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NIXON REDUCES SAFETY REQUESTS

The Nixon Administration has proposed a cutback in the level of highway safety appropriations requested earlier by the Johnson Administration.

The President on April 15 sent to Congress a series of proposed budget amendments that would trim more than \$4 billion off his predecessor's requests for all foreign and domestic expenditures for 1970. He said further federal belt tightening was one of several steps necessary to "put a halt, swiftly, to the ruinous rise of inflationary pressures."

Among specific changes recommended by the President were a \$40 million reduction in the cash appropriation for the highway safety grant program and a \$400,000 cut in the appropriation to administer the two safety acts of 1966.

If Congress follows Mr. Nixon's recommendations, the National Highway Safety Bureau would have a total of \$87 million available for state and local projects through 1970--\$50 million new money plus an estimated \$37 million currently available and subject to carry forward. It would not all necessarily be spent.

Federal Highway Administration officials report the Nixon request contemplates an obligating ceiling for 1970 of \$75 million, less about \$1.5 for administrative expenses. Mr. Johnson had sought an obligating maximum of \$100 million. In effect for the current fiscal year is a \$63.8 million ceiling imposed by Congress.

The Nixon budget, in the final analysis, represents a potential small increase over current levels in spending for state and community safety projects, but not as much as was anticipated in the Johnson budget.

Mr. Nixon's budget narrative noted the reduction in the cash appropriation from \$90 million to \$50 million had taken into account fewer project approvals during 1969 than had earlier been envisioned. A tabulation by the NHSB as of April 18 showed that of the \$63.8 million available for obligation by June 30, only \$26.4 had been claimed by the states and their local communities.

Federal grant money is made available for such highway safety related programs as motor vehicle inspection, controlling drinking drivers, driver education, improving emergency services, accident record keeping, and pedestrian safety.

A \$400,000 cut in the earlier requests for administration of the Highway Safety and National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Acts would set that appropriation at \$35.7 million, about 35 per cent more than the currently available \$26,457,000. It would thus be possible for the Bureau in 1970 to substantially step up its program related to the development of highway safety standards and, assuming extension of the vehicle safety authorization, the development of vehicle and tire standards, as well as research and demonstration projects under both programs.

Where Mr. Johnson had sought an increase in the personnel ceiling of the NHSB from 560 to 760 positions, Mr. Nixon asked that the ceiling be 635. Federal Highway Administrator Francis Turner said recently the NHSB had 505 persons on board as of January 31, but it is known that more than 20 per cent of this total represented persons shared by the Bureau with other echelons of the FHWA, and that personnel restrictions are holding back virtually every part of the NHSB program. A government-wide personnel freeze has been in effect since last summer.

The Nixon proposals for safety, as well as for all other budget areas, are subject to revision by the Congress and it is impossible to speculate as to what will finally emerge as specific funding and personnel allocations. Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.), chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, has said even more stringent slashing may be required to put the 1970 budget further in the black.

Subcommittees of the Senate and House appropriations committees are expected to begin Department of Transportation budget hearings in May or June. Safety appropriations will be considered as part of the DOT package.

SENATE HOLDS VEHICLE SAFETY HEARINGS

The Senate Commerce Committee has taken a look at the federal vehicle safety program and its funding, and raised some of the same questions that were developed earlier in House hearings. An added element in hearings April 14-15 before the Senate committee, however, was strong advocacy of the safety program by at least three senators.

Senators Vance Hartke (D-Ind.), Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.), and Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) made no secret of the fact that they were unhappy with the way all or portions of the vehicle safety program were being implemented by the Department of Transportation.

Senator Hartke charged the leadership in the DOT's Federal Highway Administration, which oversees the National Highway Safety Bureau, lacked "vigor and enthusiasm" in carrying out the Vehicle Safety Act. "Let's see some imaginative, bold approaches," he said. "I see us moving at a snail's pace...This ought to be a primary concern, not a 'funerals as usual' approach."

Senator Ribicoff said, "The American people are not getting their money's worth from the Safety Bureau. They think their hard-earned tax dollars are buying an effective program, but they are not." He testified that a lack of funds, personnel freezes, and organizational difficulties "have prevented the program from realizing its potential." He charged both the Congress and the Administration were "hypocritical" in the way they had failed to support the initial law. He alleged that the Detroit manufacturers continued to make "suckers" of the car-buying public by emphasizing speed and size and adding to safety and congestion problems.

