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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
"LIFESAVERS TWO" SAFETY CONFERENCE
DENVER, COLORADO
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I wasn't entirely confident that I could go anywhere in America, less than a week after the new nickel a gallon gas tax went into effect, and receive so warm a welcome. I'm afraid there are still some motorists and more than a few truckers who'd like me to declare that tax an April Fool. Of course, unless we get on with the work of rebuilding our highways and bridges, we may all feel a little foolish in the years to come. And our economy would have more holes than Route 66 at its worst!

Our highways must be safe, or their economic justification fades into irrelevance. And for keeping the spotlight focused upon safety, in this conference and in our daily lives, you have the gratitude not only of the President and his Administration, but of drivers everywhere. It must take a little extra effort for Colorado motorists to keep their eyes on the road -- given the spectacular scenery all around them. Fortunately, you have a governor who has kept his own attention very much on insuring highway safety. Along with his Task Force, Governor Lamm has played a major role in educating the public to the need for safety belts and the danger of drunk drivers. So, it's a special pleasure to see Dottie Lamm in the hall this afternoon. I know she shares her husband's interest in the issues before us.

By the same token, Cordell Smith, your Highway Safety Director, has done an impressive job of sharpening enforcement and -- even more importantly -- raising the safety consciousness of the people of Colorado. Along with the new laws enacted by the Legislature, and the efforts of a very supportive private sector, you have made this one of our nation's most progressive states in safety legislation, education and enforcement. Usually, Washington D.C. is too busy putting its hand in your pocket to

administer a pat on the back. This afternoon, however, I'd like to publicly congratulate you on a model program. And in doing so, I like to think I'm acting in the spirit of President Reagan's mandate to the entire Federal establishment. That is, that we in Washington have much to learn -- and you at the grassroots have much to teach.

Colorado is by no means unique in its efforts to promote safer highways. And I am pleased that Bob Wilkerson, Director of the Florida Division of Highway Safety; Lee Landes, President of the Wayne County, Michigan, chapter of MADD; and B.J. Campbell, Director of the Highway Safety Research Center of the University of North Carolina (I'm delighted that my home state is represented) are here with us today.

I am here because I firmly believe that there is no aspect of my job as Secretary of Transportation more important than the protection of lives and the prevention of injury.

When we stop to think about it, transportation -- by its very nature -- is inherently unsafe. The marvel is, that by virtue of our talent for technology, our self-discipline and a careful attention to safeguards, we Americans have made it possible for people to travel with a high degree of safety. But we are a restless people. And our restlessness leads us to conclude that we can do better yet. That, along with a ground swell of public opinion -- an outpouring of outrage and distress if you will, makes highway safety a priority issue wherever our laws are made and justice dispensed.

To do better is our collective purpose at this Conference. It is the rationale that leads the National Safety Council and the Governors' Highway Safety Representatives to join us in sponsoring "Lifesavers II" and make highway safety an ongoing crusade at both the national and state levels. For 71 years now, from the days of Tin Lizzies to the era of air-conditioned comfort and computer-equipped cars, the National Safety Council -- through the intense dedication of its leaders and members -- has campaigned for a more sensitive appreciation of the value of life and the waste that accidents represent. What the Safety Council has done at the National level, in acting as the conscience of our mobile society, the Governors' Safety Representatives have done at the state level -- providing a focal point for safety programs and continually searching for more effective ways to make highway travel safer.

When John D. Rockefeller, Sr., was still alive, he and his son, John Junior, were occasionally driven to and from the Standard Oil headquarters by the same cabbie, but at different times. Over the years, the cab driver learned that he could expect only a token tip from Rockefeller Senior, usually one of his famous dimes, while John Junior regularly tipped a dollar or more. Finally, the cabbie asked the old gentleman about it. "Why is it," he said, "that I never get more than a dime from you but your son tips me a dollar?" John Senior thought about that and said: "Simple. He has a rich father and I don't."

