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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, JOHN A. VOLPE, IN A SPEECH BEFORE THE INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY, THE STATLER HILTON, WASHINGTON, D.C., TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 1970

The auto accident fatality rate is one of the great black marks on our society. We hear a lot about war and crime and unrest. But the plain fact -- as you well know -- is that motor vehicles kill more people than all but the very worst diseases. Unless we can get firm control over the death rate, about 75,000 of our fellow Americans will die on our streets and thoroughways in the year 1980; just ten years from now. But I know those projections are not irrevocable. I know that the tide can be made to turn.

From 1961 through 1966, the average increase in fatalities was 6.8 percent per year. However, since the expanded Federal Safety Program got underway two years ago, this trend has dropped to 2.1 percent -- in spite of a 6.4 percent rise in vehicle registrations and an 8.6 percent jump in total miles driven. These figures represent a startling drop when you consider that only 10 percent of all cars on the road today have the new safety features.

Our projections indicate that the number of crash victims should start to decline around 1972 or 1973. By 1980, we could be down to about 41,000 fatalities each year. Even though there will be 37 million more vehicles on the road. I can tell you we will do anything necessary to make a reality of these hopes. We are spending a lot of time, effort and money on anti-skid devices, proximity brakes, and approach rate sensors -- as you have probably heard. We are committed to the idea of energy-absorbing bumpers and better side impact-attenuation devices. We are continuing to push for better quality tires, honestly marketed. We think we can drastically cut the flammability of fabrics.

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Improved bumpers alone could cut \$1 billion from car insurance premiums and repair costs every year.

The National Safety Council claims that if all available straps were always worn, between 8,000 and 10,000 lives could be saved every year. We also know that seat belts saved 2,000 to 3,000 lives last year; even though only 75 percent of the cars in this country have them.

People say they get "all bunched up" and get in the way. Well, the best way to keep them from being bunched up is to fasten them around your waist! And then they say, "But that's uncomfortable -- it restricts me" and to that, I can only say that seat belts are not as uncomfortable as a cast on the leg, and they don't restrict you half as much as a hospital bed does.

However, the trouble is figures indicate that no more than 25 percent of the public uses its lap belts and only a paltry 4 percent uses the shoulder harness. So it is quite evident that we need a method which does not depend upon any action that must be taken by the driver or his passengers. So we are going all out for the airbag, for one thing. I've seen them work and I'm convinced that we can get the bugs out of these bags. Preliminary studies show that, taking the General Motors severity index of 1,000 points as fatal, bags reduce the index to about 510 -- a remarkable drop. And the potential for improvement is even greater.

Don't let anyone try to tell you that the bags are impractical or that it will take until the year 2000 to get them installed in all new cars. The Japanese-manufactured Toyota recently demonstrated a computer-assisted bag which uses radar to inflate the bag just before the crash! (Which gives it time to get into place even on small cars.) Because of the additional inflation time the bag doesn't need as much pressure; which in turn cuts down the noise and "startle effects" on the driver.

Granted, present day automobiles are complex and there may be a limit to how much you can tinker with them, so what are we doing? Well, we're building an experimental safety car right from scratch.

What we are aiming for is to preserve the integrity of the passenger compartment in crashes at speeds up to 50 miles-per-hour. The safety car will be able to roll over at 70 miles-per-hour and leave the passenger compartment intact. It will brake and handle far better than any car ever built before. It will provide vastly better visibility, be fire-resistant and -- as an extra-added attraction -- be powered by a low-pollution engine. It will be designed from bumper-to-bumper with the ideal of safety uppermost.

I might also note that I think we can make it look good as well, so it will appeal to the consumer. We will build and test a total of 14 of these cars by the end of 1972. We believe that the automobile industry will recognize the value of the innovations and quickly incorporate them into production models.

I would be the first one to admit that improving the car alone will not end all road fatalities. We are dealing with a complex system of man, machine, and highway. We have to hit all three hard in a coordinated attack if we are going to start saving those 62,000 lives being thrown away every year (as revealed by the latest compilation of figures we have at DOT). In addition to a better machine, we need to complete our Interstate system because for every 5 miles built, we save one life per year -- on a continuing basis.

In fact, since the interstate highway program began, we have saved over 35,000 lives because the Interstate system is that much safer for motorists. Another thing we are going to do is continue to improve the older primary and secondary roads.

But perhaps the major improvements during the 70's is going to be in the area of driver qualifications. Let me give you a profile of a typical accident.

The Profile: The wee hours of a Saturday morning in December are apt to be the most dangerous time of the year for driving ...

Death is most apt to occur at that time on an undivided two-lane highway in a suburban area ...

The weather will be clear and the victim will probably be a 21-year old male driver alone in a sports car ...

The likelihood is that he will run off the road and crash into a tree or utility pole...

He will die, usually instantly, of head and chest injuries ...

