



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

13-S-72

REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE TO THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION, CAMINO REAL, BANQUET ROOM, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO, MARCH 11, 1972, 8:30 p.m.

I'd like to talk to you this evening about what we at the Department of Transportation are doing to help achieve "one world of environmental quality," and also talk a bit of what we have not done.

As you know, we are deeply involved in making transportation projects more compatible with the environment. We are working on our own -- and with HEW and EPA -- to help combat auto pollution.

Our Federal Aviation Administration is tackling the challenge of aircraft noise and pollution; and our United States Coast Guard (an outfit in which we take great pride) is really moving forward with programs to protect our marine environment.

Throughout the Department considerable research and development is underway that will help us find cleaner and less intrusive methods of moving people and their goods. And transportation intrusions -- whether they consist of a lone bulldozer crawling across the Arctic Tundra or 24 lanes of pavement knifing across Northern New Jersey -- have permanent and often irreversible effects.

More often than not, environmental quality relies not so much on our saying "What should we do?", but rather "What should we stop doing?"

And while I suppose people in public life are better known for talking about what they have done, let me list for you a few of what might be called "negative accomplishments" -- things the Department of Transportation has not done because of environmental considerations.

We have determined not to provide Federal financial aid for extension of Kennedy International Airport in Jamaica Bay -- an area considered an ecological treasure by conservationists and ecologists, as well as a wildlife refuge core

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U.S. INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION EXPOSITION
DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT * MAY 27--JUNE 4, 1972

on Broad Channel Island. This is also part of the proposed Gateway National Recreation Area.

We made a similar determination regarding a proposed new airport in the Virgin Islands -- an airport that would project into a lagoon and radically change the tidal flow in the area.

In my home town -- Boston -- a 15 million dollar airport expansion project has been halted.

You are well aware of the situation in South Florida -- at the proposed Miami-Dade County jetport on the northern fringes of the Everglades. Approval had already been given on this project (under the previous Administration) and we called a halt, as you know.

You will recall that after our announcement there were a few snide comments in some publications about alligators. In fact one aviation journal started its report with the line "The greatest threat to aviation today is the environment."

But now there is a better understanding that our Florida decision was a correct decision. The public knows now -- largely through efforts by groups such as yours -- that our respect for our ecosystems is important and vital. I learned a lot myself, and believe me -- the Everglades jetport decision is one that I will never regret. That is an 800 million dollar project, but the dollar saving is not what counts. We agree with the Florida people that a new facility is needed, and we have committed ourselves to Federal funding for an environmentally suitable site. Search for an appropriate site is underway now, and eventually we may have to spend more than \$800 million. But the point is, even if environmental quality costs more, it is worth more, and the taxpayer has an obligation to pay a higher price for higher quality.

I might note that now, under the National Environment Protection Act, we have tools that enable us to avoid such crisis situations in the future, and will bring such controversial projects before us in an orderly fashion.

And what of the highway side? We deleted 11.7 miles of an interstate in New Hampshire that was slated to run right under the nose of the Old Man of the Mountain in Franconia Notch. This amounted to about \$50 million, and if we had gone ahead and tunneled through the Notch (which was the suggested alternative) it would have cost \$100 million!

As far as urban highways are concerned, it was environmental impact that caused us to withdraw support from the Riverfront Expressway in New Orleans. Depending on what sort of highway they had built -- either ground level, elevated, or depressed -- the taxpayers would have spent anywhere from \$19 million to \$79 million. We said don't build it at all.

And in the District of Columbia, we have recommended deletion of about \$460 million worth of highway construction. And when you do that in Washington -- believe me, you have to be prepared to justify your conclusions.

And we are prepared. At the Department of Transportation, environmental quality is a goal, not a constraint.

Our accomplishments extend beyond the "negative actions" I have just listed, and the Billboard Removal Program is a good example.

I am delighted that I can report to you this evening that the "great American billboard" is headed for the list of endangered species. And I certainly want to thank the Wildlife Federation for helping us convince the Congress to provide money for highway beautification.

Here's the scorecard as of day before yesterday: all the States except 13 are now in compliance with our Federal requirements.

For Fiscal Year 1972 -- which ends this coming June 30 -- we will have obligated over \$22 million to the States to pay for billboard removal.

Close to 30,000 billboards have been removed already. I know, because I went out with a chain saw in Maine, Colorado, Utah, Idaho and Wyoming and removed a few myself!

But what is most significant about the Highway Beautification Program is not just the billboard removal project itself. After all -- we could knock down every billboard in the Country and still suffer from polluted air, poisonous rivers and dangerously improper land use.

The major point is that your Government is involved. Your Government has made the decision that scenery is more valuable than roadside advertising. Your Government is convinced that a Gateway National Recreation Area is more important than an airport. And we are convinced that we can -- at the Department of Transportation -- accomplish some very worthwhile things.

Even before coming to Washington -- in the interim period between the announcement of my appointment and my swearing-in -- we started a series of briefings on my new responsibilities. And I was struck by the fact that the Office of the Secretary had no central overview concerning transportation and the environment.

