

**Remarks as prepared for
Jeffrey W. Runge, MD
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
to the
First General Assembly
International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference
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- [Thank Joe Samuels (current IACP President)] for providing this unique opportunity
 - Deeply honored to be here today.
 - First NHTSA Administrator invited to speak to the IACP General Assembly.
 - I have enjoyed my relationship to the state police and major city chiefs over the last 2 years, but this is indeed a privilege to address the general membership.

- Thank you to the IACP for your efforts to make our nation a safer and healthier one. President Bush's #1 priority is the safety and security of the American people. Secretary

Mineta's #1 priority for our Department is the safety of America's traveling public.

- That mission cannot be accomplished without your direct commitment and involvement, on all levels – State, County, and municipal police agencies.
- Last year, we lost 42,815 Americans on our nation's highways. That's a body count of 115 people every day, people who did not have to die.
- This is a tragedy. Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for American children and adults from 4 – 34 years of age.
- Preparedness for what may happen is necessary and worthwhile, but I need your focus and that of your agencies

on what is already happening every day across America. You are absolutely an essential part of the solution to reducing this waste of human life.

- NHTSA has a long history of working with and supporting police agencies at all levels. We are pleased that our grant programs have been able to help you in these times of very difficult budgetary stress.

- I am sure our strong working relationship will continue under the leadership of your new President, Chief Polisar.

- Our approach to traffic safety at NHTSA is:
 - First, prevention of crashes;
 - Second, enhancing survivability when crashes do occur;
 - and
 - Third, ensuring rapid and appropriate emergency response following the crash.

- You have an integral role in all 3 aspects, by:
 - Preventing crashes through enforcement of speed laws and impaired driving interdiction;
 - Enhancing survivability by aggressive enforcement of safety belt laws, be it *Click It or Ticket* check points or stepped up enforcement; and
 - Making sure those victims of crashes get speedy medical care, and not less importantly, to control the scene so that our paramedics do not become victims themselves.

- Speaking of safety belts, I want to thank you and congratulate you and the 12,000 police agencies that participated in *Click It or Ticket* this year. Because of your efforts, our nation reached a safety belt use rate of 79%, blowing through our goal 18 months ahead of schedule.

- More importantly, that new belt use rate means that 1000 more people who will be around this holiday season, 1000 more families that will have their loved ones with them. These are people who would not be here without your efforts.

- We still have much work to do. We cannot rest until the last 20% of drivers are buckled up. That 20% are the riskiest drivers: the most likely to speed, drive drunk, and crash, killing themselves and taking innocent victims with them.

- I also want to underscore what you already know ... that traffic enforcement IS law enforcement.
 - 56% of all interactions between the public and police officers occur during traffic stops;
 - Public safety benefits go far beyond the traffic stop, and are the link with other key national safety objectives;
 - I don't have time to enumerate all the examples, but we have many ... where vigilant traffic law enforcement

officers have detected suspicious behavior and prevented harm from occurring.

- In Texas, the discovery of an individual speeding who was found to have links to past terrorist attacks, threatening our homeland security.
- In Oklahoma, the apprehension of the worst domestic terrorist in our country's history, through a traffic stop for speeding.
- In several states, safety belt checkpoints have proved to be the most fruitful of drug interdiction methods, apprehending drug couriers.
- It is commonplace through traffic stops to find fugitives, outstanding warrants, felons, stolen vehicles and property, evidence of child abductions, and individuals with fraudulent identification.
- In our Southeast Region, during a single 14-day *Click It or Ticket* campaign, officers:
 - Apprehended 1,471 fugitives

- Recovered 254 stolen vehicles
 - Detected over 1,100 impaired drivers...all while doing safety belt enforcement.
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- NHTSA's research shows that the community is solidly behind your traffic enforcement efforts. In survey after survey, the #1 community policing concern is keeping the streets, roads and highways safe for their safe passage.
 - We are devoting as many resources as we can find ... to help officers on the beat to do their jobs more effectively. For example,
 - NHTSA provides numerous training programs for police officers. We are THE Federal agency providing training of Drug Recognition Experts, now in 36 states, and for training officers in standard field sobriety tests.

- We also want to lower the impediments to your aggressive enforcement of impaired driving laws. I recently announced our initiative to bolster the number of DWI courts using the drug court model, as well as special DWI prosecutors to accommodate the result of your intensified DWI enforcement.

- Secretary Mineta recently called all of the highway agencies at DOT together to tell us that he wants us to do whatever is required within our authority to reduce the deaths and injuries on our nation's highways. Secretary Mineta has given us the job to reduce the fatality rate from 1.5 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled to not more than 1.0 by the year 2008.

- I am elated, and know that Secretary Mineta will be also, that your IACP Highway Safety Committee and the Resolutions Committee both passed resolutions in support of the Secretary's 2008 highway fatality goal. The resolution will

go to the general membership for a vote tomorrow, and I encourage you to adopt this challenging, but reachable goal.

- Finally, I have 3 specific requests for you and your leadership:
 - First, to keep as many officers on the street as you can, doing general traffic enforcement, including sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols, and letting them know that their work is important to the health and welfare of the public we all serve.
 - Second, we need the Chiefs' active support for continued officer training in traffic enforcement, DRE, and Standard Field Sobriety Testing ... so that traffic enforcement can be done right, and can truly be one of your most effective tools for crime interdiction.
 - Third, we need your active participation and support of the President's Highway Reauthorization bill ... pending before Congress ... to ensure that sufficient

resources are devoted to the traffic law enforcement activities that are so critical to reaching the Administration's transportation safety goal. You are respected on Capitol Hill, and I encourage you to take advantage of the democratic process, and let Congress know exactly where you stand on this issue.

- If there is anything that we at DOT or NHTSA can do to help you accomplish your mission, please call me. Your mission is our mission. I cannot thank you enough for the work you and your officers do every day.
- Thank you for inviting me and for your kind attention.