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Contact: Mari Maseng
Tel.: (202) 426-4570

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
TO THE AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
OCTOBER 6, 1983

May I begin by saying how much I've looked forward to this chance for us to get acquainted. I've long admired the work you do as a sort of Good Samaritan on wheels. One way or another, just about everybody who's ever hit the roads has, at some time or other, called upon the Triple A -- or kicked himself in frustration for failing to.

Like your Association, which responds rapidly to emergencies and is quick to get your members back on the road, President Reagan has taken a sputtering economy and made it hum. His recovery program has led us to 11 consecutive monthly increases in the nation's primary economic indicators, a 9.7 percent growth in the GNP for the second quarter of this year followed by a 7 percent growth in the third quarter, and the lowest inflation rate in the 20 years since you last convened an annual meeting here in Washington. We've created 2½ million new jobs since the end of 1982 -- and I need hardly remind you that we've recalled a lot of previously unemployed workers in the auto industry.

As the President said in his taped greeting to you earlier this week, your efforts in behalf of safety represent an outstanding example of private sector response to a widespread public need. In fact, your total commitment to highway safety is as obvious as it is welcome. As the nation's largest auto club, you serve the motoring and travel needs of your 23 million members -- and you obviously do so with great success. But in an even larger sense, you serve all the American people through a host of educational and public service programs promoting driver responsibility. Because of your long and faithful efforts, the Triple A logo has become synonymous with safety. I hope I can do as well for the letters D.O.T.

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I have long shared your concerns. And I join you in your commitment -- for I consider safety my highest mandate.

This week, we sent to the Congress a proposal for strengthening our oversight of highway safety responsibilities. I plan to establish a separate National Traffic Safety Administration. This will not be a totally new agency; but will incorporate some safety functions now under our Federal Highway Administration with those of our National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. This is not a mere shuffling of the boxes on some Federal organization chart. We are in fact, elevating safety to a level consistent with its importance while simplifying the organizational structure. Our goal is to improve the effectiveness of the safety mission by integrating closely related safety activities. Such consolidation will also make it easier for non-Federal organizations, including your own, to deal with our Department on issues that are literally of life and death importance.

In the passenger safety area, I have already given the battle against drunk driving and the campaign to increase safety belt usage top priority. The key to our success in curtailing the drunk driver, I believe, is to make the culprit socially as well as legally unacceptable.

Until very recently, the crux of the drunk driver problem in most states was a lack of law enforcement, not on the highways but in prosecutors' offices, judges' chambers and in licensing bureaus. For far too long, we have tolerated lax laws and lenient courts. We have permitted drunk driving to be a low risk crime, when -- actually -- it is a very serious crime taking more lives than deliberate murders.

Well, those days are over. We're not going to tolerate it any more. Last year alone, 37 states and the District of Columbia passed laws increasing the severity of sanctions or plugging "loopholes" that previously allowed permissive judges to impose only token penalties. And today, across the broad landscape of America, state legislatures are supporting tougher drunk driving laws. More than 700 separate pieces of legislation were introduced in 1983 and, at last count, 129 laws have been enacted. At the same time, communities everywhere are getting involved with comprehensive programs to attack a social cancer that -- year in and year out -- has accounted for 50 percent of our highway fatalities.

This clampdown on drunk driving reflects a nationwide response to efforts by concerned citizens, community leaders and organizations like Triple A. It testifies to the truth of what Woodrow Wilson observed, that: "Laws which work are merely the summing up in legislative form of the moral judgments that the community has already reached."

No mistake about it, Americans today have declared war on the drunk driver. It's a war we don't intend to fight with rubber bullets or mere words of outrage. For over a year, the President's Commission on Drunk Driving has been working with state, local and private sector leaders supporting a series of recommendations to curb, convict or rehabilitate the drunk driver. We at DOT are giving the Commission our full support. At the same time, we are continuing to work closely with organizations like MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers), SADD (Students Against Drunk Drivers) and RID (Remove Intoxicated Drivers).

Of course, as Triple A officials you are no strangers to this crusade. The American Automobile Association's own anti-drunk driving efforts date back to 1969.

You took a pioneering role in the alcohol countermeasures program, and the curriculum you developed for rehabilitating drunk drivers remains in use throughout the country.