Within weeks after taking over we established an Office of the Assistant Secretary for Environment and Urban Systems, and were extremely fortunate to get Seattle Mayor D'Orm Braman to take on the assignment. That office has acted as the "conscience" of the Department, and D'Orm got us off to a good start. After his agreed-upon two year stint, he was succeeded by the former Attorney General of Rhode Island -- Herb DeSimone. Herb is a lawyer -- a good one -- and he is living up to his pledge to be, truly, an "advocate" for the environment.

He has a good staff, indeed an excellent staff. And I'm delighted that we were able to bring his deputy along with us for this trip -- a most capable urban planner and conservationist -- John Hirten.

We have recently re-organized that office to make it even more effective, with increased impact.

We now have an Office of Urban Transportation Systems, an Office of Transportation Planning Assistance, and an Office of Environmental Quality. This last-mentioned office reviews the impact of all our Departmental programs on the environment; it recommends positive policy to solve environmental problems in the development of balanced transportation programs, and maintains liaison with other Federal agencies as well as State and local governments and private groups such as the Wildlife Federation.

Martin Convisser directs the Office of Environmental Quality, and I understand that he has already met with the Wildlife staff in Washington to discuss areas of joint interest and concern. The upshot of this initial meeting was agreement that we will furnish your staff with information that will enable your membership to have solid input into the environmental analysis of transportation projects.

The Office of Environmental Quality welcomes your input and suggestions.

We are doing this because we want your help. Right here in this room we have some 600 very concerned citizens -- representing a very concerned organization -- but most of all, citizens with the sort of expertise we need to help us make responsible decisions.

Moreover, I intend to suggest to my colleagues in State and local governments that they elevate the level of attention being given to environmental concerns by some of their governmental bodies.

Protection of the environment means understanding and concern at all levels, and I would hope that our Office of Environment and Urban Systems could serve as a model for the governors and the mayors.

Believe me, there is every desire at the Department of Transportation for our decisions to be responsible ones.

We have a mandate not just to provide transportation services, but to integrate those services into other national goals and program objectives. We have a mandate to oversee the expeditious movement of people and their goods, but that mandate also calls for us (and this is the law, not just a recommendation) to pay full attention to environmental considerations.

I don't think I need -- in front of this group -- to itemize the environmental considerations that must be taken before we go to work.

But I would like to emphasize the determination with which we follow environmental guidelines.

We have heard a great many complaints from city and state officials and --yes-- from contractors--about environmental procedures holding up projects. They point out very accurately that the longer they wait to get started, the faster the price goes up.

My answer to that has been -- and will continue to be -- that what causes most of the delay is not having the job done right the first time, and **not** having brought into the picture at the earliest stage everyone who has a legitimate interest. Moreover, we think that protection of the environment is worth some delay if necessary, but that if the job is **done** right the first time delay should **not** normally be necessary.

In fact, over the past three years, I have made a special point to take the time to meet with our Federal Highway Administration engineering trainees when they come to Washington for briefings. I tell them that they represent a new breed of highway builder. I tell them that the time is long gone when all they had to think about was getting a strip of concrete from point "A" to point "B". They have the distinct opportunity to make this a better world. They have the opportunity to be more than just highway builders; they can and must be "transportation builders." Yes, the highway people of the future are learning early that they had better not think about linking up the land until they've learned to respect the land.

We tell them that just as there is a balance to nature, there must be a balance to transportation as well.

We tell them that just as the universe is an interlocking system of vital elements, transportation must interlock also.

A century ago John Muir said, "When we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything in the universe." In transportation we know full well how right he was. The balance of nature pivots not just on what we pick out but on what we put back -- and how we tie the loose ends together.

I believe that we can enjoy an age of mobility while still protecting the fragile earth that is our home.

I believe that environmental considerations are not (as some would have you think) blind opposition to progress but rather opposition to blind progress.

I believe that if we work together -- your organization and your government -- we cannot help but leave lasting landmarks of which we can be proud.

We are aware that some of the most lasting landmarks can be a boulder not buried -- a tree not felled -- an eagle's nest not disturbed.

And as President Nixon said in his message to the Congress in August of last year, "The work of environmental improvement is a task for all our people. The achievement of that goal will challenge the creativity of our science and technology, the enterprise and adaptability of our industry, the responsiveness and sense of balance of our political and legal institutions, and the resourcefulness and the capacity of this Country to honor those human values upon which the quality of our National life must ultimately depend."

And again, quoting the President's message on the environment of four weeks and four days ago, "The pursuit of environmental quality will require courage and patience. Problems that have been building over many years will not yield to facile solutions. But I do not doubt that Americans have the wit and the will to win -- to fulfill our brightest vision of what the future can be."

My friends, may I reiterate as strongly as possible -- we want to work with you; we share your reasonable goals; we are convinced the challenge can be met.

Again, thank you for inviting me to be with you.

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