

Taking Traffic Safety to the Next Level
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I am so pleased to be here at Lifesavers again for my second address to you as the NHTSA Administrator. I want to thank you for giving such a warm and rousing welcome this morning to my friend, Rich Carmona. He absolutely loved being here, and he is right on target when he talks about the dedication of this Administration to the safety and security of the American people through prevention of senseless injuries.

These are my guys, right here, that I work for. Secretary of Transportation Mineta over there is working diligently, keeping the screws turned to those of us at the DOT who are charged with getting this job done. And I frequently remind the Secretary that as hard as we push, as much as we try to get the word out and let our programs drive the issues, the work is, in fact, done in the community.

So, that's one reason I love being here. It's because you all really are the key, you really make the action happen at the local level where the real work gets done. And I'm very, very honored to be here with you again today.

Secretary Mineta has made clear that our work can be summed up by the words: business not as usual. He refuses to accept that 42,116 people were killed on our highways last year. He also has demonstrated in the last year what he

means when he says, “We will meet our goals.” Congress gave DOT 35 goals, but Secretary Mineta gave us 36. That last one was to meet the first 35 we got from Congress. With respect to transportation security, in fact, the Department has done exactly that.

Now that the Transportation Security Administration has moved to the Department of Homeland Security, both the Deputy Secretary and the Secretary communicated to me that now we can turn our attention to what is causing 95% of transportation-related injuries and deaths. That is highway safety.

Since Lifesavers 20 was held last year in Orlando, there have been a number of landmark accomplishments in key areas in highway safety. And although great challenges remain which I will touch on in a few minutes, I first want to talk about the progress that you all have made. I have some pride here, and I think we’ve done a lot of this together. There is some good news to share.

Please consider the following achievements of the last year. Safety belt use continued its upward trend in 2002, reaching 75% nationally, the highest level since surveys began. States with primary safety belt laws hit another milestone with 80% belt use, while states with secondary laws averaged 69%. Once again, I’m telling you how important that primary belt law is in every state in the country.

We are bringing these numbers up slowly, but this two percentage point increase translates into more than 5 million additional people being buckled into

their safety belts last year. We saved an estimated 500 lives from this two percentage point increase and reduced the severity of 8,800 injuries.

The 2002 Memorial Day “Click it or Ticket” campaign, to which over 30 states signed on, was the most successful such campaign to date and took high visibility safety belt enforcement to a new level. The strongest gains in safety belt use came for those states that actively conducted the “Click it or Ticket” model around Memorial Day.

As I said, a total of 30 states and D.C. participated but some states really distinguished themselves. For instance, Vermont lead the states in posting an impressive 19% point increase, followed by West Virginia, which increased its safety belt use rate by 15 percentage points. Who here is from Vermont? I want you to stand up. And from West Virginia? Please stand up. Give yourselves - everybody give them - a hand. All this points to the fact that the “Click it or Ticket” model and primary safety belt laws are critically important as we move towards reaching the national goal we have set of 78% use this year.

We have more good news: fewer children aged 15 and under died in motor vehicle crashes in 2001 than in any time in record-keeping history. As I announced during Child Passenger Safety Week last month, restraint use for young children rose to a record level in 2002. Ninety-nine percent of infants under age one are now restrained. Isn't that fabulous?

But there's more work to do. Unfortunately, a lot of the child safety seats were turned the wrong way. And some of the children were also sitting right in front of an airbag. So child safety advocates: don't stop. Your work is not done yet. But the rate is up four percentage-points from 2000. For toddlers, 94% are now restrained, a three percentage point gain over two years ago.

We realize that progress on a national level is due largely to what is done, not in Washington, but from the efforts of state and community injury prevention advocates, police officers, and fire-fighters who are helping to conduct the child safety seat checks. I'd like to share with you a few particularly exemplarily achievements from last year that are based on preliminary 2002 data that the states have provided to us.

Where's Indiana? I would like the folks here from Indiana to stand up a second. Indiana's crash-related fatalities dropped from 909 in 2001 to 790 in 2002. That's a reduction of a 119 people, the lowest number in modern times. Indiana's gains are due to a combination of factors, we believe, including a concerted safety belt and a concerted impaired driving prevention program lead by Indiana's leadership team, and roadway improvements conducted by the Indiana Department of Transportation.

Now I want you to look at your table number. If you are seated at tables 4 through 18, would you please stand up a second? If you think what they did is not

important, take a look at the people standing. This is the number of people that were saved in Indiana last year. Think about that. It makes a difference, people. Every one of those individuals represents a family that is intact, that would otherwise be broken.

In Iowa - where's Iowa - anybody here from Iowa? Traffic tallies in Iowa are at their lowest level since World War II: 416 fatalities in 2002. We are crediting this success to their aggressive safety belt enforcement activities, where they got to 82% usage, and their graduated driver's licensing law.