Tests will show that he had an alcoholic level of .15 of one-percent in his blood -- more than half again the Federal government's standard for intoxication.

These are not guesses -- these facts come from the results of a \$1.2 million Department of Transportation grant to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to computerize accident data.

The Massachusetts study shows that more than two-thirds of all auto deaths were triggered by alcohol. (We have been using, nationally, the figure of "more than half". The startling Massachusetts figures show that we may have underestimated.)

We estimate that the use of alcohol by drivers and pedestrians causes at least 25,000 deaths and 800,000 injuries each year. The sickening aspect of this tragedy is that so much of the loss of life, limb and property is suffered by people who are completely innocent.

However, public myth has always held that you can't really do very much about the drunken driver. Well, the time has come -- in fact, it's overdue -- for us to demolish this defeatist attitude. But it will take more than a simple Breathalyzer test.

We have just set up an Office of Alcohol Countermeasures to direct our top-priority campaign in this area. The job of this office will be to identify the chronic drinker before he becomes a statistic in the morgue -- or kills an innocent victim. The alcoholic, contrary to legend, does have an identity. He is on somebody's book, either as a patient, a bad employment risk, a trouble-maker or a poor insurance risk. Most heavy drinkers are already known to family counselors, welfare agencies, local traffic courts and their long-suffering neighbors.

So, whenever a man is convicted for drunk driving, his entire background should be investigated before he is sentenced. The judge should determine whether the offender has ever been arrested before for drunkenness -- on or off the highway. Then he can confront him with two options -- either get treatment and dry out, or stop driving. Period. No leniency, no excuses, no extenuating circumstances. The tough approach has paid off in countries as diverse as Sweden and Great Britain.

We are convinced that the insurance industry can do a great deal to help reduce the misery of highway crashes.

Clearly, neither this audience, the Department of Transportation, nor I need yet another study to convince us that highway loss reduction should rank well up on any list of society's priorities. But our auto insurance investigation has recently released the results of a sample survey of how the highway victim -- or his survivors -- are compensated for their losses. This survey was concerned basically with how the individual victim copes with the measurable economic consequences of his accident, but to make its findings more comprehensible, they were expressed in terms of national estimates.

I will not deal with the compensation aspects of this study here, but what it shows about the losses themselves is sobering indeed. Counting only the losses of the half million most seriously or fatally injured victims of 1967 accidents, the cost to society was some \$9 million. When other injury and property losses are added, the figure rises to the \$15 billion range. About half was damage to people and half damage to things.

Nor do these direct losses exhaust the auto accident's toll. The missed appointments, the disrupted work schedules, the traffic delays, the drain on health resources, the diversion of police, the operation of a vast insurance mechanism -- these too, are real economic costs which should be counted. Finally, there are the intangible costs of the accident -- the ruined lives, the opportunities lost, the maimed bodies, the loss of sight or limb, the mental anguish, the simple inconvenience, the pain and suffering of victims, their families and their survivors.

Surely, one of the key issues in highway loss reduction is whether, and if so how, the private insurance mechanism can better serve society's needs while still serving its own.

I wonder if during this past year we have not been seeing the beginnings of a breakthrough in this regard with the first tentative steps towards rating the automobile according to how well it can resist damage in a collision.

More than one observer has pointed out that in the past the average automobile shopper has not proved particularly interested in buying "safety" in his vehicle. But in his defense, we must remember that up until these recent developments, neither has most of the insurance industry! But the insurance community is interested now and, I believe, properly perceives its own great potential for influencing the design of cars. The issue, then, is how best to translate this perception into effective and early action.

I think we could do one heck of a lot better if the average motorist -- the consumer -- had all the facts. It will be our job and yours in the coming years to get the deadly facts across to the man behind the wheel.

Perhaps you saw the newspaper ads run by Mobil Oil Company in papers around the nation just prior to the Memorial Day Week-end. The ads pointed out that 28,000 people died last year in crashes that happened within 25 miles of home. And 25,000 of them were going slower than 40 miles-per-hour when they crashed. The ads pointed out that in a 35 mile-an-hour crash an unbelted passenger of average weight smashes into the interior of his car with a force of two and a half tons!

Also, a belt keeps you inside the car where you have a 500 percent better chance of surviving. And in the 2 or 3 cases out of a thousand where the car catches fire or goes under water, the belted occupant has a far better chance of remaining conscious so he can act to get out.

Yes, my friends, there are many effective and realistic ways of cutting the tragic highway death toll. It is only a question of systematically applying what we know. But we can't do that unless all elements in the safety equation are brought into balance. Everyone has a part to play -- the manufacturers, the State Highway Departments, the individual driver.

And **there** is most emphatically a dynamic role for the insurance companies. Your potential opportunities for service are incalculable. With your industry's help, we can achieve safe passage on the highways and byways of America.

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