights, bridge construction.

Now we must do it with the driver. And that means getting the drunk out from behind the wheel.

We know, for example, that excessive use of alcohol by drivers and pedestrians is involved in half of all highway deaths.

Our 1968 Report to the Congress on Alcohol and Highway Safety indicated that approximately 2% of all drivers on the road at times and places of fatal accidents -- usually evenings -- are drunk.

Not "drinking" but "drunk". That's one in fifty -- one in every fifty drivers who might as well be coming at you with a loaded shotgun.

President Nixon boldly seized the leadership in this issue last year and recommended that Congress give the highest possible priority to control of drunken drivers. He requested and we received an additional \$40 million for fiscal year 1972 and \$70 million for fiscal 1973 to bolster our alcohol countermeasure programs. With that kind of support we are confident of success.

Research has led us to two important conclusions. First, that while even moderate use of alcohol can certainly impair driving skill, most fatal and serious crashes result from excessive use (which means "abuse") of alcohol.

Secondly, those who abuse alcohol and become involved in accidents have certain background characteristics that give them group identity.

We call them the "problem drinkers." This identification gives us an entirely new -- and I believe workable -- thrust to keeping the intoxicated driver off the road.

In Sweden, for example, their alcohol countermeasures program has already shown success. In that country, only 10 to 12% of fatally injured drivers had been drinking. In the United States, that figure is 50%.

We estimate that 32 million of the 100 million driving population are not your customers -- they choose not to drink at all; 45 million are low volume social drinkers. But there are 16 million who are considered high volume social drinkers, 4 million who appear to be heavy escape drinkers, 3 million who are outright alcoholics. These latter categories are the "problem drinkers" who cause most alcohol related accidents. And we know how to recognize them.

The problem drinker will probably demonstrate at the time of his arrest a blood alcohol level above .15 percent. That would make him legally drunk in practically every state in the union.

He may have a previous arrest for either a driving or non-driving offense involving alcohol.

He may have contacted social or health agencies for treatment of alcoholism or for family welfare aid.

He may have had a medical examination which indicated excessive drinking.

And finally -- among his family, employers and associates -- there must be someone who knows that he has alcohol-related problems.

Our research indicates that where two or more of these signs are present, that individual is a "marked man" -- a man quite likely to end up in the morgue. He should not be driving a vehicle that could take others to the morgue with him.

Our alcohol safety countermeasures program is designed to inhibit and/or prohibit operation of motor vehicles by these individuals, unless and until their drinking problem can be overcome.

Essentially, our countermeasures program is designed to aid state and local authorities in identifying problem drinkers; in making those identifications known to the courts and licensing agencies; in rehabilitation and in setting up special enforcement and assistance programs.

The burden of deciding how to deal with problem drinkers -- how to limit their driving -- will fall on the courts and licensing agencies. But those responsibilities must be discharged effectively and forcefully.

We now find that many problem drinkers are driving with revoked licenses -- and they're getting away with it -- usually just because they're willing to take the risk.

I say let's make the consequences greater -- even if it means longer periods without licenses, larger fines, or confinement.

Let's confiscate license plates or impound cars.

I might note **here** that we aren't being totally "heartless". We recognize the dimensions of the problem and are proposing certain transportation assistance efforts that would ensure a revoked licensee's ability to get to work.

To assist states and communities in applying these countermeasures, we now have alcohol safety action programs in nine states. Twenty more will be underway within the next few months. These programs are conducted, under contract to us, by such diverse groups as the Washington State Department of Motor Vehicles, the University of Wisconsin, and several county governments.

We are also enlisting the support of private organizations and other units of government.

Secretary Richardson, of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and I recently announced a special agreement concerning certain cooperative efforts between our National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and HEW's National Institute for Mental Health.

We are going to set up special alcohol rehabilitation programs for convicted drunk drivers. We're going to develop public service advertising campaigns -- tell the country just how dangerous this problem is.

Just two weeks ago, I sponsored a Forum on Traffic Safety Alcohol Countermeasures for Womens' National Organizations. More than 500 womens' leaders attended that conference in Washington -- and they represented more than 40 million women from all across America. We outlined our goals. They offered advice and guidance.

The women also received a message from the First Lady, who has taken a special interest in our countermeasures program. As Mrs. Nixon said at that time, "The viability of volunteer activity assures me that the many women's groups who have expressed an interest in combatting the problem of the drinking driver will succeed in their efforts to reduce this danger on our Nation's highways."

The forces at war with irresponsible drinking are gathering. And I am here tonight to solicit your support. The Licensed Beverage Industries, through your national leadership, has taken a statesman-like and constructive position on this subject. But I know you can do better and you know you can do better. There is no question but that it is in the best interest of the industry to do so.

The Licensed Beverage Industry can be -- and should be -- extremely influential in educating the American public concerning the problem drinker. But we must be careful to insure the validity of that education.

Last summer, the LBI sponsored several national magazine advertisements which included safe driving charts. These charts -- which I'm sure were well-intentioned -- indicated the legal drinking limits for safe driving. And I understand that nearly 60,000 people requested copies of that chart.

But those 60,000 people, and numerous others, may have been led astray -- with some very serious consequences. The reason is simple: the legal drinking limit is a far cry from the safe drinking limit. The man who thinks he can safely drive with a blood alcohol content of up to .10% is the man who will jump a median strip to hit your car -- or will speed through a crosswalk to kill your son or daughter.

It should be pointed out, however, that problem drinkers comprise a distinct group, not to be confused with the great majority of drinking Americans. Problem drinkers must be recognized for what they are -- potentially criminal drivers -- and controlled until their problem is contained.

I urge you, as an industry, to do two things: first, put your local LBI organizations on record as supporting alcoholic countermeasures programs -- and urge local leaders to work on their behalf; second, use your advertising influence to solidly discourage irresponsible drinking. Tell people not to have more than 2 drinks before driving -- or not to average more than one drink per hour at all-evening parties.

A few weeks ago I picked up a very attractive, well-done advertising insert in a Sunday newspaper. It showed a lot of pretty girls, and had quite a collection of drink recipes, but I could find nothing in the ad warning the partaker that safe driving should be given consideration.

Our alcoholic countermeasures program represents the first major effort by the government to organize communities for a frontal attack on drunk driving. I hope that its success will make it the last. But we have a long way to go before reaching that point.

I am convinced that if the members of this organization will join with us, we will keep the drunk driver off the highway.

We will have a responsible drinking public.

And we will further lower the highway death toll.

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