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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE RALPH NADER'S PROFESSIONAL DRIVERS CONFERENCE ON TRUCK AND BUS SAFETY, STATE ROOM, MAYFLOWER HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1971, 9:00 a.m.

I am impressed that you men -- professional truck and bus drivers -- are here for this Conference. I am confident you will find it time well spent. So let's get right to business.

Do we have a safety problem in the motor carrier industry? The answer is a very emphatic "yes"! And I don't say this just because of the accident and fatality statistics -- grim as they are. I say that because one accident, one fatality, constitutes a safety problem. And I say it because the only way we will lick the problem is through a constant pre-occupation with safety. That is the price we must pay for the efficiencies of high speed, high volume truck transportation. That is the price we must pay for the economy and convenience of fast intercity bus service. And I say that pre-occupation with safety is a price we must be willing to pay. Truck occupant fatalities last year totalled 5,350 -- and that's about 15 a day. Fifteen truck drivers killed every 24 hours -- men like you, men with wives and children. It is a tragic waste. Obviously there is work to be done.

As I am sure you are aware, there are three angles of attack in the highway safety effort. We must be concerned with the highway, the vehicle, and the driver.

Let me start first with the highway, because that is where the Federal involvement has -- historically -- had the largest impact. I refer of course to the 42,500 mile interstate system, now more than 3/4 complete.

I am sure there isn't a man in this room who doesn't agree that safety-engineered highways -- highways designed and constructed to Federal interstate standards are far safer than stop-and-go, lackadaisically-designed, unlimited access highways of the past. They may have been adequate for Mack chain-drive trucks, but they are woefully inadequate for the speeds and traffic volumes we are faced with today.

It is a documented fact that for every five miles of highway we build to interstate standards, we save one life and 200 injuries per year -- on a continuing basis. That's 6,400 lives a year now, 8,500 lives a year when the system is completed.

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In addition to new highways that are far safer, we have an ongoing program of spot improvements to eliminate potential hazards and known danger spots that were not anticipated, but developed as weak links under actual usage.

Now let's take a look at the second item -- the vehicle.

While truck and bus safety standards fall primarily within the realm of the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety, you are also directly affected by standards for automobiles -- standards promulgated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I think it should be kept well in mind that automobile standards work for your welfare, as they are aimed at keeping unsafe vehicles and unsafe drivers off the roads, out of your way. Each of you undoubtedly has story after story of some drunk in an old rattletrap on bald tires cutting you off on a rain-slicked, winding, two-lane hill. We are doing everything we can to get these nuts -- and their bucket-of-bolts automobiles -- off the road. Our standards are administered by the States -- but we have a little clout here in Washington. If the States don't conform, they have to forfeit a percentage of their Federal-aid highway construction money. And as a former Governor, I know full well what sort of action you get at the State house when the Federal government starts to pinch-down on those funds from Washington!

Of course our "clout" at the Federal level goes beyond simply threatening States the loss of highway funds. I venture to say that in the 2-1/2 years we have been here in Washington, there have been more gains made -- more "first steps" taken in this massive task -- than ever before in history. The accomplishments aren't easy to come by; they aren't automatic. You can't just holler "safety" and watch 100 million vehicles fall into line. But we have made progress.

Let me mention a few of these accomplishments -- the high spots only -- in the accelerating drive for saving lives and reducing injuries on the Nation's highways.

In 1970, despite the fact that Americans drove more miles on more roadways in more vehicles than ever before in our history, the number of lives lost was substantially less than in the preceding year. The number of lives lost per 100 million miles -- despite the steady rise in total miles driven from year to year -- is not only the lowest in the world, it is on a downward curve.

The fatality rate was 5.3 per 100 million miles in 1969. It became 4.9 in 1970, 4.8 in the first half of 1971. This is a solid accomplishment. I want to mention some of those programs which we believe are partly responsible.

One of our first tasks, two years ago, was the reassessment of priorities and the assignment of priorities to those programs which could save lives -- not five or ten years from now, but today and tomorrow, in the next month.

Among these new priorities was the program we call the alcohol countermeasures program. In a nut-shell it is a massive program to make Americans conscious once and for all of what carnage and tragedy is caused by a very few citizens who over-drink habitually, and cause something over 50 percent of all highway fatalities.

This program is just beginning to swing its weight in the public media, by radio, television and the press. We have started nine community demonstration projects in which the whole of a community or state becomes involved at the grass-root level. Twenty more of these projects will be fully operational in 1972. Our goal is 52, one for every State at the least. If the public can be made to see the truth of the alcohol problem -- and we firmly believe the weight of this program is accomplishing that -- the pay-off in lives saved and injury avoided will be measured in many thousands in the years immediately ahead.

A second program is the crash survivability program, and still another is the Experimental Safety Vehicle Program. Crash-survivability is a program which admits that we can change people, drivers old and young, only slowly -- that highway crashes will occur and that thousands will die as a result unless we can build crash-worthiness and survivability into the vehicle. It can be done.

The NHTSA's safety standards have proven it can be done and such things as resilient windshields, stronger side-doors, collapsing steering columns, safety belts and padded interiors have long since furnished proof that lives saved are the prompt result. That program is continuing and by 1975 and after, the cars rolling out of Detroit will bring the motorist through a 30 mile-per-hour collision free of major injury ... a collision speed which is very often fatal in today's vehicles.

At the same time the ESV program -- endorsed and joined by several foreign countries due to our efforts in DOT -- will bring to the highway for competitive testing and demonstration a new breed of automobile which is built for safety and occupant survival, from the ground up. This is a new concept: safety from the drawing board to the final product.