Puerto Rico: anybody here from Puerto Rico? Please stand. In 2002, the November safety belt and the December impaired driving mobilizations resulted in the lowest number of fatalities in the month of December in more than 30 years. Over the previous 30 years, an average of 57 Puerto Ricans died in the month of December and this past year the number was 32. Congratulations.

Tennessee; where's Tennessee? Anybody from Tennessee? There you go. Tennessee has reported that for two years in a row, they have reduced their number of roadway fatalities by more than 100 people each year. The State Highway Safety Office attributes these reductions to Tennessee's "Click It or Ticket" and to the "Booze it and Lose it" campaigns, and to the effective use of paid media.

Where's Texas? I know there are Texans here somewhere. With great leadership and support from Governor Rick Perry, Texas sparked an increase in

safety belt use last year to 81% following the May 2002 Mobilization. In the ten largest cities where the “Click It or Ticket” campaign was focused, the percentage use rate was even higher, at 86.5%. I want to congratulate you. Who said that they couldn’t do it in Texas? They did it.

I was privileged to be on the road last May, visiting a number of states where you asked me to show up and be your cheerleader for the Mobilizations. I can’t tell you how good delighted I am that we were so successful.

We’ve also made big gains in safety belt usage by minorities. Today, I’m proud to release additional results from the 2002 National Occupant Protection Use survey, which shows big gains in safety belt use among the African-American community. Safety belt use by African-Americans this past year increased from 69% in 2000 to 77% in 2002. Given that the national overall use rate is 75%, this is a clear indication that the gap in safety belt use among different groups is closing. Please congratulate yourselves.

I want to point out that these increases in the African-American community are due in large part to the efforts of the Blue Ribbon Panel to Increase Seat Belt Use among African-Americans and to the efforts of a number of African-American organizations that put that Panel’s recommendations into action. I’m told that there are a number of these groups represented here today. I’d like for people who are representing these groups to stand and be recognized, including the National

Council of Negro Women, the National Conference of Black Mayors, the Meharry Medical College, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. If there's anybody here from these groups - there you are - please stand and be recognized. We are counting on your continued leadership, which will be crucial to achieve further increases among this special population as well as other special populations across our nation.

Now we are very excited about the upcoming safety belt mobilization plan for May and I believe you will be, too, once you know the details. For the first time ever, about 8 million dollars in funds will be used to purchase airtime on national broadcast media for advertisements in support of the May 2003 Mobilization. In addition, 45 states will be receiving a total of more than 40 million dollars to conduct highly visible, stepped-up enforcement activities with an unmistakable enforcement-focused message. Of this amount, about 16 to 18 million will be used by states to purchase ads in their own media markets. These ads will reinforce the success of the "Click It or Ticket" theme, will advise the public of continued stepped-up enforcement activities, and will raise the specter that if they travel without their safety belts fastened, they're going to get a citation.

We're also making a special effort to link state patrols with their respective State Superintendents of Education, to warn high school students about the

upcoming campaign and the crack-down that it entails. We fully expect that the proven formula of paid media and earned media, coupled with stepped-up enforcement, will persuade even more citizens this year to buckle up on every trip.

But we need your help to get this done. We have a goal of 78% national safety belt use. This is not going to be easy. I hope you will take this on as your goal as well. If we get there, we will save another 750 Americans next year - a huge reward. I want to reiterate the promise I made to all of you last year: we will not rest until America is buckled up at the same rate as other developed, heavily motorized countries.

Given the progress I just outlined in safety belt use, as I told you at Lifesavers in Orlando last year, we must zero in far more deliberately on impaired driving. Here the news is not as good and where we clearly must redouble our efforts. After years of steady improvement through the 1980's, fatalities and alcohol-related crashes are not making progress now. In 2001, more than 17,000 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes. There are nearly 1 billion drinking and driving trips annually on our roads and highways and more than 45 people are killed in alcohol-related crashes every single day in this country.

I told you last year that 2003 would be the year of renewed emphasis on impaired driving, and it is. Many of you, no doubt, are already aware that we are conducting an intense, yearlong effort that emphasizes what we know works to

prevent impaired driving, which is, again: highly visible detection, arrest, and prosecution. Even while expanding our intensive safety belt emphasis as I've already described, we've launched our most serious push against alcohol- and drug-impaired driving in more than a decade.

You heard the Surgeon General this morning. This issue is getting attention at the very highest levels of government. We're targeting significant resources to the states that need to shore up their defenses against impaired drivers. To this end, we are working especially closely with 13 states that have either high numbers of alcohol-related fatalities, or high rates, or both. Leaders of these 13 states have agreed to work with us to conduct sustained enforcement campaigns following the "Click It or Ticket" model. This stepped-up enforcement will be punctuated by high-visibility, broadly publicized national mobilizations. Most of this will employ the "You Drink, You Drive. You Lose" slogan.

