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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Earlier this year, I submitted to the Congress my proposed Energy Independence Act of 1975. In that comprehensive proposal, I recommended that the Congress modify provisions of the Clean Air Act of 1970 related to automobile emissions. I proposed strict emission controls that would still permit America to achieve a high-priority energy goal -- a 40 percent improvement in automobile fuel efficiency within four years.

Since that time, I have received information concerning potential health hazards from certain automobile pollution control devices first used on 1975 cars. In response to this information, I ordered an executive branch review of the problem and asked the appropriate officials to consider the various impacts of a range of emission alternatives as they relate to public health, energy goals, consumer prices and environmental objectives.

This review has now been completed. We have carefully surveyed this matter with many scientists and other qualified authorities. Although there is some disagreement on the data and conclusions, there is general accord that it is impossible to accurately predict the adverse impacts likely to result if we move to stricter automobile pollution standards now. Most of the experts agree that tighter emission controls will limit the fuel economy potential of our cars, and all agree that they will increase costs to the consumer.

As the automobile manufacturers have responded to Federal requirements to remove pollutants from automobile exhaust, other unregulated pollutants with potentially serious health implications have been produced. The same devices designed to control some emissions may result in the creation or aggravation of other pollutants. The result of government-mandated changes to our automobiles could actually increase prices, without substantial environmental benefits but with possible new risk to the Nation's health.

As a result of actions already taken, the automobile is rapidly becoming less of a contributor to air pollution. A major part of our task is behind us. But it was the easiest part. We have now reached the point where the further incremental progress we all want can only be achieved slowly and at higher cost.

I, therefore, urge the Congress to consider how uncoordinated Federal laws mandating automobile fuel efficiency and emission control might work against each other, and how they will effect other national objectives such as public health and a strong economy.

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In view of these considerations, I have decided to revise my Administration's position proposed in the Energy Independence Act. We simply cannot afford to be wrong on such serious policies. I have concluded that we should maintain the current automobile emission standards through model year 1981. This will enable us to achieve the following objectives:

- Health. Avoid increasing the potential adverse health impacts of certain automobile emission devices by retaining current controls on known health hazards, such as carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, without the risk of increasing other imperfectly understood but potentially dangerous pollutants such as sulfuric acid.
- Energy. Achieve an increase of 40 percent or greater in automobile fuel efficiency by 1980.
- Environment. Achieve almost all the environmental objectives we would have achieved by going to stricter standards.
- Economy. Minimize the inflationary impact of Federal regulations on the cost of automobiles to consumers. Avoid aggravating unemployment, especially in the automobile industry.

I recognize that this position modifies the auto emission standards contained in my proposed Energy Independence Act of 1975 which I transmitted to the Congress on January 30. However, as pointed out in recent testimony during Congressional hearings, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency has already noted that it is necessary to adjust the strict emission standards that I proposed. Administrator Train held hearings which considered the problem of sulfuric acid mist emitted from cars equipped with catalytic converters. Most new cars are equipped with the converter to meet current emission standards. The Administrator concluded that this is a potentially serious health hazard. The Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare agrees.

Evidence brought out at the EPA hearings and by other Government reports, shows that current catalytic converters do not emit enough sulfuric acid to constitute any immediate danger. However, if the auto emission standards are further lowered, as would be required if no change is made in the current law, then changes in the catalytic converter control system would be mandatory. This could produce substantially more sulfuric acid. This poses a health risk which my advisers believe we should not accept.

The Nation needs long-term automobile fuel efficiency and emission control policies so that we can begin to build cars meeting responsible energy and environmental standards. By replacing the current fleet with new cars offering more fuel efficiency while generating less pollution, we will make substantial progress toward our goals of better fuel efficiency, economic recovery and a healthier environment.

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I deplore the delay in resolving the conflict between Federal energy and environmental policies and laws. Such delays will only contribute to further economic disruption and continuing unacceptable levels of unemployment. Lack of a comprehensive and balanced policy would allow one objective to go forward at the expense of other critical national goals.

It may be that additional Government standards will be required in future years. This is something which EPA and other Government agencies will work on in cooperation with the appropriate committees of Congress.

Today we cannot shirk our responsibility to make decisions that establish realistic ground rules. We cannot afford to ignore the sulfuric acid problem. But our response must be more than simply another Government decree that sets another standard that could create another problem. We have a positive obligation to ensure that the steps we take today do not aggravate potentially serious health hazards.

Other technical information was brought to my attention as I reached my automobile emissions decision. In addition to a statement of facts, which I am making public today, I have asked my advisers to consult with the appropriate members of the Congress, particularly the committees now considering legislation in this field. They will be available to discuss these complex and interrelated issues and to provide all the detailed information available to the executive branch.

I urge the Congress to carefully consider all the issues involved in the potential conflict that one national objective -- clean air -- might have on our efforts to reach other national goals.

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