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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE
AT THE HUFSAH/AAMVA FORUM ON TRUCK SAFETY
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I am delighted to join you today in this forum on two of the most critical -- and certainly most worthy -- issues in commercial vehicle safety: the Driver License Compact and classified driver license systems. I would like to commend each of you -- and the many others you represent -- for your hard work to date, but I am sure we all agree that much remains to be done.

Today, my purpose is to look ahead to what we must achieve together in the months to come. The fact that this group has come together so quickly-- and as we prepare to launch the first observance of National Truck and Bus Safety Week -- is especially encouraging. Next week will give all of us a public forum in which we can further educate, heighten public awareness and promote legislative responsibility in the area of truck and bus safety.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know we have a serious problem to address. In 20 of our states, any person who is licensed to drive an automobile can also legally drive a tractor-trailer without first meeting any formal serious training, testing or operator licensing requirements. Quite frankly, this is outrageous. And consider that only seven states require all truck operator applicants to successfully pass a state-administered, behind-the-wheel test.

Nor does this exhaust our concern. What about the ease with which drivers can obtain multiple operator's licenses and thus establish separate driving records? As you know, some drivers possess licenses in several states at the same time. There can only be one reason for this: to spread

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accident and convictions among different state files, to hide them from meaningful review, and to effectively avoid state license sanctions such as suspensions and revocations. The National Transportation Safety Board has found that some states are continuing to license "problem drivers" who operate heavy trucks. And, I submit, unsafe or unqualified drivers behind the wheel of large vehicles pose a danger -- to themselves, to all motorists on the road, and to the reputation of the many thousands of safe truck and bus drivers as well.

State driver licensing systems are the only programs which reach all drivers routinely and, in most states, at regular intervals. Licensing systems are already in place in every state, and they can go a long way toward assuring minimum qualifications for operators of larger vehicles and to identifying repeat offenders and other problem drivers. In particular, there are two licensing reforms -- already adopted in a majority of states -- to address those objectives. We at the Federal level strongly encourage their adoption in all 50 states.

Currently, 31 states have some form of classified licensing system, and I'm pleased to report that Oregon's new classified licensing law will take effect this October, raising the number to 32. We urge the other 18 states and the District of Columbia to join their ranks at the earliest possible opportunity, so that we can be assured that every state in America sets reasonable standards for drivers of larger vehicles.

In addition to licensing drivers carefully, we must make sure that operators carry only one license, and that there is a single, complete record of each driver's history. The one-driver/one-license concept makes good common sense, and it's essential for state licensing agencies to identify problem drivers. After all, offenses such as drunk or reckless driving, or deaths caused by accidents are no less serious for being committed in a jurisdiction other than the driver's home state.

Thirty states and the District of Columbia have joined the Driver License Compact, an interstate agreement among states which have adopted the "one-driver/one-license" concept and support it by forwarding conviction data to each driver's state of record. The compact was initiated in 1961 and it has been a major step forward, since cooperation among states is needed in our highly mobile society. Drivers who are convicted of serious traffic offenses when away from home should not escape corrective action by their home states. Missouri and the District joined just last summer, and North Dakota has applied to join. That's good news, but we need all 50 states in the Compact for it to achieve maximum effectiveness.

There are, unfortunately, too many drivers who will abuse less stringent licensing systems, so we need all states to have single and classified licensing systems. This is appropriate as a state responsibility, but the Department and the private sector must join together to educate the public to encourage state governments to enact legislation to implement these systems -- now.

The presence of representatives from so many groups here today -- from the motor carrier and insurance industries, highway safety groups, and other concerned parties -- underscores the widespread public interest in licensing, and I believe we are united in our efforts to support the adoption of these vital programs in every state of the union.

The next step in that process is the big one -- the development of a national coalition with affiliates in target states. With the resources of my office, and those of the entire Department solidly behind this effort, let us, here today, commit ourselves to urge states to take seriously their responsibility to improve highway safety... by acting now... to ensure that only qualified drivers operate the nation's trucks and buses, to guarantee that serious or repeat offenders are taken off our highways, that they are no longer permitted to hide behind multiple licenses. We can not sit by and allow needless deaths to occur at the hands of drivers who, by any standard, have forfeited their right behind the wheel.

During this forum, the private and public sector organizations represented here today will be working to develop a strategy for adopting a more effective driver licensing system and to encourage fuller participation by the states in the Driver License Compact. Together, we must encourage states to require commercial vehicle license applicants to meet certain minimum testing or training requirements.

We can do no less. Heavy trucks represent less than two percent of the nation's registered vehicles and about five percent of all vehicle miles traveled, but are involved in over ten percent of traffic fatalities. And over 85 percent of the injuries associated with large truck accidents were suffered by occupants of the other vehicle, usually a passenger car.

I am pleased NHTSA is assisting AAMVA as you work to update your Model Classified Licensing Program. We are also supporting the Driver License Compact Commission in expanding membership and gaining fuller participation. And we won't rest until all 50 states and the District of Columbia have joined the Compact as active, productive members. For my part, I have written to every Governor in the nation, informing them of our efforts and urging them to strongly support the adoption of single and classified driver license systems.

As we expand the public discussion on commercial vehicle safety next week during National Truck and Bus Safety Week, it bears pointing out that the Department and the states are moving ahead on several fronts to enhance safety for both drivers and vehicles. This is being done through revisions of Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety rules; through our support of the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program -- we are requesting an authorization of \$50 million in fiscal year 1987 for this program, an almost 200 percent increase over current levels; and through research such as on brakes and lighting. And efforts to improve driver licensing represent an important part of this overall truck and bus safety program.

I want you to know how much I care about this issue and how dedicated I am to resolving it -- with your input and your assistance. When you think of the work ahead, consider how often it is that any of us have the kind of opportunity -- before us now -- to make such a positive difference for people.

What we do know is that you can't do it alone and we can't do it alone. I welcome your suggestions and ideas and I look forward to the opportunity to work with you. I thank you for your hard work and your commitment. I rely on your support.

Thank you very much.

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