The first of these occurred in December 2002 and continued through early January 2003. Nationwide, almost 5,000 enforcement agencies in 41 states plus D.C. and Puerto Rico participated in that mobilization. We're currently collecting data from those 13 states to determine that program's overall effectiveness on deaths and injuries.

The next impaired driving mobilization will be conducted from June 27 through July 13 of this year, and then again, from December 19 through January 4,

2004. In fact, here are the dates for all four of our national mobilizations planned for this year. We need you. We need your continued support. We need your ideas, and we need your energy.

This disease has a cure. We're discussing now what to do with the long-term strategy. Some of it will involve technology, some of it will involve other strategies, but renewed emphasis will be in getting resources into the states where it's most needed. The disease has a cure, and we will encourage Americans to take the medicine.

Turning now to motorcycles, we're also very concerned about the alarming incidence of motorcycle-related fatalities, which have risen by almost 50% since 1997 and are now at their highest level since 1990. In 2001, more than 3,100 motorcyclists were killed.

Many of you know that the Secretary has given the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and NHTSA one goal for 2008, and that's to reach a rate of no more than 1.0 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled by 2008. For the next five years, we need to come up with 9,000 additional lives saved. As you can see from this graph, by vehicle type we're closing in on our goal for passenger cars and light trucks. Large trucks are again very safe for their occupants. Unfortunately, the motorcycle fatality rate is more than 33 deaths per hundred million vehicle miles traveled.

We encourage states to use NHTSA's *National Agenda for Motorcycle Safety* for ideas and resources for motorcycle safety intervention. Also hot off the press is a new NHTSA publication that maybe useful to you, *Cost of Injuries Resulting from Motorcycle Crashes: A Literature Review*. These can all be accessed through the NHTSA website, and if you need a hardcopy, please give us a call.

As noted in the President's fiscal year of 2004 budget, a 100 million dollar incentive fund program would be available to states that enact primary safety belt laws, if Congress passes the President's budget. This is how important primary belt laws are to our country. Many states are considering primary laws in the current legislative session. We know of at least nine states right now where passage of primary laws is considered likely in the near future. You know who you are. If these nine states all succeed in passing a primary belt law this year, we will save 650 lives in the first year alone. I can't tell you how important it is that we have primary safety belt laws in all 50 states and the territories of this country.

We turn for a second to reauthorization. I want to mention that the Department's reauthorization is now underway. When I was coming to Lifesavers as a player, like you, I had no clue what reauthorization is or was. I heard about Ice-T and then I heard about TEA-21, but I had no idea. Let me just say that this is important. It's really important, because it determines how much money the

Department of Transportation has to work with over the next six years. It's an open process. The President will submit a reauthorization bill to Congress - hopefully very, very soon - and Congress will then do its thing on the bill. We're hoping that there will be a swift passage. This is a democracy, and I would encourage each of you to examine closely what's in it for highway safety, what's in it for your states, and weigh in accordingly.

Under this reauthorization plan, we want to get a lot more resources where they are needed into highway safety. This will be based on a comprehensive highway safety plan that pinpoints in each state the nature of their safety problem. We are diverse, we have different needs, we have different strengths, and we have different weaknesses. Our proposal calls for increased flexibility for state and local authorities and transportation projects to enable them to address specific areas of concern, whether they be impaired driving, safety belt use, motorcycles, pedestrians - you name it - including infrastructure. I will encourage this group to make sure that you are at the table when your state is developing its highway safety plan, because that will determine how these flexible funds are spent. About half of our budget each year is spent on behavioral issues such as safety belt use and impaired driving, and this reauthorization package will reflect these priorities. Stand by; it's important.

This ambitious highway safety agenda that we have forged together needs the involvement of all of the partners and allies we can get. The goals that we have set out are tough, but they are achievable and they're necessary in order to stop deaths and injuries that plague our highways and roadways.

You heard the Surgeon General this morning; we're singing the same tune. These injuries, these deaths, this economic decimation that occurs to the tune of 230 billion dollars per year every year in this country, has a solution. This is preventable. You all are what make it happen. All of you, and your communities, do the work that you do everyday. As was said earlier, "Anonymously, without thanks, and most of the time without even expecting thanks, you get the work done."

We have to go beyond what we have done in the past to get more serious about traffic safety. If we do not get to the Secretary's goal and reach a decreased fatality rate by 2008, if we keep the current rate constant, we will have 50,000 deaths on our highways by 2008. We are not playing. This is deadly serious. It is an absolute life and death situation.

I want to thank you so very, very much for the work that you do everyday in your community to foster what we're doing in NHTSA. We can't get it done from Washington. It gets done in every community in this country and you are the reason why. I'm honored to be here today. Thanks very much.