We are carrying out our own community-based alcohol countermeasure program -- at 10 demonstration sites across the country -- and I personally am taking a strong interest in youth groups concerned about alcohol use. We want teenagers to get involved because no one can better communicate effectively with youthful drivers than their own peers. In that regard, I cannot say enough for Triple A's "Starting Early" program developed by your Foundation for Traffic Safety. In addition to a driver education text book used by many of our high schools, the program now extends to the elementary school child -- recognizing the sad but unavoidable truth that too many of our young people today are "starting early" on alcohol and drugs.

The numbers alone are enough to make anyone sober up. According to FBI statistics, of all persons arrested in 1982, over half were under the age of 25 -- many for driving violations. Alcohol has been called the number one teen-age drug problem. Thirty-one percent of our high school students today are alcohol mis-users. Alcohol-related car accidents are the leading cause of death in the 15 to 24 age group. In fact, in the past 30 years, longevity has increased for every age group except the 16 to 24, the main reason being traffic accidents. With such appalling statistics at hand, we would be shirking our responsibilities as public servants or concerned citizens if we did not take every step possible to inform young drivers of the dangers of misusing alcohol. I thank you for what Triple A is doing in that regard. I wholeheartedly support your efforts to raise the minimum legal drinking age in all states to 21. And I hope that when you vote on the issue later this morning it will be to reaffirm your commitment to that vital objective.

As for our own efforts, declarations of government intent often mean little unless backed by Federal support and Federal dollars. I realize that there are still some out there who would reject such assistance from public sources as ideologically distasteful. My own sympathies are expressed in the story about Booker T. Washington, the great Black educator who was once criticized for accepting so-called "tainted money" for Tuskegee Institute. Sure enough, Washington replied, the money was tainted -- "taint enough," he said. In the past, the Federal commitment to drunk driving programs has been similarly tainted. Then last year Congress authorized \$125 million in incentive grants over a three year period to help the states administer such efforts. These funds are available to any state that enacts or amends laws putting real teeth into drunk driving sanctions -- laws putting drunk drivers on notice that conviction carries mandatory penalties.

The current outlook is encouraging. Since North Dakota and Delaware first qualified for incentive grants under this program, dozens of their sister states have followed or are following in their path. Based on legislative proposals now planned or pending, we expect 32 states to qualify for those grants in 1983 and 1984, with perhaps 15 more in 1985. And before this decade ends, we hope that not a single state in the Union will be considered a haven for drunk drivers.

A second passenger safety initiative to which we are making a similar commitment is safety belt usage.

I know we're not alone in this. When I met a few months ago with Jim Creal and Kay Aldous, we compared notes on what we were doing in our respective organizations to raise the level of safety belt compliance. Your "Saved by the Belt" promotion is having good results and the internal program carried out here in Washington at Triple A

headquarters significantly increased employee awareness of the importance of buckling up.

We ran a similar program at DOT -- consisting first of an all-employee education program followed by a modest incentive contest. I even went down to our garage a few mornings to see how many of our people drove in wearing their belts. After several months of emphasis and education, we managed to raise the usage rate from about 23 percent to over 60 percent. So I am encouraged that, when properly and patiently motivated, people will see the wisdom of "getting it together" everytime they step into a car. With your help, and the continuing efforts of the many others in the private sector who are joined in this program, I am sure that more and more highway accident victims can and will be "saved by the belt."

If passenger restraints are essential to the protection of adult passengers, they are even more vital for infants and small children. Many of you know from sad experience that unsecured children are extremely vulnerable to injury in any car accident. Car crashes, in fact, are the leading cause of death and injury for children under five. When used correctly, child safety seats can reduce death and injury by 80 percent. Like you, we are encouraging the states to require child safety seats for infants, and we are assisting states in implementing laws already enacted.

Forty states and the District of Columbia now have laws requiring safety seats for small children. Your goal for 1984, I am told, is to see similar laws enacted by at least seven more. But laws alone, however important, are not enough. We need educational reinforcement and broad public support. We need more loaner programs, such as those conducted by Triple A, and greater media attention. Fortunately, we are getting encouraging assistance from the private sector -- Triple A clubs, for example, provide safety seats to employees expecting a child, and Mc Donald's gives free meals to children and others who pledge to wear their safety belts. And Uncle Sam is prepared to provide greater technical assistance to the states and to local groups who share our interest in promoting the proper use of child safety seats.