Senator Nelson maintained the vehicle safety program "is in danger of complete failure." He urged that the NHTSB quickly be supplied with the resources that would permit broad-scale independent testing of vehicles and tires. A strong advocate of tire safety and the author of pending legislation that would require tire defect notification, Senator Nelson declared it was three years since passage of the Vehicle Safety Act and "The only standards in effect are those written by the tire industry, which even they admit are inadequate."

Representatives of the auto and tire industry did not testify in the hearings. Neither did they appear during six days of hearings held earlier by the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee.

Federal Highway Administrator Francis Turner responded to criticism that the safety program was relegated to secondary status in the FHWA. He said he felt the small NHTSB staff had done a "remarkable" amount of work in a short period of time and promised a stepped up effort as the Bureau receives more money and personnel. He added that he was a "firm believer" in disseminating all possible safety-related information to the public. The FHWA's attitude had been questioned earlier because of its refusal, subsequently withdrawing, to release films on the crash testing of Volkswagens.

Mr. Turner presented the Nixon Administration's requests for spending authorization for fiscal 1970 and 1971. Authorizations provide the base against which eventual appropriations are made, and it is because past appropriations have been far below authorized levels that many believe the vehicle safety program has faltered.

For 1970, the Administration is seeking an authorization of \$23 million for the vehicle and tire programs and support of the National Driver Register (slightly less than the current authorization), with that figure increased to \$35 million in 1971. Ten million dollars is asked for the planning and design of a research test facility.

THE SMALL CAR PROBLEM

NHTSB-produced films of small cars being crash tested pointed up dramatically to the senators the problem of assuring reasonable safety to the occupants of small cars.

A film the first day showed the Japanese Subaru and the American King (formerly the King Midget), both of which weigh less than 1,000 pounds and are not covered by federal vehicle standards, being compressed into junk in collisions with regular sized vehicles.

The second day, the lawmakers saw a filmed collision of a 1969 Volkswagen, sold as being in compliance with federal standards, with a standard 1957 Ford. Both cars were banged up, and a dummy in the Volkswagen penetrated the vehicle windshield when an upper torso restraining strap broke and a front seat tore loose from its safety hardware.

Dr. Robert Brenner, acting director of the NHTSB, said preliminary data from a study being conducted by the New York Department of Motor Vehicles for the NHTSB showed Volkswagen occupants were killed at a substantially higher rate in collisions with other vehicles than were the occupants of the other vehicles.

He added that the New York data had shown 9.6 per cent of all accidents of foreign compact autos weighing around 1,900 pounds resulted in death or serious injury. The fatality-serious injury rate for domestic compact cars averaging 2,800 pounds was 6.4 per cent, for domestic cars weighing 3,700 pounds 4 per cent, and for large domestic vehicles weighing 4,800 pounds 3.1 per cent.

"In general, the smaller the amount of space that is packaging the occupant, the more serious the outcome of the impact," he said.

Dr. Brenner added that statistics also showed cars in the Volkswagen class were more inclined to experience non-collision roll-overs and to require longer to pass on level highways--both important safety considerations.

Volkswagen of America, Inc., issued a statement following the screening in which it said there are "so many variables in vehicular exposure to accidents--such as number of miles driven, time of day, average age of driver and even personal attitude of driver--that sample percentages do not reflect an accurate picture." Senator Hartke said the intent of the screening was not to single out any particular manufacturer, but to alert the public to the factor of crashworthiness."

HADDON MAKES NINE SUGGESTIONS

During an appearance before Senate Commerce Committee hearings on the federal vehicle safety program, Dr. William Haddon, Jr., was asked by Senator Vance Hartke (D-Ind.) what suggestions he had regarding additional legislation to bolster the national safety program.

Dr. Haddon, who headed the National Highway Safety Bureau during the first 29 months of its existence and who was testifying as President of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, made nine recommendations. They were that:

1. The organizational status of the NHTSB be changed. He suggested it be an agency directly responsible to the Secretary of Transportation rather than subordinate to the Federal Highway Administration.

