



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY TEACH-IN, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 1970, 8:00 P. M.

I think it is entirely fitting that "Earth Day," and its associated teach-ins across the country, is being led by the younger generation, for it is your world we are talking about. It is also fitting that members of my generation should be called upon to account for our stewardship (or lack of it.)

I don't like smog any more than you do; I find nothing of value in polluted rivers and streams; I am offended by pernicious loud noises; and I resent anyone running rampant over anything.

As long as we live in a society that is based upon manufactured goods -- and "manufactured" means everything from a carved wooden table to a sophisticated inertial guidance system -- we will have to expect a gradual deterioration of resources. But this doesn't necessarily mean we'll be "buying time." What it does mean is that we must apply our expertise to making far better use of the resources, human and natural, that have been placed before us. And we had better do far more to re-cycle our assets and not turn them into unusable wastes.

Russell Train, Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, is fond of pointing out that virtually every human activity causes some sort of pollution -- in terms of noise, aesthetic damage, solid waste or reduced water and air quality. For example, breathing is a form of pollution and no one has yet suggested that we stop breathing.

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The critical question is how much pollution abatement are we willing to pay for? What benefits are we willing to forego?

We do live in a finite world. Our resources are limited. Consequently, outright "preservation" may be impossible. But "conservation" -- the wise, thoughtful and extended consumption and re-cycling of our resources -- is not only possible, it is mandatory. And like most other things that are either mandatory or desirable, conservation is not free for the asking. In fact, it is pretty doggone expensive!

The solutions we seek will place a burden on all of us. We will pay a steep price in terms of life as we know it now -- but it is a cheap price if we are interested in survival.

"Curing" pollution -- assuming that is possible -- will not produce a high quality environment. Urban design, city and regional planning, open space and access to open space, outdoor recreation, scenic beauty, transportation, population densities and freedom of choice -- all of these factors and many more are part of this thing called "environmental quality."

Whether it is a Johns Hopkins student riding a motorcycle in downtown Baltimore -- or an Eskimo on a skimobile in the Arctic (they don't use dogsleds any more, you know) -- the problem cannot be sorted out and blamed on one group of people, or any one Nation. Remember -- "Earth Day" means just that -- all of us -- all over the earth.

In the face of these situations, what can we possibly do to conserve that which we all want? What can we do to make "Earth Day" more than an idea and a slogan? Where do we start in this massive task of cleaning up and catching up?

Let me touch first upon the role of government. The role of government in terms of standard setting, regulation and enforcement in the field of pollution seems plain although there will be differences in the details of implementation. While there must always be flexibility to accommodate local and regional differences, I know that the Federal Government will play an increasingly strong role in this regard.

A rapidly developing area of national interest is that of more effective land use. The Federal Government has traditionally assumed little responsibility for land-use planning except on its own public domain, and even there it has not succeeded in distinguishing itself by its comprehensive land management policies.

The control of the use of land has been left largely to the States and these, in turn, have delegated much of their authority to local governments. The result has been either no planning and no land-use controls at all, or planning on such a local scale that it ignores regional or broader considerations. A series of dramatic examples of the fallacy of such approaches has served to attract national attention to the problem.

A case in point was the proposed 40 square mile international jetport planned in southern Florida just north of the Everglades National Park. Such a facility would have threatened the very existence of the park and could have led to a drastic alteration of the ecology of all southern Florida. Yet the entire decision was dominated principally by one local instrumentality -- the Dade County Port Authority. Only the eleventh hour intervention by the Departments of Transportation and Interior and the White House brought the matter to a halt.

Another example that points to the need for more effective land-use planning by the Federal Government itself is the Federal-aid Highway System.

Yesterday noon I gave a speech in Washington to a group called the Highway Users Federation for Safety and Mobility. Let me pass on to you a few of the things I told the highway industry people yesterday at lunch.

I reminded them of a recent Wall Street Journal article which was headlined: "Volpe stiffens stand on roads that disrupt housing and scenic sites." And I read part of the article to them -- and I'll read one quote in particular to you right now. I said then, and I say again now, "Freeways that adversely affect our environment cannot be built." That's it.

Also in yesterday's speech -- I told these gentlemen that ill-conceived and poorly designed highways can and have damaged the environment, that automobile-originated air pollution is a serious health threat, and that traffic congestion really is not one of the amenities of the so-called good life.

And I told them that we cannot build one inch of pavement without full planning, full consideration for the environment, full consideration for human and natural resources. That is the policy of the Department of Transportation today, and that shall continue to be the policy of the Department of Transportation in the future.

And I also pointed out to them that in the past fiscal year alone a full 15 percent of the total project costs for Federal-aid highway projects was devoted to items generally associated with the environment.

And I told them too -- that our emphasis on the environment will receive even higher priority in the future as the highway program responds to its social as well as its transportation responsibilities.

One of my first actions as Secretary was to establish the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Environment and Urban Systems, the first office of its type within the Executive Branch. We brought in a top-notch man to take the job, Dorm Braman, the Mayor of Seattle, Washington. During the past year, this office has acted as the "conscience" of our Department, making sure that as we helped provide Americans with the transportation they need and demand, that we also protect our environment.

As I noted, we halted the Everglades Jetport project. In the highway field, we withdrew Federal support for a highway through the Vieux Carre -- or French Quarter -- of New Orleans. We halted plans to put an expressway through Franconia Notch in New Hampshire -- an expressway that would have gone right under the nose of the famous "Old Man of the Mountains."

We have made decisions in other areas -- we saved a park in Memphis, Tennessee; another one in San Antonio, Texas.

But when we speak of highways, we are speaking of only part of the environmental crisis in transportation. Of equal -- and probably greater -- danger is the vehicle itself and its internal combustion engine. And here too, we are in no way standing still. We are working closely with the automobile industry. They can lick the problem of poisonous emissions. They can and are developing engines with lower compression ratios that will burn non-leaded fuel. They are developing such things as catalytic exhaust systems that will turn hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide into water and carbon dioxide. Americans may have to pay a little more for their cars after 1971 and 1972 -- but they paid more in 1957 and 1958 when they wanted lots of chrome and lots of comfort, didn't they?

And there we have the nub of the whole problem. Our environment will be as dirty as we want to make it, and it

can be just about as clean as we want it to be. It is up to us -- the American public, the consumers, the travelers, the people who have to live here -- to demand, and be willing to pay for, the things that we want.

I could go on at greater length about things that are being done in other environmental fields. The Federal Aviation Administration is devoting considerable effort, time and expense to the problems of jet aircraft noise and smoke. The U. S. Coast Guard has programs to prevent and control oil spills at sea. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration has a multi-billion dollar program to restore and restructure public transportation in America's cities that is already through the Senate and will be debated in the House soon.

We submitted this legislation because we know that this Nation -- and its cities -- must abandon completely the idea that highway transportation is enough. We must abandon completely the idea that one mode of transportation should be favored over all others.

And our Railroad Administration is working to find a solution to the railroad passenger problem. This is a service that cannot be allowed to die.

The Government is taking the lead in converting many of its vehicles to operate on natural gas. We are revising our standards for the transportation of toxic and hazardous materials. Strong standards for air and water pollution control at Federal facilities are being implemented.

We are setting the pace. We are working to bring about a new vitality, a new concern, a new dedication. And we are delighted, as I said at the outset, to see that young people are giving us a shove; a good hard shove that (believe me) is being felt.

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