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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS, TO THE AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, FEBRUARY 13, 1979.

I am here to talk about the future of the automobile. And I believe the car does have a future. We're working hard to provide alternatives, so that people's travel options are retained not reduced. But it's clear that the American people will give up a lot before they give up their cars. So the motor vehicle is not going to be replaced. We're not going to lose the private transportation that has become a vital force in our economy and an integral part of the American lifestyle.

And it's because I believe in the automobile and its importance in all our lives that I want to be sure it survives.

When I challenged the auto industry to "re-invent" the car, I was not trying to dictate to Detroit or invoke a miracle. I was trying to deal with (1) the realities of a worsening energy situation and (2) the necessity to attack the problem now if we are to have new, super-efficient cars before the end of this century.

I was asking for a new commitment by the manufacturers -- to innovation instead of imitation, and to revolutionary -- not evolutionary -- thinking. I was asking the auto makers to reach for goals that may seem beyond their grasp -- to test the outer limits of automotive technologies.

Today I bring the second part of that challenge.

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I am asking for a good faith effort between the public and private sectors -- involving government, private research laboratories, universities and the industry ... a recognition that we share common objectives. I am asking that we join in a national automobile development policy dedicated to the creation of cars we can live with on acceptable social terms.

I am suggesting that we quit bumping heads and start using them, to produce the car of the future.

We both have made mistakes in the past. In some cases, government may have expected too much too soon. Federal demands, at times, have been confusing and inconsistent. Industry has not been as inventive or as responsive to changing conditions as the times have required.

What I am saying is, let's put our differences behind us and our objectives squarely in front of us. To state it as briefly as I know how, we have to determine what we can do together to speed the development of an energy-stretching, life-saving, people-pleasing car.

In addition, we want to preserve competition, keep prices within reach of the consumer and guarantee choice in the marketplace.

We will not solve all of these problems -- certainly not at this meeting, or at our conference in April, or perhaps in the next 10 years. But I hope to propose a national motor vehicle policy to the President next year. It is not a policy we intend to impose on the industry, but one that respects our several objectives.

Our purpose today, as I said, is to begin the process; to lay the foundation. By 1985 we will not have exhausted the potential for improvements in motor vehicle technology based on currently known technologies. But beyond that time period, further improvements will be severely limited unless we:

(1) expand our basic knowledge, and

(2) generate new ideas.

Henry Ford II recognized 15 years ago that in automotive technology there was really nothing very new or startling.

> "When you think of the enormous progress of science over the last two generations," he said, "it's astonishing that there is very little about basic automotive principles today that would seem strange to the pioneers of our industry. What we need more than the refinement of old ideas is the ability to develop new ideas and put them to work."

That's what we're here for -- to generate ideas, to stimulate thinking, to assess where we are so we can plan where we're going.

We must know what is possible, before we can determine what is impossible.

We must know what is reasonable, so we can avoid the unreasonable.

We must know what has been tried, so we can focus on the untried.

And while I believe in being practical, I hope there is sufficient scientific curiosity running through this conference to inspire a few exercises in imagination. It is worth noting that the science fiction writers of the last several decades have portrayed the future more accurately than many scientists. I suggest, therefore, that it may be well to indulge fantasy as well as fact in your investigations and deliberations.

There is also a very practical, dollars-and-cents reason for investing today in the car of tomorrow. The late Charles Kettering, who we remember for the self-starter and a multitude of other inventions, told a Detroit audience 27 years ago that research was "good insurance" for an auto company.

"We have to be thinking five, 10, 15 or 20 years from where we are now," he said, "or we won't have anything new.

"The money General Motors spends for research," he explained, is an insurance premium -- "insuring against surprise."

Our job, then, is threefold:

(1) To work out a motor vehicle development policy we can pursue together, based on the socially-responsible automobile;

(2) To consider what's being done now, and can be done, for application after 1985; and

(3) To look beyond the '80's and into the '90's, to see where technology can lead us.

To begin that task the distinguished panel members assembled for this conference will focus on basic research in three areas: (1) engines, (2) fuel and powertrain systems and (3) vehicle structures and materials. Since each of these systems offers a number of technology choices, the prospects for further, more clearly defined basic research projects are encouraging. And once we know the avenues of greatest promise, we can assign priorities and allocate resources.

Let me conclude by emphasizing again the problem.

First, with annual highway deaths again edging over the 50,000 mark, we must devote greater attention to crash protection and occupant safety. The experimental cars on display at this conference demonstrate what can be done, using state-of-the-art technology, and suggest what even greater improvements can be achieved in guarding against death and injury. Along with the human misery and suffering involved, the economic consequences are enormous. The economic costs of automobile crashes are now approaching the retail sales of new cars, adding to insurance costs and feeding inflation.

Second, it has now been nearly 40 years since the smog from automobile exhausts began to cloud the skies over Los Angeles. And despite efforts to control emissions, the motor vehicle is still polluting the air. The car of the future cannot wear the badge of social acceptance unless it passes the clean air test.

But the third and most compelling motivation in our quest for a better car is the stark fact that we are running out of what our motor vehicles run on.

No matter how you measure it, oil is a finite resource. There is only so much of it. We are now using 100 billion gallons a year in our 145 million cars, trucks and buses. Consumption is increasing, not decreasing -- despite our conservation efforts and the more efficient cars now being produced. Even the 27.5 mpg standard may not suffice. That average may have to be doubled before the year 2000, if our use of the car is not to be drastically curtailed.

I do not believe that the motor vehicle industry, with all of its technological resources, will remain baffled, intimidated or frustrated by the energy challenge.

I cannot believe that we will continue to gamble our mobility on the shaky assumption that we will always be able to find or buy fuel in the quantities we have become accustomed to consuming.

I will not believe that, with a coordinated national program of basic research, we cannot build a new foundation in auto technologies -- one that assures the continuing ability of the industry to produce cars and our freedom to drive them.

When the Civil War was imminent, Lincoln sent a terse telegram to one of his military commanders. "The necessity to be prepared increases," he wrote. "Look to it."

That, I suggest, is good advice today. With the price of gasoline increasing and contingency plans for dealing with scarcities being formulated, the energy shortage is a near-term as well as a long-range possibility.

The importance of our purpose here grows more urgent. Let us "look to it."

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