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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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I have had the pleasure of addressing this Conference previously, and what a joy it is to be with you again this morning. Much of the success of our transportation programs is due to the leadership and initiative of the legislators who serve the people of our 50 states. Heaven knows, those of us who serve the public must also be responsive and flexible. We never know what's going to arise to surprise and challenge us in this complex modern era in which we live and serve.

We know at the Department of Transportation that we must have strong state participation if we are to complete the Interstate system, rehabilitate our bridges, get drunk drivers off our highways, and improve highway safety. We look to you as essential partners in working together toward these goals.

We meet today in a climate of renewed confidence in America and in our future. We are engaged again in the pursuit of excellence, rediscovering the bedrock values that made our country great in the first place. Many of those values -- America's "first principles" -- began in state legislative halls across this land, and still are expressed most eloquently in those assemblies. I know when I meet with members of the National Conference of State Legislatures, I'm talking with people firmly dedicated to representative government and to the personal and political freedoms we cherish. For, as the President has said, "the greatness of America and the solutions to her problems begin (with you) and not in Washington, D.C."

I come before you at a time when the U.S. economy is causing many of the experts to revise their assumptions and reprogram their computers. Families and businesses as well as state governments are once again able to plan for their future, secure in the knowledge that our economy is healthy, perhaps stronger than it has been in two decades. The Gross National Product in the first quarter of this year grew at an astounding rate of 10.1 percent. Second and third quarter growth continued strong, -- at rates that sustain the economy without new inflationary pressures. Inflation, in fact, continues to decline, falling to a 2.9 percent annual rate in the third quarter. About six

million more Americans are working today than when President Reagan took office. Three and a half million fewer people are unemployed today than at the depths of the recession. Increased employment is helping the states improve their financial condition and replenish their unemployment insurance funds. In total, more than 106 million Americans are working, and "help wanted" signs are appearing again in stores and plants and at construction sites all across our country. Since last December alone, personal income in the United States has risen \$182 billion. Business investment plans for 1984 and beyond mirror similar faith in the recovery. America's vital signs are good; the prognosis for further growth is excellent.

Transportation, a \$620 billion industry, is sharing in this new economic prosperity and is, in fact, responsible for some of it. In turn, we are investing more heavily in the infrastructure so essential to our transportation industries and our personal mobility.

The nickel a gallon increase in the federal gasoline tax authorized by the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 is providing the funds needed to prevent the deterioration of our roads and bridges. Today we can renew our roads instead of just patching them, rebuild our bridges instead of detouring around them. The increase in federal dollars combined with larger state highway investments assures completion of the Interstate system and its preservation. We are repairing and replacing bridges at an unprecedented rate.

Overall, federally assisted highway construction levels increased more than 73 percent in 1983. Bridge construction and rehabilitation projects grew by 56 percent. Resurfacing projects accounted for more than 11,000 miles of improvements on the Federal-aid highway system, and work began on nearly a thousand miles of new roads.

Of course, a key factor in our ability to move forward with the completion of the Interstate Highway System is gaining timely approval of the Interstate Cost Estimate (ICE). As you know, both the Interstate Cost Estimate and the Interstate Substitute Cost Estimate (ISCE) must be approved by Congress before Interstate construction and Interstate substitution funds can be apportioned each year.

Unfortunately, full ICE approval for funds available in fiscal year 1984 was derailed when authorizing legislation was encumbered with numerous costly special purpose projects which threatened the stability of the Highway Trust Fund. A compromise, six-month ICE bill, you will recall, was approved in March. This month, however, we are back in the Congress seeking release of the balance of the 1985 Interstate construction and Interstate substitution funds available in FY 1984. At the same time, we need Congress' approval to release the funds available for FY 85 so construction plans can move ahead without further delay. And, again, we are faced with ICE approval legislation laden with costly and unnecessary special purpose projects -- projects in the billions. The Senate began debate on this critical issue yesterday afternoon. I believe they will act in the states' best interests. I'm sure glad you're in town to help us work on this crucial issue, and I am grateful for your outspoken support of legislation now before the Congress which would permit administrative approval of the ICE and the substitute ICE in future years.

This Conference recognizes, as do we, that reforms are imperative if funds are to flow from Washington to the states in a timely manner. Your voice carries great weight in Congress and I'm just glad to be working side by side with you on this tremendously important issue. You can't build roads with money tied up in Washington.

We can't finish the Interstate while a few members of Congress lobby for their pet projects. Without a green light on ICE legislation, road construction all across America will be delayed.

