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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION BROCK ADAMS,
TO THE 84TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS
OF POLICE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, OCTOBER 4, 1977

I am delighted to be here and to have this opportunity to address the
84th annual conference of your association.

I was glad to read that violent crime in the United States declined
by about four percent last year. I wish I could report that the loss of
life on the highways was also declining. It is not. After two years of
slower speeds and fewer fatalities, drivers are returning to their old
habits. Average speeds are creeping up. The accompanying rise in deaths
and serious injuries tells us what we already know; speed kills.

Based on figures for the first six months of 1977, no state comes close
to having 85 percent of its vehicles traveling at or below the 55 mile per hour
speed limit. Worse still, our studies show that the average speed is rising
in more states than it is decreasing. This must change.

Highway travel in the United States is up -- six and a half percent in
1976 over 1975. We are using gasoline at record rates. Motor vehicle
consumption averaged 7.1 million barrels a day last year, a 4.9 percent
increase over 1975. This year demand is six percent over 1976. We are
burning gasoline like it's going out of style. Unless we mend our ways,
there may not be much left to burn.

The 55 mile per hour speed limit has proved its effectiveness, but
it is in danger of losing its punch. It is sensible and reasonable -- "A
law we can live with." Unfortunately, this good law is not being taken
seriously by all our citizens.

A month ago, President Carter stated his strong support for the speed limit. He said that it "deserves and must have greater Federal attention." He personally told General Ben Davis, my special representative on the 55 mile per hour speed limit program to "redouble his efforts to communicate the importance of the speed limit to the people throughout America."

The President also asked for a report on compliance with the law and for my recommendations on ways to increase the effectiveness of the law.

That report went to the President yesterday. It is what I want to talk to you about today.

In the past month General Davis has met personally with the governors of eight states, with the governors' highway safety representatives and with leading law enforcement officials from those states. In addition he has met with civic leaders and with private organizations in every region of the country. In going to the states General Davis has taken with him pledges of greater Federal assistance, and sought from those he has met greater assurances of support for the enforcement effort.

He has seldom been disappointed. In fact, I am very pleased by the response of the people who enforce the laws. I also appreciate their sincerity -- and the difficulty of their job. You cannot maintain high standards of safety on the highways in the face of fixed or decreasing budgets, unsympathetic state legislatures and inadequate resources. You are saying, as our military men did in World War II, "give us the tools and we will do the job."

I am here to assure you we are going to do all we can at the Federal level to answer that request.

The report to the President is in two parts: findings and recommendations. Let me touch just briefly on the findings.

Speeds are inching up. In 1974 average vehicle speeds dropped from 65 to 57.6, an unprecedented 11.4 percent decrease in one year. But in 1976 speeds began increasing again, and the trend is continuing this year.

The states with the highest percentages of vehicles traveling above the posted speed limit include: Wyoming, Connecticut, Missouri, Maine, Texas, North Dakota, Arizona, Utah, Indiana, and Tennessee. At the other end, Virginia has shown that the 55 mph limit can work. Nearly 70 percent of the vehicles there obey the limit.

Let me say that the presence of a particular state on the list of the worst offenders, so to speak, does not necessarily imply a recalcitrance on the part of the governor or other state officials. Governor Grasso of Connecticut, for example, has been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the speed limit program and has -- in fact -- proposed a regional information and enforcement effort.

However, some states have softened their penalties. Such actions destroy the effectiveness of speed limit laws and frustrate the enforcement process.

Highway fatalities declined by 16 percent in 1974 alone and hit a 10-year low in 1975. But they have increased in 1976 and 1977.

Faster highway speeds mean more highway deaths. And while it is difficult to prove, Commissioner Glen Craig of the California Highway Patrol estimates that in his state a one mile per hour slower speed saves 40 lives a year. Why can't we waste a minute to save a life?

The report also concludes that we're paying a price in wasted fuel for our haste. By driving within the speed limit we could save an estimated 8.4 million gallons of gasoline a day.

We are trying to do that, in part, through a national advertising campaign. We deeply appreciate the help of The Advertising Council, whose assistance has been worth at least \$27 million in promoting the 55 mph speed limit message.

We also have provided promotional materials to the states. I have told all Department employees to observe the speed limit wherever they drive, and to obey the limit scrupulously when driving government cars. I have urged my fellow Cabinet Officers to make the same appeals in their departments and agencies. Ben Davis and I have requested support from national organizations such as the Teamsters and the American Trucking Associations.

It's clear, however, that we must do more -- and work harder -- to achieve the high levels of voluntary compliance that are essential to the success of the speed limit law. You are doing more at the enforcement level. The number of citations issued for speed violations has increased by nearly 3 million since 1973, even though the growing use of countermeasures makes your job increasingly more difficult. Radar detectors are illegal today in only two states -- Virginia and Connecticut -- although I understand the American Automobile Association may call for their prohibition nationally at their convention this month. Unlike the CB radio, which has value in emergency situations, the only purpose of the radar detector is to help motorists beat the system. Highway safety is not a game and I do not think we should permit this kind of gamemanship.