Those of you have visions of a Sherman tank as the result are due for a surprise. We've seen the mock-ups and the pilots on many of these experimental and styling and beauty is there to satisfy the severest critic.

A final accomplishment I would mention is the complete overhaul of the process by which the Department of Transportation and the 50 states work hand-in-glove to implement State and community programs in highway safety. Unlike the process we found in January of 1969, the States now may submit program plans for the years ahead, and find the same measure of comprehensive planning taking place in Washington which they must use to create an on-going, effective program.

We have streamlined the funding process, put a greater variety of programs in motion for State adoption and approval, and then handed over to each State the major responsibility for implementing those programs which it truly needs. All of this represents a vast amount of work and change, and I needn't tell you that change is sometimes the most difficult of all improvements for Government to accomplish efficiently.

I could mention many more, such as the experimental rescue programs in which we have joined with the Department of Defense to demonstrate the feasibility of helicopter ambulance service for remote areas. These teams have saved more than a few truck drivers' lives, I might note.

Other efforts that I might mention quickly include the multi-disciplinary accident investigation teams, with an assortment of professional skills, who delve into the causes and potential cures of major accidents. We work closely with the National Transportation Safety Board on this.

These teams have shown us new areas for safety standards, and have uncovered previously-unknown defects which need prompt investigation and cure. And speaking of defects, it's worth noting that we have directly influenced the recall of some 514,000 vehicles during the first nine months of this year.

So let me repeat my point. We are not standing still. Indeed, we are doing more than has ever been done before.

I realize, of course, that your primary interest here today involves regulations and standards as they apply to trucks and buses. This is a Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety function, as I noted, and I hardly think we can be accused of laxity in this area! Indeed, the great bulk of our correspondence urges us to ease off a little! But we're not easing off, and we don't intend to.

I don't want to get into a lengthy discussion here on truck and bus safety regulations from the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety. You are all pretty well acquainted with the safety regulations book. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here. And that leads me to the third side of our safety triangle, the driver. Let me emphasize one thing about these regulations, as they apply to you -- the drivers. They are minimum requirements. Some could be more demanding. Perhaps some of the companies you drive for require more. Perhaps you yourself demand more in the vehicles you drive. If so, fine! I am all for you. There cannot be too much safety.

These regulations require that you be in good physical and mental health. They require that you limit your hours of driving. They require safe operations of your buses and trucks. And they require, as I pointed out, that your vehicle meet certain performance standards and be equipped with certain safety features, and meet maintenance requirements.

Other regulations put out by the Bureau cover the over-the-road movement of hazardous materials. These new chemicals and explosives are becoming an increasingly larger problem. We have, consequently, assigned a hazardous materials specialist in each of the nine regions of the Bureau and two more are working in our Regulations Division here in Washington. We are constantly studying this problem and upgrading our regulations covering these materials.

Now regulations are fine but by themselves they are of little value. Our safety program also consists of making them known, checking to see that the carriers are complying with them, and inspecting vehicles to see that they meet the standards set in these regulations. We check about 40,000 vehicles a year. The Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety also conducts investigations into violations and, finally, takes enforcement action. This enforcement action consists of reporting violators to the Interstate Commerce Commission which can act on the carrier's operating authority. Earlier this week, for example, the ICC ordered one bus company to suspend all charter operations for one month. The suspension was a penalty for the company's failure to observe our Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. The company (as I'm sure you're aware) was charged with failure to observe the 70 hour rule which prohibits a driver from being on duty more than 70 hours in any eight-day period.

DOT is sponsoring legislation which will increase fines for violation of Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, extend the civil forfeiture procedure to all violations, and permit the suspension or revocation of a carrier's operating rights for violations. The proposed legislation has been circulated as required by law to the other interested agencies for comment. The Interstate Commerce Commission does have some objection to the provisions which would allow the revocation or suspension of a carrier's operating rights, but these differences of opinion are being resolved.

This legislation will give DOT a stronger hand in dealing with motor carriers that persist in violating safety regulations. The bill would increase the fines from \$250 dollars to \$1,000 for first offense and from \$500 to \$2,000 for subsequent offenses. Presently only common and contract carriers are covered by the civil forfeiture penalty procedure. The new bill would include private carriers. Presently only common and contract carriers are covered by the civil forfeiture penalty procedure. The new bill would include private carriers. Presently only the ICC can suspend or revoke a carrier's operating rights. This law would allow the Secretary to suspend or revoke a carrier's operating rights up to 60 days without notice if the carrier's operations created an unreasonable risk of accident, injury or death to persons or damage to property.

The Department can also initiate on its own, criminal prosecution against safety regulations violators.

I have left to the last what may be one of the major thrusts, in the motor carrier safety effort. That is the concern and voluntary effort of you drivers here today and the carriers who employ you. Let me explain. We have out in the field a staff of approximately 130 safety investigators to follow up on your complaints and enforce our regulations. They must, however, oversee a total of 150,000 carriers. That means each one is responsible for over 1,000 carriers. Now there is just so much that each of these men can do. We are asking the Congress for funds to enforce our regulations more stringently and I am hopeful we shall be successful. In the meanwhile, we are relying on both our staff and you drivers and concerned motor carriers to help us ensure enforcement. And I am happy to say your response has been good. Nobody wins when safety is given short shrift; safety cutbacks are the perfect example of penny-wise and pound-foolish.

I want to state again that I regard our Motor Carrier Safety Program as a cooperative effort of the drivers, the carriers and the Government. This is the only way it can work. If there is any feeling of us versus you -- any feeling that one of the partners is using the safety program to work against the other, then we are all the losers. This, then, is why I am here today. You men want to work for safety. I want to help you. I want you to help us.

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