We no longer have a rich father -- or, perhaps I should say "a rich Uncle" -- in Washington. President Reagan has been working hard, against considerable opposition and in the face of some very costly traditions, to cut unnecessary Federal spending, lower taxes and reduce dependence on the public treasury. Government retrenchment does not mean government retreat. On the contrary, as a part of his renewal of fiscal prudence, self-reliance, volunteerism and a sharing of mutual responsibilities for the common good, he has fostered a revival of concern for our country and a regeneration of the volunteer tradition so central to our history.

The "me generation" of a decade ago has become the "us generation" of today. We care about our country and, just as important, we care about our neighbors. This is what set us apart two centuries ago, and what has maintained America's unique identity in the family of nations. In the long run, a big heart has meant more to the quality of life in America than a big purse.

And our hearts have an encouraging way of working in tandem with our heads. I don't believe we could have predicted, even a few years ago, the kind of personal and emotional response to death-dealing issues such as drunk and drugged driving that we are seeing today. The attitude a few years ago was to "let Washington regulate the problem" and to look the other way while irresponsible drivers committed homicide on our highways. Unfortunately, no amount of Federal money or Federal regulation could by themselves solve that problem.

But people, aroused and motivated to impart their sense of mission to lawmakers and drivers alike -- well, they could make a difference. They have made a difference. A little over two years ago, when I addressed the Highway Safety Congress in my capacity as Director of the Office of Public Liaison, the grass-roots outcry against the ravages of the drunk driver was just beginning to be heard. As Candy Lightner said then: "We've kicked a few pebbles, turned a few stones; eventually, we will start an avalanche."

Candy Lightner has done more than start an avalanche. She has launched a revolution -- a popular and highly effective revolt against the tyranny of alcohol abuse and the injustices of excusing violent actions in which cars, not guns, are the lethal weapons. She and the thousands who have enlisted in her cause -- and I count among them all of us here today -- have made it clear that we must take seriously our mandate to safeguard human life. For years the American people chose to believe, ironically, that death was something we had to learn to live with on our nation's highways. In 1980, the year that 13-year old Cari Lightner was struck down while walking to a church social, more than 26,000 deaths were attributed to drunk driving. That's an average of one every 23 minutes, or over half the total traffic fatalities for that year. The drunk driver was so common, experts tell us, that if the pace of recent years had continued unabated, one of every four adult Americans -- at sometime in their lives -- would be involved in an alcohol-related crash.

Some may turn a disinterested ear to the statistics, but the tragedy that drunk drivers inflict on our society strikes at individuals in a very real and personal way. I know. My uncle was killed, when I was very young, by a drunk driver. I remember my grandmother speaking tenderly of the son she lost. I remember the Christian forgiveness she displayed toward the offender. And I also remember that even her faith could not remove entirely the grief she suffered or the remorse that lingered. Death at the hands of the alcohol-impaired driver is always shrouded by futility and overcast by frustration.

But nations, like families, move on. Their attitudes evolve. And the good news today is that prevailing attitudes with respect to drunk driving have shifted. Today we have in place preventive, punitive and corrective countermeasures.

The report that John Volpe, Chairman of the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving, brought before this Conference this morning provides us with both an intellectual assessment of the problem and a comprehensive set of recommendations

aimed at making the dangerously drunk driver a rarity on our highways. President Reagan has the highest regard for the Commission, for all of its members, and for the outstanding contributions they have made to the cause of highway safety. For that reason, the President is today announcing his decision to extend the Commission for the rest of this year, to continue working with the states and volunteer safety organizations all across the country. The Volpe Commission has made great strides in bringing the necessary resources to bear on the problem. It has helped fix public attention on the issues. It has probably already saved some lives. So we cannot relax our efforts. We will not allow the momentum, or the Commission's mandate, to fall by the roadside.

The gains that have been made are encouraging. Traffic deaths fell in 1981, below 50,000, and declined still further last year -- by a remarkable 10.2 percent -- even though more vehicles were on the road, and people did more driving. Clearly our assault on drunk drivers has contributed to this.

Phil Haseltine pointed out recently that while traffic fatalities have been on the decline in Michigan as a result of depressed economic conditions, it would be incorrect - in his words -- to overlook the impact of new deterrents to drunk driving.

