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REMARKS BY CLAUDE S. BRINEGAR, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, TO COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS, WOMEN'S NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, WASHINGTON, D.C., AUGUST 23, 1973.

It is a great personal pleasure to be able to keynote the Council of President's second annual conference.

My early experiences as Secretary have shown me that problems -- of which we have our share -- are attacked in a variety of ways in Washington. At times we may study them for so long that we lose sight of what we're up to, while at other times we may simply try to ignore them and hope that they go away. Your group's direct approach to a most serious National problem -- the problem of alcohol-related automobile accidents -- is refreshing and most welcome. On behalf of the Administration, please accept the Nation's gratitude for your hard work and accomplishments.

My own interest in automobile safety precedes by many years my appointment to the President's Cabinet. Too often I have seen, as have you, the tragic aftermath of an indifference for safety. Until we substantially reduce the rate of traffic accidents, I can assure you that increased highway safety will continue to be a top priority program of the Department of Transportation.

I came to Washington with some appreciation for what already has been accomplished -- thanks to Government, industry and community action -- in countering the hazards of highway travel. But the more I dig into this subject the more impressed I am with the work being done and with the sincerity of those involved. Clearly we are moving in the right directions. The fatality rate (in terms of highway deaths per hundred million vehicle miles) has declined progressively since 1966, the year the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was established: a cumulative decline of nearly one-fifth over a six year period. But while we sense that we are doing something right, with traffic accidents still taking more than a thousand lives a week and causing four million injuries annually, it remains compellingly obvious that we must do more.

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I was most pleased to be able to recruit Dr. James B. Gregory as the new Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I have known Jim Gregory, both personally and professionally, for nearly 20 years, and I have the greatest respect for his managerial and technical skills. I am confident that he will bring fresh insights and approaches to our Nation's safety problems.

I have been greatly encouraged to find the kind of spirited citizen support that's in evidence at this meeting. It's a great feeling to have the Council of Presidents, and the 35 million women you represent, as allies. I appreciate, too, the technical and financial assistance provided through private industry's partnership.

The problem's dimensions can perhaps be drawn from a statistical portrait of the motor vehicle's influence in our society. Vehicle registrations now exceed 118 million, including 97 million automobiles and 21 million trucks, plus a growing and worrisome assortment of motorcycles, trailers and recreational vehicles. Our National affluence reached the point last year where the number of registered vehicles now equals the number of licensed drivers -- a personal mobility ratio of one-for-one. During 1972 our highway vehicles traveled 1.2 trillion miles, consumed 106 billion gallons of gasoline, and killed 57,000 people.

It's this last number, the 57,000, that brings us here tonight. Data now grimly familiar to all testify to alcohol's evil impact on highway safety. Fully 50% of all vehicle deaths are alcohol-related. The principal culprits are the "problem drinkers," perhaps no more than six or seven percent of the driving population, who account for a third of all traffic fatalities. The "social drinker," guilty of occasional abuses, is responsible for another 15 or so percent. Additionally, we must be alert to the growing incidence of drugs in our culture, which has made the drugged driver as well as the drunk driver a cause for caution and a further incentive for more effective and forceful countermeasures.

Much of your time tomorrow and throughout the course of this conference will be occupied in discussions of our National alcohol countermeasures program and the implementation of the fine handbook that will be your "bible" in this all-important crusade. For my comments tonight I would like to outline in broad terms the three ways we are attacking the problem of highway deaths and injuries.

The first aspect of our overall safety strategy is to do what we can to make vehicles, drivers, and highways safer.

Several years ago the Department adopted as a reasonable goal a one-third reduction in the highway fatality rate by 1980. We are making progress toward that goal. From a rate of 5.5 deaths per hundred million vehicle miles in 1967, we have edged steadily downward to last year's rate of 4.6. The battle we are in is not exactly an even match, because we are working against at least five factors that individually increase the risk and collectively compound the hazards.



First, we have a steady increase in highway exposure. Highway travel has been growing about five percent a year and, depending upon future development in energy availability, may reach 1.7 trillion miles by 1980.

Second, average highway speeds have been creeping higher year by year. In general terms, we have found that we can anticipate a three percent fatality increase for every one mile/per/hour increase in speed. The need to conserve gasoline may help reverse this trend.

Third, America's per capita consumption of alcohol continues to increase. It went up 26 percent in the decade from 1960 to 1970.