2. Consumer information provisions of the law be "toughened" to give car buyers and the general public more information, in advance of a purchase decision, about vehicle safety features, accident experience, and so forth.

3. Sections of the law related to manufacturer labeling of compliance with safety standards, including month and year of manufacture, and the government's capability to check on compliance be clarified and strengthened.

4. There be a statutory requirement for the NHTSB to issue "safety advisories" where there is the need to quickly communicate information to the public.

5. Tire manufacturers and dealers be required to notify final purchasers of tire defects and take corrective action whether the tires were included as equipment on new cars or purchased for replacement. Defect notification is required under National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act for new vehicles and equipment, but not for replacement tires.

6. The NHTSB be authorized to issue standards for the helmets worn by motorcyclists and their passengers.

7. Information in the National Driver Register be more productively disseminated, including to other federal agencies, than is now permitted by law. Dr. Haddon cited the present inability, for example, of the Federal Aviation Administration to obtain critical information on drunk drivers from the Register.

8. Product liability be extended to assure manufacturer responsibility for inadequacy of the crash design of their vehicles.

9. Federal law provide for bicycle safety standards for such as clearly visible reflectors.

BOARD URGES COORDINATION IN ALCOHOL PROGRAMMING

The National Transportation Safety Board has urged the Secretary of Transportation to take steps to coordinate the solution of alcohol-related problems among all modes of transportation.

Board Chairman Joseph J. O'Connell, Jr., in a March 14 letter to Secretary John Volpe, pointed to similarities in the nature of alcohol involvement in highway and non-commercial aircraft accidents which suggested the application of common approaches. He cited recent DOT findings that about 25,000 highway fatalities a year involve alcohol, and that remedial efforts had to fall within a broad spectrum of public health programming.

Mr. O'Connell suggested this was true for the alcohol problem as it relates to air, rail, water and other transportation. He urged that (1) the DOT "give increased emphasis to study and program action with respect to the role of alcohol, extending coverage of the problem to all transportation modes," (2) that DOT efforts be coordinated with those of health-oriented agencies and organizations, dealing with other social ills if need be, and with state and local programs, and (3) that the DOT become the "national focal point" for information on alcohol and transportation safety, with the NHTSB research program becoming an especially important input.

Accompanying Mr. O'Connell's letter were the results of a Safety Board staff study that noted, in addition to the involvement of alcohol in about 50 per cent of highway crash fatalities, its involvement in at least 24 per cent of fatal general aviation crashes in 1967, and in a small but presumably under-reported number of water and rail accidents.

VOLPE ASKS COMMITTEE ADVICE

Secretary of Transportation John Volpe has asked the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee for recommendations on three policy issues in administering the highway safety program. As the result of a March meeting with an executive subcommittee headed by J. Sam Winters, Mr. Volpe asked the full 35-member Advisory Committee to make recommendations back to him on:

1. Suggestions as to an appropriate structure within the Department of Transportation to administer the safety program, and the level at which it should be located.

2. Assuming continued limitations on National Highway Safety Bureau funding and personnel, what aspects of the highway safety program deserve more attention than others.

3. The standard on alcohol in relation to highway safety, and its implementation.

Subcommittees of the parent Committee have been assigned to look into the three areas.

* * *

INDIANA POLICE RECORDS GRANTS -- Indiana has received a \$439,000 federal highway safety grant to establish a state police radio network to assist in the rapid retrieval of traffic records information. The intent of the project is to speed up police access to central files on driver licenses, vehicle registration, and other enforcement information. Some of the money will be used to purchase and install radio and multi-plex equipment for use in police district offices, according to a recent DOT announcement.

OHIO DRIVER EDUCATION GRANT -- The state of Ohio has received a \$736,000 federal safety grant to purchase 16 mobile driving simulators to improve driver education programs. The grant is part of a three-year project for the eventual purchase of 45 simulators, which will be mounted on trailers so they can be moved from school district to school district. The announcement was made by DOT Secretary John A. Volpe. Grant money is made available to the states on a 50-50 matching basis to help meet 16 highway safety program standards issued by the Secretary.

