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STATEMENT BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION DREW LEWIS, AT A NEWS CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, D.C., JANUARY 28, 1981.

The President has asked me to form an automotive task force charged with the responsibility of addressing the problems confronting our domestic auto industry.

I am honored to have been named Chairman of that task force, whose members include Donald T. Regan, Secretary of the Treasury; Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Commerce; the Secretary of Labor; William Brock, the United States' Trade Representative; and Murray Weidenbaum, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors.

We recognize both the importance and the urgency of finding solutions to the industry's difficulties. As I told the Senate Commerce Committee during confirmation hearings, I consider the health of our nation's automotive and motor vehicle related industries the single most pressing problem in transportation.

Moreover, it is a problem inexorably linked with other aspects of our economy. We are challenged by burdensome tax rates, bloated Federal spending, high interest rates and overbearing Federal regulations that are causing havoc not only in the auto industry but in other industries as well. We must attack these problems zealously and simultaneously.

I propose to travel to Detroit in the next week to meet with the leaders of the auto industry, both management and labor, as well as leaders of the community. We expect to make good use of the analytical data on the industry gathered by the Department of Transportation. I believe it is important in addressing the auto industry's needs that we move in the direction and pursue the course consistent with this Administration's goals.

The task before us is enormous. The industry is heavily involved with investments expected to total more than \$70 billion by 1985. Government's job is to foster industry's recovery efforts, and its return to competitiveness. Among other things, we will consider where Federal regulations can be eased without sacrificing the necessary safety and emission standards.

I am pleased that the Department of Transportation will be the coordinating Federal agency in recommending solutions to restore the vitality of the domestic automotive industry.

Our task force will be examining problem areas and making specific recommendations. From these recommendations we will assemble the package of government actions that should be taken and submit them to the President.

The American auto industry is vital to our national defense and has spearheaded our peacetime prosperity. It has given us a mobility unparalleled in the world. It has been a fountainhead of technology and a leading supplier of jobs for American workers. We must work together to preserve this industry that has served us so well and so faithfully.

We are determined that through a concerted effort of everyone involved -- the Administration, Congress, management, labor and the public -- we will work to keep the American-built automobile first in sales in our country and competitive in world markets.

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