Fourth, there are more young drivers on today's highways. And, as any insurance actuary will tell you, young people -- as a class -- are the risky drivers. (The under-25 age group, as an example, represents 22 percent of the driving population but are responsible for 35 percent of the fatal accidents.)

And, fifth, we are experiencing a greater and more adverse mix of vehicle sizes and weights.

Taken together, these trends make our task a difficult one. But there are some favorable signs. The proportion of small cars on the highways is increasing rapidly, and large cars may soon be in the minority. The safety advantage of bigger cars recedes as they diminish in relative terms, and as we devote greater effort to making smaller cars and their occupants safer.

The safety improvements incorporated in new automobiles beginning in the 1960's are already having a favorable effect on the statistics. We estimate that 65 to 75 percent of all passenger car travel is now in vehicles equipped with safety belts, shatterproof windshields, energy-absorbing steering columns, and other protective devices. While safety belt usage is far below desirable levels, we believe that overall some 1,000 lives are saved each year by each additional model year of safety-fitted cars.

We also see the progress private and public groups have made through persuasion, education, and even legal action to reduce human error and traffic code violations as factors in highway accidents.

The Interstate System, which is nearing completion, has clearly contributed significantly to driving safety, and we are constantly making highways safer by guarding against crossovers, removing road-side hazards, and improving the road surface. The new Highway Act provides for additional work in this area.

I also count as one of the most effective forces for safety the growing influence and increasing support of the insurance, automotive and highway-related industries, who are making substantial investments of time and money in the interests of safer roadways.

As part of our Federal safety strategy, we have focused on what appear to us to be high pay-off areas. For some time safety experts have advocated

effective passenger restraint systems as having the greatest life-saving potential in accident situations. We agree and endorse mandatory seat belt laws. We are working hard in several states for legislation that would require usage of seat belts. Since the new Highway Act provides "incentive" money for the first few states that enact such legislation, I am hopeful that we may soon see some significant breakthroughs.

Despite their demonstrated value, lap and shoulder belt utilization rates have remained discouragingly low, although the addition of lights and buzzers has pushed lap belt usage in current model cars to about 45 percent. The new interlock system, mandatory on all 1974 cars, should increase belt usage still further -- and may raise a few tempers. Personally, I have found the new belts to be better designed and more comfortable to wear. They may raise tempers -- but they will also save lives.

The next generation of automobile safety equipment -- the air cushion -- cannot yet be firmly scheduled. While some legal questions relating to the test standards are still pending, we believe there are a number of ways to move ahead. We will learn as we go. For example, in a recent General Motors study of some 700 fatal accidents, analyses indicated that if the lap and shoulder belt combination had been worn by the occupants, 31 percent of those killed could have survived. Lap belts alone would have saved 17 percent, air cushions 18 percent, and lap belts plus air cushion protection would have prevented 29 percent of the fatalities. While this study is not conclusive, it does suggest that the relative merits of the various restraint systems need further evaluation. The General Motors plan to install air cushion systems in up to 100,000 of their full-size 1974 cars is most welcome and should yield valuable additional experience. We plan to follow the results very carefully.

Returning to today, it's worth stressing that if everyone in the country wore the seat belts they now have in their cars, at least 10,000 lives a year could be saved and hundreds of thousands of serious injuries averted. So I would urge each of you to encourage the state and local leaders of your organizations to exert their influence in support of state seat-belt legislation, as well as your continued work on alcohol countermeasures.

The second element of our highway safety strategy is to evoke a far greater response on the part of state and community leaders to safety enforcement and education initiatives. Here is where you play such a key -- and encouraging -- role.



Data from two years of operations for the first eight of our Safety Action Projects and from one year of 20 others show that alcohol-related traffic arrests increased from 46,000 in 1971 to 94,000 in 1972. Background investigations have been conducted on 43,000 individuals to help determine the best means for preventing recurrences of drunk driving. Fifteen thousand drivers have been identified as problem drinkers, and of those, 13,000 have entered treatment programs. Another 30,000 have been enrolled in educational programs. Nationally, drunk driving accounted for 48 percent of the license revocations and suspensions reported last year.

The 35 Alcohol Safety Action Projects in operation across the country represent a beginning, but only a beginning. Alcoholism on the highways will not respond to enforcement or to education, or to social action alone. Alcoholism is a complex problem, and only a composite program of careful diagnosis, strict enforcement, prudent adjudication, professional rehabilitation, and constant alertness by all the agencies involved can bring the progress we so much want and need. We are confident that alcohol countermeasures can be effective. But they will save lives only if they are applied, which means that states and communities must be equally convinced of their value. We look to you and the energies of your members to help make this happen.