Better highways are one element of our three-pronged approach to greater safety, an approach focused also on driver behavior and vehicle design.

As we move to make our highways better and more efficient, we are also working to keep them safe. On this question too, we have enjoyed the outstanding leadership of state legislators all across America. You have been a leading force in the campaign against drunk driving. Today's national campaign began at America's grassroots and was quickly picked up in the state legislatures. It was powered by a groundswell of action by volunteers: Remove Intoxicated Drivers (RID), Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) and other organizations such as Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD), Auto Dealers Against Drunk Drivers (DADD) and a new one I heard about the other day -- BADD (Bartenders Against Drunk Drivers).

Your leadership has been impressive. Virtually every state has passed or proposed new anti-drunk driving laws. Enforcement agencies are cracking down. Communities are showing concern through comprehensive programs. There's been a real consciousness raising in this country, and many Americans are no longer willing to tolerate lax laws and lenient judges. And, believe me, I won't and cannot rest until every last drunk driver is off the roads of this country.

In 1982, President Reagan signed into law a bill providing federal incentive funds for states dealing sternly with those convicted of drunk driving. To date, 16 states have qualified for those funds. We are hoping that more will continue to qualify. Two months ago the President signed another bill, encouraging states to set 21 as their legal minimum drinking age for all alcoholic beverages. About half the states already had such a law. The President is a strong believer in state's rights. But one question simply couldn't be answered without Federal leadership: "blood borders" -- where teenagers have the incentive to drink and drive, crossing state lines to take advantage of lower drinking age laws. We strongly support states' rights and normally defer to state governments on traffic law issues, but this was one instance where we believe Federal leadership was justified. We must save young lives nationwide, and spare many families the heartache and financial tragedy of loved ones lost or seriously injured. Certainly there are many responsible young people, but statistics show that drivers between the ages of 18 and 20 are more than twice as likely as older drivers to become involved in alcohol-related accidents. In states where the drinking age has been raised, teenage driving deaths have declined. In New Jersey, for example, night-time teenage drunk driving fatalities fell 26 percent; in Michigan, 31 percent; and in Illinois, 23 percent.

But getting drunk drivers off the road is only one approach to the serious problem of highway safety. The cost of highway accidents -- in lives, injuries and property losses -- demands greater efforts toward occupant protection. One proven life-saver is the safety belt. It's in our cars. We only have to use it. Studies prove conclusively that safety belts save so many lives and can cut moderate to serious injuries in half. Barbara Mandrell escaped serious injury in a head-on collision last week because she was wearing her safety belt. The driver of the other car, not protected by a safety belt, was killed.

The 1983 highway death toll of 42,600 -- although much too high -- was the lowest in 20 years; and the death rate per million vehicle miles traveled was the lowest ever recorded.

But we can do far better. Here in Washington, D.C. there's a very impressive memorial. The Vietnam Memorial wall has more than 55,000 names. We could almost build one of those walls every year with the names of the dead on our highways. Four hundred seventy thousand persons have died on American highways in the last decade, about 43,000 die in passenger cars each year and 2 million are injured seriously enough to require hospital treatment. Statistics like these cry out for action.

In July, I announced an occupant crash protection rule which gives consumers -- your constituents -- a choice in the kind of protection they prefer and affords manufacturers a choice of automatic crash protection techniques. During the passive restraint rulemaking process I spent many hours talking with representatives of all the parties involved -- I talked extensively with consumer groups, doctors, auto companies and insurers. My staff and I analyzed more than 8,000 comments. At the public hearing I conducted in Kansas City, I heard the heartbreaking testimony of victims and their families. A number of state legislators submitted comments encouraging me to adopt a final rule based on state enacted safety belt use laws. Of all the special interests concerned, I could consider only one: the public interest. We cannot permit these tragedies to continue unabated, nor can we afford the tremendous drain these injuries and fatalities cause. We have all heard the numbers, but like many others, I have become keenly aware of the personal misery resulting from lives shattered and families devastated by the cruelty of auto crashes. Forty-three thousand deaths a year is a national tragedy, but for the severely injured -- the thousands of Americans who are disfigured or disabled -- the pain lingers on -- as do the costs. Trauma center hospitals testify to the anguish, as did Dr. Paul Meyer, a dedicated and brilliant surgeon, who made himself available to answer questions recently on the White House lawn when the President spoke out on the perils of drunk driving. Auto accidents alone cost the American taxpayers almost \$2 billion a year in Federal public assistance programs, and more than \$5 billion in revenue losses. My decision affords us the opportunity to begin saving lives, preventing injuries and cutting costs to our families and our nation, immediately.