SCHOOL BUS ALERT -- The NHSB has alerted the governors of all the states to the necessity of insuring the adequacy of school bus safety measures and maintenance programs. The Bureau's concern has been heightened by the investigation of two school bus crashes last year in which a total of five children were killed and several seriously injured. According to Acting Director Robert Brenner, inadequate maintenance contributed to one of the crashes, and a malfunctioning braking system was suspected in the second one. As a result of the investigation of the second crash, General Motors began the recall of more than 10,000 Chevrolet and GMC school buses of the 1967 and 1968 model years. A letter from Dr. Brenner to the state governors also called attention to the fact that in a 1968 inspection of more than 10,000 school buses in one midwest state, 40 per cent did not pass inspection.

HOLLOWAY JOINS IIHS -- Dr. John J. Holloway, acting director of the National Highway Safety Institute, one of the three major components of the NHSB, has resigned to become vice president for research of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Holloway joined the Bureau in January 1968 after serving in several capacities with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration over a seven-year span. He has a Ph. D. in physics from Iowa State University, and did earlier work at Millikin University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Maryland. While with the Bureau, he was responsible for administering its vehicle and highway safety research program. Dr. William Haddon, Jr., former director of the NHSB and now president of the IIHS, said Dr. Holloway would manage the IIHS research program.

TWO SAFETY BUREAUS? -- Federal Highway Administrator Francis Turner reportedly has recommended to DOT Secretary John Volpe that the NHSB be divided into two smaller bureaus, one concerned with vehicle and tire safety and the other with state and community programs. The latter would remain in the FHWA. The vehicle safety program might be located in a separate regulatory agency outside the FHWA but still within the DOT. The state and community safety program, centered around the use of federal money to meet DOT-issued standards, would thus remain under the same roof as the huge federal highway construction program.

INTERSTATE REPORTED SAFER -- Travel on the Interstate Highway System continues to be substantially safer than on other roads and streets, according to a report by the Bureau of Public Roads. The report notes that during 1967, 2.89 persons were killed for each 100 million vehicle miles of travel on interstate highways, compared with 5.66 on other roads. The 1967 interstate fatality rate was lower than the 1966 rate of 3.08. Rural travel, both on the Interstate System and on non-Interstate roads, was more hazardous than travel in urban areas, according to the report. The report did not present any evidence of differences on a passenger mile basis and the extent to which differences in average passengers carried per vehicle on these types of roads may underlie the findings is unknown. Copies of the document, "Fatal and Injury Accident Rates on Federal-Aid and Other Highway Systems," are available at 45 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS SET -- The Subcommittee on Roads of the House Public Works Committee will begin hearings on implementation of the Highway Safety Act May 13, according to Committee sources. It will be the first series of hearings by the Committee since passage of the 1966 Act and a full-ranging examination of how the law is working is expected. A second Subcommittee of the full Committee, headed by Representative John Blatnik (D-Minn.), on May 6 will begin a separate series of hearings into the lack of uniformity in highway laws, regulations, signs, signals and other traffic control features. Where past hearings of the Subcommittee have focused on the Interstate Highway System, this time the Blatnik panel expects to devote more attention to the non-Interstate federally-aided system.

MORE DILIGENCE NEEDED -- An accident investigation report by the Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety on a truck-car crash in Kansas City, Mo., October 20, 1968, has underscored what the Bureau describes as the need for "more diligent requirements relating to the evaluation of driver background information" on the part of interstate truck companies. Two occupants of a car were killed when their vehicle collided with a truck that had run through an intersection stop sign. The report noted both the truck driver and his co-driver had been drinking and the driver, while properly licensed, had been convicted of six speeding violations since 1961.

BAYLOR STUDY -- A study of 25 recent driver fatalities in the Houston area by the Baylor University College of Medicine showed "80 per cent of the fatalities were maladjusted in that they were either alcoholics or had personality disorders, or both." The \$89,000 study was financed by the NHSB. The conclusions of the investigators, described in a recent publication by the NHSB, coincide with other studies elsewhere that alcohol and emotional-personality factors are present in an exceptionally high percentage of fatal crashes. In the Houston study, in which driver fatalities were investigated in serial sequence, 72 per cent of the drivers had at least .15 per cent blood alcohol content. Psychiatric stress, growing out of marital, financial, occupational, or other factors within a 24-hour period prior to the crash, was present in 80 per cent of the fatalities.

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