In still other private passenger safety initiatives, we are in the rulemaking process on two equipment proposals, one for high-mounted stoplamps -- to reduce injuries from rear crashes -- and one for anti-lacerative windshields. We are also preparing a consumer publication called "AutoWise" which will contain useful information on safe driving as well as tips on buying a car.

Another area where we are targeting new highway safety initiatives is in commercial transportation.

Under a five-year grant program which began the first of this month, the states will receive \$8 million in fiscal year 1984 for truck and bus safety enforcement programs. This in turn represents only a downpayment of a much larger sum, totalling perhaps \$150 million through 1988.

At the same time, we are establishing a Hazardous Materials Advisory Group to assist in assuring the safe transportation of hazardous cargoes and to prepare for possible emergencies. Carriers, shippers and hazardous materials container manufacturers will be represented in the advisory group. So will state and local governments. Meanwhile, the Transportation Department is moving to strengthen our own hazardous materials enforcement program.

There is a third area where we believe safety can be further improved. That is the highway itself. No one who has ever driven across even a fragment of the Interstate Highway System -- parts of which are over 20 years old -- can doubt the need for improvements to its oldest segments. Otherwise, preservation of the entire system may be in doubt.

Of course, we don't intend to let our marvelous highway system go to pieces. The increased highway and bridge funding levels permitted by the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 are enabling the states not only to proceed with their Interstate construction work but to accelerate their rehabilitation projects as well. The nickel-a-gallon increase in the Federal gasoline tax, which went into effect last April, has resulted in a 45 percent gain in highway spending this fiscal year -- from \$7.7 billion in 1982 to \$12 billion for fiscal 1983. That's by far the highest level in the history of the Highway Trust Fund. Since January, in fact, we have been making funds available to the states at the rate of \$1 billion a month. For bridge replacement and rehabilitation projects, the new funding levels represent a two-thirds increase over 1982.

This also means substantially more money -- \$1.5 billion so far this year -- for rehabilitation of the Interstate system. In addition to making that system more "drivable," timely resurfacing and restoration work is cost-efficient, saving the need for costlier reconstruction later.

All of these are investments in highway safety, present and future. Yet our concern cannot be measured in dollars alone, nor in legislative initiatives. For instance, we are currently studying minimum design standards that will preserve and enhance the useful lifetime of the average highway. We are probing for ways to reduce the dangers of night time driving -- a major area of importance given the fact that nearly 60 percent of all highway fatalities occur after the sun goes down. We know we need better warning devices and better guidance systems. And we are advising the states that they can expect 100 percent Federal funding for such improvements as reflective material that is more durable, full-striping of roadways and more visible signs and markers.

All the initiatives I have discussed with you this morning, along with others I haven't had time to mention, are but the beginning of a new and massive crusade for highway safety. Our programs, like our doors, are open -- open for comments, for criticism and -- we hope -- for contributions from Triple A, an organization steeped in safety and anxious to promote it wherever and whenever possible.

I conclude as I began, with appreciation for all you do in support of the motoring public. Your more than 1,000 clubs and branches, your 80 years of experience in the automotive field, your reputation for service and your broad community concerns: all these and more make your organization well qualified to help us achieve a five-diamond rating for highway safety in America.

Last year's 10 percent drop in highway fatalities is encouraging. But it doesn't permit any lessening of vigilance. Economic recovery has brought a resurgence in auto sales, and renewed popularity for the so-called "performance cars." We can expect a further increase in highway travel and -- unless we are on our guard -- a parallel increase in both accidents and fatalities. I do not intend, any more than you, to stand by and see our great progress fade away in carelessness or be nullified by complacency. That is why I am here, to solicit your continued active involvement in this cause and to invite your original ideas on how we can do still better. I said a moment ago, that my door was open. I meant it. Equally important, my mind is open too.

Today, you've been kind enough to do a good deal of listening. I look forward to proving that I'm a pretty good listener myself. Together we can hasten the day when safety is a universal concern. Those whom we serve expect nothing more and they should settle for nothing less.

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