As you know I examined many alternatives during the course of that rulemaking. This is as complex an issue as any I have dealt with. My own deep concern and commitment gave me determination to find the best answer. It became obvious that the best possible solution was one which would begin saving lives now while at the same time providing leadership for the future, encouraging new technologies that could provide even greater safety in the years ahead. The alternative I selected will accomplish both our short range and our longer range objectives. The old standard 208 reinstated would offer no incentive for manufacturers to develop advanced occupant protection technologies. It would have led to passive belts, not air bags, and we don't really know how many additional users there would be. Air bags alone provide little protection in side impact, rear impact and rollover crashes and no protection in low speed crashes. It's a wonderful safety device but it must be used with the belt. Current air bag cost estimates are high and new simpler, less costly air bag designs, still need future testing.

The immediate part of my plan will increase usage of the highly effective lap shoulder belt systems currently installed in all vehicles by encouraging state safety belt

usage laws. After 15 years, we still have only 12½ percent usage. We must act now! Public attitudes toward safety have changed dramatically during the past few years. We know from experience in 29 foreign countries that belt use laws can save thousands of lives. Clearly, effective belt usage legislation is the fastest, most efficient and most cost-effective way to cut highway deaths and injuries. In England, before a law was passed requiring safety belts, only 33 percent of occupants used them, even after a massive public education campaign. Now usage is 95 percent. Safety belts are right there in our cars. We don't have to wait for an entire fleet to be equipped, and, if used, those belts are the most effective way to save lives. We will be working cooperatively with automakers, insurers and others in the private sector on a joint \$40 million campaign during each of the next four years to educate the public about occupant restraint systems and the importance of using them. There are no "penalties" to this program; just funds to provide information and education. Because of the offices we hold, you and I have the privilege of serving. But rarely does a public servant have such a direct opportunity to make such a positive difference in so many lives. Now is the time for state leaders to be statesmen and women. What a wonderful opportunity to lead! I appeal to you to work with me to increase safety belt usage. I beseech each of you to give it your all -- to follow New York's lead by passing safety belt laws. Four states, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, plan to consider seat belt bills this year. Take up the cause in your states as well and you will make a positive difference in people's lives, as you have with child safety. Not quite four years ago, only two states had child safety seat laws. Today, only one does not. Congratulations on your outstanding work.

The second component of rule reinstates the passive restraint provisions of standard 208 in 1989 with a phase-in starting September 1, 1986. The phase-in approach complements the enactment of belt use laws and recognizes the realities of the market place. It gives manufacturers adequate lead time to gear up for passive restraints. It affords time for consumers to be educated about the passive belt or the air bag -- and how they work. (No, air bags don't go off when you cross railroad tracks.) There are incentives built into this plan to encourage the use of airbags or innovative technologies still on the drawing board that provide even greater protection than we have now. These incentives will encourage manufacturers to continue or escalate their efforts to design less obtrusive and more effective systems. The rule provides that when two-thirds of our population are covered by belt laws, the phase-in of passive restraints will halt.

What will we see on our highways ultimately? Belt laws will create markets for passive restraints among some "hard core" non-belt users. Beginning September 1, 1986, ten percent of our new car fleet will be produced with passive restraints as required equipment. In 1987, 25 percent; in 1988, 40 percent; and in 1989, 100 percent. In all probability, two-thirds of the population won't be covered by belt laws by September 1, 1986. That is a short time for state legislative action. So we can be fairly certain that at least ten percent of the new cars sold in this country will have passive restraints. Ultimately I see many states having a belt law and millions of cars equipped with passive restraints in the marketplace.

I want to stress the two parts of the plan are complementary and totally compatible. My plan does not cast one against another. It affords instead the best atmosphere for saving lives in the short-run and long-run.

This comprehensive, integrated approach is designed both for the present and for the future. The plan can be the greatest lifesaver we've ever known.

As state legislators, you are united in a common bond of dedication to public service. The breadth and energy of your programs and activities touch so many people. You demonstrate the difference a person can make in our society. I frequently think of a woman who knew great adversity, one whose spirit and example inspired millions. Her name was Helen Keller -- and she summed up her philosophy in a single sentence. "One can never consent to creep," she wrote, "when one feels an impulse to soar." Your commitment makes our spirit soar and we all prosper from your work. As a fellow public servant, I salute you. As a fellow American, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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