

(Under general permission for Members to revise and extend their remarks on HR 13228)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JEFFERY COHELAN

In the House of Representatives

August 17, 1966

Mr. Chairman, there is a clear and pressing requirement for this automobile and tire safety legislation, and I will support it.

Last year our highway death toll set a new record. As a matter of fact, the frightening record of fatalities on our nation's highways in 1965 was more than thirty-five times as high as the number of Americans killed in Vietnam. Or, as the President pointed out in his message on transportation to the Congress, the 1.5 million that have been killed on our streets and highways since the introduction of the automobile is greater than all the combat deaths we have suffered in all our wars.

It is interesting to note that the Interstate Commerce Commission regulates the buses used in transporting passengers across state lines. The General Services Administration sets safety standards for vehicles it purchases, as does the Department of Defense for military vehicles. But automobiles sold to the general public are subject to Federal standards only in relation to brake fluid and seat belts.

Automotive safety standards, in brief, are limited in scope and largely voluntary in nature. There is no systematic means for developing or enforcing them. The record shows, though, that we must do more and better.

The Federal Government is presently engaged in regulating a wide variety of activities that bear upon public health and safety. These activities

range from the regulation of air traffic to the purity of food and the safety of drugs. Certainly it is consistent, clearly it makes sense to develop safety standards that can help limit one of the greatest causes of death and suffering present in our society.

The requirement for the Secretary of Commerce to establish Federal motor vehicle and vehicle equipment safety standards is equalled by the requirement to improve tire safety.

As the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission has pointed out, the need for minimum safety standards for automobile tires is beyond question. The Commission's studies indicate that present voluntary standards fail to provide realistic and adequate safeguards against unsafe tires. Its studies further raise grave doubts about the problem of "overloading" and whether performance requirements and allowable tolerances are sufficiently stringent in light of current high-speed turnpike driving.

This legislation should be passed, but it also should be improved. The bill now authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to order manufacturers to notify owners of any defects that are discovered, but it fails to provide penalties if the manufacturers do not comply. Civil penalties are certainly in order if this reasonable requirement is to have any real meaning.

The bill also could be appropriately strengthened if the Secretary of Commerce were given the authority to inspect auto-assembly plants. How else, as the NEW YORK TIMES has asked, is he to investigate failures to comply with the safety regulations he sets forth?

Both of these changes would help this legislation to carry out its intent. I urge that they be included and that this bill be passed so that the world's most efficient and economical highway transportation can also be its safest.