



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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FOR ~~IMMEDIATE~~ RELEASE
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DOLE BILL WOULD RAISE SPEED LIMIT TO 60 MPH

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Senator Bob Dole Thursday introduced legislation to raise the maximum speed limit from the present 55 MPH to 60 MPH for all vehicles.

Dole said assessment of the situation ahead demonstrates "the need for a slight change to soften the burden that the 55 miles per hour limit has imposed on important segments of our society and economy." Following is the entire text of Dole's introductory statement:

MR. DOLE. Mr. President, it has been nearly four months now since the enactment of Public Law 93-239, reducing the speed limits on our Nation's highways to 55 miles per hour. During that time, we have had a chance to analyze and evaluate the impact of that initiative to conserve energy, and no one, I think, will question the fact that at least the major objective of the law has been successfully achieved. The lower speed limit has also resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of lives lost on the highways.

It is appropriate now, however, that we review the need for, and intent of, that measure to determine whether it is still timely, and whether certain revisions might not be more desirable for the long term. Based on my conversations with many Kansans over the Easter recess, as well as the correspondence received in my office, I believe modification is both necessary and expedient at this point, and am therefore introducing a bill to raise the limit to 60 miles per hour.

Simply stated, my bill will substitute for the present 55 miles per hour speed a prescribed maximum of 60 miles per hour for all vehicles. This adjustment would take effect 60 days after enactment, and would carry with it the provision that states could again use federal-aid highway funds to change their signs accordingly, although the recent experience has shown that this is not a major item.

It is significant also to point out that in Kansas -- and I'm certain in most other states as well -- this change could be implemented by the Governor or State Highway Authority without requiring a special session of the Legislature.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF ACT

Mr. President, as I previously suggested, the Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act has indeed served to reduce the consumption of precious fuel supplies during a period of great crisis in our country. Moreover, there is ample evidence that the lowering of speed limits has had a very favorable secondary effect of saving lives which might otherwise have been lost in high-speed vehicular accidents. However, all this has not come without considerable sacrifice on the part of every citizen, as well as substantial disruption of our patterns of mobility and commerce.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF LOWER LIMITS

In retrospect, the speed limit legislation has caused many Americans to curtail their pleasure driving and postpone or suspend planned vacation trips by automobile. A more serious consequence of the act, perhaps, has been the imposition of a serious economic burden on America's trucking industry. As the old adage goes, "Time is money", and the lower speeds and longer travel times have meant that truckers are able to make fewer trips per month, covering less mileage, and consequently earning less income -- in the face of greatly increased fuel costs.

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So clearly, this has been much more than merely the making of substantial time adjustments by those in the trucking industry -- and others who must travel great distances in their businesses. For people in states like Kansas -- with many miles between cities, between families, and between important personal destinations -- the 55 m.p.h. speed limit has resulted in a considerable loss of mobility and interaction in their daily lives.

AN IMPROVED ENERGY SITUATION

As a result of all our efforts to cope with the acute energy situation, we have "turned the corner" in the matter, and are now in a position to view what was formerly labeled a "crisis" as more of a "problem". This is not to say that we are "out of the woods" by any means, but that we are better able to look ahead now with cautious optimism.

THE IMMEDIATE OUTLOOK

The time has come, then, to re-evaluate the evidence and weigh the merits of our earlier action, applying the findings to the immediate future to determine whether some new measures might be in order. And it is my firm belief that such an assessment of the situation ahead does demonstrate the need for a slight change to soften the burden that the 55 miles per hour limit has imposed on important segments of our society and our economy.

FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION

Not least among the factors for consideration is the decision-making process going on in thousands of homes across the country right now regarding the feasibility of a summer vacation trip in the family automobile. While the availability of gasoline for tourism no longer appears to be of primary concern, the question of the extra time required for a long-distance trip is one which many are listing as a negative feature of following through on proposed traveling.

I believe just the psychological boost of an additional 5 miles per hour will be most important in encouraging families to go ahead with their plans. For the great majority of people consider 60 miles per hour to be a more natural and satisfactory speed to travel. They would be able to accept it, I think, in a way that they cannot the present 55 miles per hour limit.

A second major item of concern over the weeks and months ahead has to do with rumors of the threatened renewal of a strike by the trucking industry. Proponents of such a move still argue -- and perhaps with some foundation -- that they cannot operate their rigs economically and efficiently at the established speed restriction. They further submit that the fuel which they would actually save by being permitted to go 60 would more than offset any amounts lost by all passenger car motorists combined at that speed.

The Nation -- and particularly the cattle industry, which is "fighting for survival" right now -- cannot afford to undergo a repeat of the previous strike ordeal, and surely, our action to increase the speed limit to 60 miles per hour would be worthwhile if for no other reason that its help to avert another truck strike.

TIME FOR ACTION

Mr. President, Section 2 of the Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act is not set to expire until June 30, 1975, or until the President declares that there is no longer a fuel shortage. I do not feel that it is advisable to wait that long without reviewing our energy situation, and strongly advocate that we begin immediately to take an incremental approach to the return to "normalcy".

I believe that the circumstances are ripe now for a modified stance on this issue; that we can take timely action to change our speed limits, in keeping with the change in our energy situation; and that this can be done without any noticeable sacrifice in the savings of fuel and lives realized at the present standard.

In short, by moving to enact a 60 mile per hour speed limit today, we can accomplish the most desirable of all legislative goals: that of stimulating a more attractive and acceptable guideline without compromising a recognized need for reasonable and responsible efforts to conserve fuel.

The moment to act is now, and I urge early consideration of my proposal.

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