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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS,
TO THE KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE,
MASSACHUSETTS, FEBRUARY 13, 1979

I can't help this evening but engage in some Kennedy nostalgia.

I remember Jack Kennedy, a candidate for the Senate, standing in line at an airline ticket counter in Seattle, kicking his suitcase ahead of him and going over his notes for a speech that night.

But when he was campaigning for the Presidency in 1960, the "regular guy" character of Jack Kennedy had been all but obscured by his opponents, who delighted in saying that he was a rich kid who had never worked a day in his life.

In the West Virginia campaign, down in a coal mine, Kennedy was asked by a burly miner if that was true -- that he had never worked a day in his life. Kennedy grinned and said, "Yes, I guess so."

The miner slapped him soundly on the back. "Well, let me tell you something," he said, "you haven't missed a damn thing."

President Kennedy gave me my start in politics when he appointed me U.S. Attorney for western Washington state eighteen years ago. In those days, humor and excitement were in the air.

How things have changed! In less than two decades since the Kennedy Presidency, the Congress has gone from a tightly-controlled southern barony, run by iron fisted arch-conservatives like Judge Smith and Carl Vinson - to an intensely competitive political marketplace where a couple of hundred subcommittee chairmen vie for power every day.

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As a junior member of the house, I chafed under the seniority system and rebelled against it. Today that seniority system is all but gone, but there is no structure to replace it and the pieces are glued together only by the personality and remarkable political skills of a great speaker and the Congressman from this district 'Tip' O'Neill.

The executive branch that Jack Kennedy inherited two decades ago was still running on the momentum of Franklin Roosevelt, and it dominated government. When Kennedy spoke out on civil rights or steel prices or even Cuba, that was national policy. He need not consult with the Congress.

Two years ago, President Carter inherited a different executive branch. An executive demoralized by Vietnam and Watergate; encumbered by mounds of new procedural requirements putting the decision making process in slow motion; enfeebled by a corrupted civil service system and by the alienation of the American people themselves.

In Kennedy's day, executive decisions were made sometimes too quickly, pressed by agencies like the FBI and CIA so secure in their power and wisdom that they might even lie to a President in pursuit of their policies. Today the pendulum rests at the other extreme, where executive agencies duck and dodge decisions as though they were the enemy of the people. When it comes time to offer the President hard advice, experts vanish and policy beliefs are written in disappearing ink.

Time has become the substitute for action. Studies, public hearings, environmental impact statements -- all of which may be good and necessary in themselves -- have become havens of opportunity for officials elected to decision making responsibilities who, for one reason or another, are afraid to make a decision.

In an age when changes in our society are occurring more rapidly than ever, our ability to respond to change is being slowed. At a time when we need, more than ever before, to peer into the future, we are still looking backward at questions left unanswered ... actions not taken ... deeds undone. In an hour when we desperately need success - in urban development, for example -- we are bogged down in process.

Churchill once sent back his dessert complaining that "the pudding has no theme." That may be our problem today. Economic, social and political forces pull us in conflicting directions. Special interests lobby hard. Dissent is more visible than assent; protest more vocal than acclaim. It is said that government is "not responsible", when in truth the problem is one of a government trying to be too responsive to too many forces in too many ways. The result is a public perception of government costing more and more while doing less and less.

We have to change this. We have to focus on directions and settle priorities. We have to regain the willingness to make up our minds and the courage to act on our decisions. We have to act in spite of the restraints of energy and inflation and environmental concerns which, by their very nature, frustrate rather than fortify us.

Let me tell you what we are trying to accomplish in urban transportation.

Since World War II, the federal government alone has spent nearly \$80 billion on transportation projects in America's cities.

Not all of that money was badly spent. There are roads and terminals and airports which have helped urban areas.

But there is increasing evidence that a preponderance of this investment was badly spent - invested in a way that did not build cities but destroyed them.

Our enthusiasm for the auto, our hunger for the suburbs, contributed dearly to this policy. What contributed even more was sheer ignorance.

We assumed that a country with an unlimited supply of cheap oil no longer needed transit systems, and so we let them collapse one by one - the MBTA in Boston, the subways in New York and Philadelphia, the street-cars in St. Louis. In Los Angeles, we let oil companies buy up the nation's best urban rail system and pave it over.

In honor of progress, we built interstate highways designed like concrete canyons, right through our cities dividing neighborhoods and races. Once those barriers were constructed, we designed beltways that like circular magnets drew people and businesses and jobs away from the center of town.

We abandoned perfectly good auxiliary facilities -- like Midway Airport in Chicago -- to build flashier and in many cases redundant systems. The result was to destroy urban economies for marginal gains.

Planners somehow forgot that transportation decisions are human decisions.

That a decision to build a highway is a decision to tear down someone's home; that an airport may be a great municipal asset but a personal liability to those along its flight path.

And yet the evidence is all around -- and it screams out against the ignorance, short sightedness, and insensitivity of three decades of urban transportation decisions.

No wonder we are bogged down in process arguments and permit procedures.

Well what are we now to do?

Tonight I am announcing five policies which will guide the federal investment in urban transportation growing out of President Carter's historic effort to develop a coordinated urban policy.

First we will make transportation money a magnet to bring back to the cities the people, shops, schools and jobs which we drove away. Beltways will be frowned on. Federal transportation planners will work with their counterparts at HUD, EPA, and other federal agencies, and the private sector to see where money can be pooled and chances for joint development exploited.

Second, we will demand that every transportation decision be measured against its energy costs. It is no secret that an energy scarcity is upon us, and transportation is at the core of the problem. I have told the automakers that we will not backdown on tough fuel economy standards. I can't turn around the approve highways that encourage urban sprawl and lengthy communting.

In urban areas, the most practical way to achieve energy conservation in transportation is to increase ride-sharing and transit use. A condition of federal approval of any future freeways will be separated rights-of-way for buses and carpools.

Third, we will require that those who are adversely affected by an urban construction project get a piece of the action. A key condition of approval of a major freeway in Phoenix, for example, was our demand that 15% of a half billion dollar project go to minority contractors in the area and that the local construction trade unions open their doors to new membership.

Fourth, we will use federal dollars to repair existing facilities in urban areas rather than abandoning them. I reversed a decision by the previous administration to abandon a perfectly good airport in St. Louis county in order to build a major new hub across the river in Illinois. Lambert Field is adequate with a financial commitment to improve it. Abandoning it would have done to the economy of north St. Louis what the closing of Midway did to south Chicago.

Fifth, we are reforming the process by which urban transportation projects are designed and approved.

New procedures detailing how these proposals will be evaluated by the Department of Transportation are being published. These procedures make clear to local and state governments how the decision to approve their proposals will be made.

A key to success is development of an "early warning" system to spot controversial projects before the brawl is in full swing. If we do this right, we can head off years of delay, and perhaps once again gain the confidence of the people.

One of my favorite philosophers, Yogi Berra, once expressed this great thought. Yogi said, "You can observe a lot just by watching."

I don't think the policies announced tonight will be easy to carry out in practice. There will be political pressures to overturn them: in fact, there already are.

But I believe they will prevail because of what we have all observed, and hopefully learned.

We have learned:

-- that transportation decisions are not decisions about steel and concrete, but rather about people and the cities in which they live.

-- that the transportation investment is huge, and that if it is wisely applied, it can help bring back to our urban areas the people, businesses, and jobs it drove away.

-- that the change of transportation policy will mean nothing if not accompanied by a change in governmental process. So that government once again can deliver.

When he accepted the nomination for the presidency at the Democratic Convention in 1960, President Kennedy said, "The new frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises. It is a set of challenges." How true those words ring tonight.

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