In thinking about what we should do to improve the life and energy saving benefits of the 55 mph speed limit, we considered:

- additional Federal funding for the states;
- the establishment of enforcement and compliance criteria; and
- development of incentives.

Let me outline what we are proposing.

With respect to funding, it is quite obvious that the lower speed limit has imposed a heavy workload on state enforcement agencies, with little or no increase in resources.

Some new assistance in this situation will be provided during the fiscal year that began October 1. The Department of Transportation budget for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration includes an increment of \$43 million for application to high payoff areas such as 55 mph speed limit enforcement and drunk driving countermeasures. It is the goal of the Department that a minimum of \$30 million of these funds be allocated for enforcing the 55 mph limit. I have directed the NHTSA Administrator to work with each governor's highway safety representative to achieve this goal in accordance with annual state highway safety work plans.

Senator Birch Bayh deserves a great deal of credit for pushing for this additional money and directing it toward enforcing the 55 mph limit and controlling drunk driving.

The exact amount needed to carry on an adequate enforcement effort across the nation is difficult to determine. It depends partly on the cost of gasoline and the effect higher prices may have on driving patterns.

My own feeling is that additional federal funding, in some amount, is needed to help the states perform the enforcement necessary to turn speeders into believers. I also favor assured funding on an annual basis, for not less than three years, to enable states to make prudent investments in enforcement personnel and equipment. As to the method of apportionment, we will recommend that funding be based on the Interstate mileage in each state even though other road systems present some compliance problems. However, some of these are frequently patrolled by county and local police agencies. And state patrols can control the rest if they are provided additional help to patrol the Interstates where the speeding problem is the greatest.

Second, some performance standards are essential if we are to evaluate a state's success in enforcing the speed limit. The present law sets neither goals nor standards. I believe we must have both.

The objective is to get 85 percent of the drivers driving at 55 or less, within a reasonable time. That is a difficult but not unrealistic goal.

The logical measure of progress toward this goal is the degree to which motorists in each state drive at or below 55 miles per hour. Our NHTSA people worked out a method for determining whether a state's enforcement program is producing a satisfactory result. We propose to pursue the establishment of a uniform compliance standard.

Then, third, there is the question of sanctions.

By law we can now withhold a state's Federal highway construction funds for failure to enforce the 55 mile per hour posted speed limit. Earlier this year I advised governors that this sanction could be invoked if the states took action to reduce penalties against violators of the speed law.

I hope, however, that we can also take a positive approach to the states' enforcement needs. Once criteria are established it will be entirely possible and, in my opinion, desirable to inaugurate a system of funding incentives. In other words, the extent of the additional funds available to the states would be tied to each state's performance in reducing vehicle speeds.

We have not yet determined the system of incentives that will work best, but we are giving this matter careful consideration.

Overall, the imperatives of energy conservation require that we do our utmost to wage war against waste and inefficiency at every opportunity. The prospects for saving lives and reducing injuries are even more compelling. We can't prevent all accidents. We can do more to prevent death when accidents do occur.

On a related subject, I strongly urge the Congress to uphold the decision I have made on passive restraints. It should be clearly understood that as Secretary of Transportation, I do not intend to raise this issue again if airbags are turned down by the Congress. A vote by the Congress to reject this moderate program would be a clear instruction to me that the Congress is willing to accept 9,000 deaths and tens of thousands of injuries per year, and let the auto-makers decide whether the passive restraints should ever be installed in American automobiles.

It seems to me that most Americans would agree that a human life is worth at least \$150, and even \$300, if the automobile manufacturers want to charge more for it. There is no further advantage to be gained by crashing cars into walls or by analyzing numbers for economic benefits. So if this major safety device is rejected by the Congress, it will be left in the hands of the automobile manufacturers -- and there is no present leadership on their part to come up with airbags, even as an option.

What I have been talking about today are not the kind of felonies Mr. Kelley was describing yesterday. But a speeding car can be a deadly weapon, and wasting fuel by driving unnecessarily fast is highway robbery when fuel is scarce.

The time is not far off when full scale conservation of fuel will be a necessity, and the wasteful use of fuel will be inexcusable. Today we must continue to depend on you to compel conservation through efforts such as the 55 mph limit where voluntary measures are unsuccessful.

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks to you for the difficult job you are doing. I have been repeatedly told that highway safety is the greatest public health problem we have. Anyone who is the parent of a teenager knows the fear and anxiety of letting our children take the car. The car is the number one killer of the under-25 age group, taking 21,000 young lives annually. The 55 mile per hour speed limit and the airbag are good medicine. You would rather give a speeding ticket than go to a coroner's inquest. And I would rather pay the ticket than read an autopsy report. So do your work in good conscience. Traffic safety is as important as investigating a homicide. In writing a ticket, you may save a life.

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