

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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STATEMENT BY IRWIN P. HALPERN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY, PLANS AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY OF THE HOUSE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1973, REGARDING H.R. 11372, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION TO PRESCRIBE MAXIMUM SPEED LIMITS ON INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear today to discuss H.R. 11372, a bill which would authorize the Secretary of Transportation to prescribe maximum speed limits on interstate highways.

As you know, the President stated in his energy address on November 25 that while the voluntary response to his earlier request for reduced driving speeds has been excellent, it is now essential to establish maximum speed limits for all vehicles.

The President stated that the maximum speed limits for automobiles during this energy emergency are to be 50 m.p.h. We expect that this measure will produce a savings of 200,000 barrels of gasoline per day. For inter-city buses and heavy duty trucks, which operate more efficiently at higher speeds, the speed limit will be set at 55 m.p.h.

As the President explained in his energy address, the authority to require the reduction of maximum speed limits on a nationwide basis at present does not exist.

H.R. 11372 would provide this authority on the Interstate System. The needed authority also would be provided by the "Nationwide Energy Emergency Act of 1973" (S. 2589), which the Senate recently passed and which is now being considered by the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. Section 203 in S.2589 would direct the President to promulgate an energy conservation plan, which would include reductions in speed limits. He would also be required to promulgate requirements for energy conservation and programs which the States and major metropolitan governments would be required to develop in order to implement the Federal program. H.R. 11450, now also being considered by the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, would authorize the President to reduce speed limits.

We support the intent of H.R. 11372: to authorize the Executive Branch to take steps to reduce the amount of fuel consumed by vehicles travelling on our nation's highways. The response of this

Committee and others to the need for emergency legislation to meet the energy crisis is laudatory, and we hope that our continuing joint efforts will be productive. Further, we think that the approach of this Committee's bill of providing the Executive Branch with direct authority is far preferable to that in H.R. 11450, which in its present form would require Congressional review of any energy conservation plan, including reduced speed limits, before such a measure could become effective.

However, we would like to offer some suggestions for improving H.R. 11372. First, we believe that the authority to prescribe maximum speed limits during an energy emergency should extend to all highways and not just the interstate system. Second, the proposed authority should be predicated on an energy emergency, which we hope will be short-lived, and therefore should not be made a permanent part of title 23 of the United States Code. We would prefer to have the authority drafted to expire after a certain time period or at the end of the energy emergency. Finally, we believe that consideration should be given in the bill as to how the Federal Government would enforce this authority in the event that a State fails to implement the speed limit directive.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the Department supports the purpose of H.R. 11372, we suggest a somewhat different approach. Specifically, we urge that this Committee direct its efforts to enacting a speed limit provision as a part of the comprehensive energy bill now taking shape in the House of Representatives. This comprehensive bill should provide for speed limit reduction authority which should (1) apply to travel on all highways; (2) be predicated on an energy emergency; (3) enable the Executive Branch to implement this authority without prior Congressional approval, and (4) give guidance on the appropriate Federal action in the event that the speed limit requirements are not implemented by States.

This concludes my prepared testimony. I will now be happy to answer your questions.