"Two-thirds of the fatality reduction last year," he says, "was due to declines in pedestrian, fixed object and rollover crashes -- the categories closely associated with drunk driving. This strongly suggests that the new attention being focused on the drunk driving problem in Michigan is beginning to have an impact."

Our own government experts have concluded that people are driving the same amounts. What may well have changed is that people are driving different types of trips. Nor is that all we are being told. Where states have good programs and good statistics, we find an obvious difference: Fewer people are being killed.

The American people, on their own initiative and through their elected officials at state and local levels, have let it be known that an era of permissiveness, with respect to the drinking driver, has come to an end. Largely propelled by public opinion and with the impetus of organizations such as those represented here today, the governors of 39 states have appointed special Task Forces to deal with the drunk driving problem. In addition, 38 new drunk driving laws were enacted last year alone. Drunk driving laws have been tightened in 20 states, while 40 are even now considering more stringent laws. From shore to shore, and from border to border, these members of the American commonwealth are signalling an end to the senseless slaughter of innocent lives by those who forfeit any claim to our sympathies through their own irresponsible behavior on America's highways.

Then, too, we are doing something else, perhaps equally significant, to make highway transportation itself safer. We are making an all-out effort to convince people that the safety belts provided in their cars and trucks are certified lifesavers -- but, like life jackets, we must wear them if they are to do any good.

Behavioral scientists tell us two things: we live by the eternal optimism that "it won't happen to us," and we tend to react to something in the present much more intensely than to the possibility of something in the future. If you have any doubt on either score, let me remind you that April 15 is just around the corner -- a date sure to inspire a lot of reacting if not much optimism! And as John Volpe said this morning, we have the mistaken notion that accidents always happen "to the other guy" and "at another time."

We are trying to change all that. We are saying to the American public today, by way of a nationwide campaign which has the strong support of the private sector, that everyone who neglects to use a safety belt is playing Russian roulette.

Death is highly democratic. The accident that robs us of life, inflicts misery and despair on those we love or relegates a family to financial ruin, can happen with the speed of summer lightning, on the open highway or within the sight of home. No one is immune; neither the veteran driver nor the novice. To ignore the risk, however small it may be statistically, however distant we may perceive the danger, is a gamble. Few of us would go without life insurance, fire insurance or car insurance. Yet everytime we take a trip -- around the corner or across the country -- without buckling up, we are bucking the odds. All of us who have seen the films of crash tests know what windshields and dashboards can do to unbelted passengers. It is far too horrible a gamble to permit.

So how do we curb the gamblers' instinct? As someone has said: "Motivation is when your dreams put on work clothes." The totally accident-free highway may be a dream -- perhaps the impossible dream; but we already have experienced the fruits of motivation since we "put on our work clothes" against the drunk driver. Increasing safety belt usage deserves the same degree of concentration and commitment. Safety belts should be considered the work clothes of the car occupant. We simply must put them on.

Already, we have begun within the Department of Transportation a concerted program to improve safety belt usage by Department employees. We began with an observed compliance rate of 23 percent, somewhat higher than the national average. As proof that a personal appeal and education program can work, we have increased usage to 43 percent and our goal is to go much higher.

Some critics say such programs don't work. The skeptics sing their dreary old refrain of "it can't be done." But well-developed incentive programs to encourage belt use have worked. Our program at DOT is not an isolated case. It is based on successful private sector initiatives. At General Motors, a company-sponsored safety belt information program doubled the number of employees who buckled up. At one DuPont plant, nine out of 10 employees got the safety belt habit, and at an Air Force base in Texas the usage rate reached 92 percent after a base-wide motivation program.

We not only want to set a good example, we want to start a safety epidemic. We can do it as employers by showing that we are really concerned about those we work with; we can do it as state legislators by passing laws which make it clear that driving is a privilege -- one that can be withdrawn or denied for due cause. We can do it as private organizations and as individual citizens by casting our votes for safety and lending our voices to the support of highway safety initiatives.