There is evidence that our joint efforts are bearing fruit. Spurred by an increasing public awareness -- often spearheaded, I am sure, by women's organizations -- state legislatures are beginning to write the laws necessary to identify drunk drivers and remove them from the roads. All states now have "implied consent" laws requiring tests for intoxication in alcohol-related arrests. Eight states have passed "illegal per se" statutes, proclaiming a driver in violation of the law if his blood alcohol concentration is at a level of .10 percent or more. Since nothing else then needs to be proven, this measure acts as a very effective deterrent. Clearly, here's a worthy goal -- find the ways to push this total from 8 to 50.

Ten states have laws authorizing the testing of drivers prior to arrest, thus enabling communities to establish a thorough screening process for detecting excessive blood alcohol levels among the driving population. Expanding this total is also a worthwhile goal.

The third element in our safety strategy fits with one of our larger objectives -- that of offering the individual increasingly better options to the use of the private automobile.

In 1973 our Nation's total transportation bill, including several billion because of accidents, will exceed \$200 billion. Of this total some 80 percent will involve highways, either directly or indirectly. Considering the relative inefficiency of the automobile, especially in the urban setting and in view of the all too common one driver-one car equation, we must wonder if our allocation of resources is not out of balance. Are we not devoting more of our land, fuel and financial resources to the motor vehicle than is prudent? I believe that we are.



Certainly it's become increasingly apparent that our long-term concentration on highways and automobiles -- to the point where we now have 3 1/2 million miles of the former and a hundred million of the latter -- is no longer appropriate. Highway growth has properly served our Nation's past development and will continue to do so in the future. But the time has surely come to shift the emphasis.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973, passed earlier this month, provides for some of this needed shift in direction and emphasis. This is a highly significant piece of legislation, because, for the first time, it gives urban planners flexibility in the use of funds assigned to urban communities for transportation purposes. President Nixon proposed this flexibility feature, and we worked hard for many months to assure that it was in the final bill.

Those who have accused the Administration of trying to "bust" the Highway Trust miss the point. Our goal is to see urban transportation dollars used more efficiently and to better advantage. Experience has shown that highways alone do not cure urban congestion. Yet because Federal highway funds have been easily available, urban transportation planners in the past have had little choice but to "think highways." Now these same planners can consider a mix of transportation alternatives, including additional buses and bus routes, exclusive bus lanes, and rapid rail systems. The new Act also allows cities to substitute mass transit projects for unbuilt Interstate highway segments no longer wanted by the community or essential to the National system. This option to trade highway dollars for transit dollars is in addition to the funds provided cities under our Urban Mass Transportation Administration capital grant program and -- as a practical matter -- puts public transit projects on an equal footing with highway programs in urban areas.

While this is a major move in the right direction, we do not foresee any sudden transition to transit systems or any mass exodus from private cars to public conveyances. We have grown so accustomed to placing our cars, along with food, clothing and shelter, as necessities of life that displacing them with alternatives will be gradual, and, to some, possibly a painful process. Yet if we fail to slow the growth of automobiles in our society, the results can be even more painful. Significant numbers of people who by reason of temperament, habits or ability are unfit to drive are often nevertheless granted licenses because the prevailing body of official opinion regards access to our highways as a right rather than a privilege. Judges and juries faced with the prospect of revoking an individual's license for due cause, will often succumb to the plea that a driver's license is essential to the person's livelihood.

I think that the needed revival and growth of high-quality urban public transit will do much to overcome our National addiction to the automobile. Of course, there will be resistance to any reduction in car usage, but the combined circumstances of air pollution, urban congestion, and energy scarcity -- and I cannot stress too strongly the seriousness of the long-term energy problem -- these forces should help to moderate that resistance. Hopefully, we will increasingly find that there are clean, fast and safe public transit alternatives to urban usage of the automobile. I believe that meeting this need will increasingly be

recognized as a top-priority National goal.

So there you have the three legs of our approach -- improving the safety aspects of the highways, the vehicles, and the drivers; enlisting local and organizational support to make the programs work; and offering motorists decent alternatives to the use of the automobile.

Tomorrow you will be considering ways to press for adoption of the Alcohol Safety Action Project concept by communities and municipal jurisdictions all over the country. I could not commend to you a more worthwhile project for your organizations and your 35 million members. Let me close by urging you to find the effective parts -- the parts that best fit your communities -- and push them with the power that only a group like yours can command.

Thank you for your support and good luck!

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