We at the Federal level are helping by investing in safer highways and through incentive grants to the states. The five cents a gallon increase in the motor fuel tax, that I mentioned at the outset, provides more money -- over \$13 billion for fiscal 1984 -- for highway construction and for the rehabilitation or replacement of aging, decaying and otherwise unsafe roads and bridges. Congress has also passed legislation authorizing a two-tier incentive grant program to assist the states in carrying out their own anti-drunk driving programs.

Under this program, states qualify for a basic grant by meeting the four criteria mandated by the Congress -- laws requiring the prompt suspension of driver's license, a blood-alcohol level of .10 percent or greater as proof of intoxication, and any increase in enforcement efforts or resources. By our early tabulation, six states today either meet those basic grant criteria or could qualify by adopting the recommendations of their Governor's Task Forces.

States also may be eligible for Federal supplemental incentive grants if they meet at least four other criteria from a long list of options. Needless to say, we very much hope that states applying for grants under the basic criteria will also compete for the supplemental grants.

Our National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently completed and sent to all concerned organizations and government agencies a summary digest of laws currently on the books relating to alcohol use and motor vehicle operations. According to our analysis, 378 separate pieces of legislation dealing with this issue were introduced in 37 state legislatures last year. This, I believe, is a tribute to the effectiveness of an aroused citizenry supported by organizations professionally dedicated to safety. Together, you have given state legislators all across the country the constituent support they have needed to review and revise their procedures for dealing with drunk drivers.

Lest we appear unduly harsh or vindictive, let me say that our primary target is the repeat offender.

- The California motorist who drove onto a sidewalk and killed a four-year old boy waiting for the ice cream truck was a repeat offender -- with six convictions on his record.
- The Tennessee driver who killed one young boy and seriously injured his twin had been arrested seven times in four years for drunk driving -- but had never spent a day in jail.
- The Maryland man who killed a 23-year-old college student, riding her bicycle in a bike lane, was on probation from a prior drunk driving conviction.

We cannot tolerate, much less condone, the tragic loss of life and the wasting of precious resources that all too often result from lax enforcement and lenient judges. If the driving privilege means anything, it carries with it the moral obligation to drive responsibly.

Our failure as a nation to make that distinction has cost us dearly: 25,000 deaths per year, 650,000 injuries, more than \$24 billion annually in economic costs, and untold pain and grief.

Gratefully, however, we are at last on the offensive. We are making gains.

Highway fatalities are declining.

Twenty-two states now have child safety seat laws.

Adult safety belt usage has increased two percent over the past three months -- no small gain, considering that every one percent increase means 200 lives saved and 3,000 injuries prevented.

Wide segments of the private sector, including the auto, insurance and beverage industries are involved in sponsoring and supporting highway safety programs.

Together we have succeeded in making much of America safety-conscious. We have demonstrated that if we truly care we must also share -- not only our concerns but our response to those concerns.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his best-selling book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," theorizes that we can redeem seemingly senseless tragedies by -- as he says -- "imposing meaning on them;" by taking actions or undertaking reforms that might otherwise remain neglected.

That's what you are doing -- in your daily work and through this Conference. That's what we are also seeking to do, through the President's extension of the Drunk Driving Commission and in our overall efforts to raise the levels of transportation safety throughout our country. There is nothing we could do that would better serve the motoring public or make a greater contribution to the progress of transportation.

Too often on this country's roads, tragic things have happened to decent people. Drivers or pedestrians who themselves obey the law become the victims of others too drunk or too irresponsible to live within its confines. Thanks to people like you, and gatherings like this, the old imbalance is being corrected. Lives are being saved. Pain is being averted. Costs are being reduced. Most of all, Americans are re-asserting control over their own destinies, displaying an appetite for self-control and demanding that government join them in its exercise. All of us who drive are grateful for what is, quite literally, a new lease on life. And none of us will rest in our efforts to write new laws where they are needed, and change old attitudes where they are outdated. Our conscience dictates nothing less. Our children can request nothing more. Together, we will satisfy both.

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