

MINUTES OF THE SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Les Donovan at 8:30 A.M. on March 16, 2005 in Room 527-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Anthony Hensley- excused

Vicki Schmidt - excused

Committee staff present:

Robert Waller, Kansas Legislative Research Department

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Colonel Seck, Superintendent, Kansas Highway Patrol

Secretary Deb Miller, Kansas Department of Transportation

Secretary Roderick Bremby, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Others attending:

See attached list.

Colonel Seck, Superintendent, Kansas Highway Patrol, said he would just start off with some startling statistics. In 2004, four-hundred and fifty-six men, women and children were killed in motor vehicle crashes on Kansas roadway, two thousands others suffered disabling injuries, and nearly twenty-three thousand more suffered non-incapacitating injuries. In Kansas, on average, more than one person is killed every day in motor vehicle-related crashes and every 21 minutes, someone is injured.

As a Highway Patrol Superintendent, he is all too familiar with the toll these traffic deaths and injuries take on families and friends. Seeing the results of this strengthens every Kansas Highway Patrol officer to do what they can to prevent these incidents. To the public they serve, it may not seem as important until they become personally involved. He, and his colleagues, Secretary Miller and Secretary Bremby are bannng together trying to find additional ways to deal with the epidemic. A handout titled "Stop The Epidemic" with comments from all three plus a Stop the Epidemic Fact Sheet were handed out. (Attachments 1 and 2)

Secretary Miller said they had their first public safety forum in Colby last night to help raise awareness of the problem, to listen, and to start a dialogue in order to gather ideas so that the very best and most effective program can be established. KDOT administers federal safety funds that flow to the state. Many of the dollars go to law enforcement or highway patrol and she thinks it legitimate to step back and ask if we are getting the best use we can out of these dollars. We need to ask if we have gaps in our laws, in our enforcement techniques, and in our educational approaches. Secretary Miller said they were looking at a wide range of things. She noted that typically rural states have higher fatality rates than urban states. She noted that this is not only a highway issue but also a public health issue. Our state is fortunate to have a well-funded highway program and that has helped our statistics however they have discovered that ninety-nine percent of the injuries and deaths are caused by driver error. She reported that a spokesman from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration has said that, in this country, if we can reach 90% use of seatbelts, we would reduce traffic fatalities by 34 %. Highway fatality is the number one killer of children, of teenagers and of people under the age of thirty-four. Thirty-seven percent of all crashes in Kansas occur in rural areas accounting for seventy-five percent of all crash fatalities statewide. She said one of the things being done currently is the highway patrol has 7 trailers and goes around and teaches parents, teachers and children how to use booster seats and how to properly install infant seats.

Senator O'Connor stated her concern that more needs to be done in the schools noting that there are many inexpensive ways to distribute educational materials there. She also noted that public service announcements were very effective. Senator O'Connor pointed out that 7 trailers weren't very many for 450,000 students.

Secretary Roderick Bremby, KDHE, said that Kansas is fortunate in that our timing is spectacular. A new health officer, Dr. Howard Rodenberg, has just been hired by the state. He has staffed trauma units in the past. He is an old emergency room doctor and has been teaching emergency room medicine. He staffed the trauma center at the Daytona Beach Speedway. He's a certified NASA flight instructor because with the shuttle launches he was training folks to be able to respond to incidents. So, he understands what this is all about. He is very powerful and convincing when he stands up in front of folks and says "I have had to put people back together." Not only does he have that background, but in terms of strong public health infectious disease he's had some experience in Central Africa. We are well positioned, as a state, on the issue we're presenting

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Transportation Committee at 8:30 A.M. on March 16, 2005 in Room 527-S of the Capitol.

today and in other public health issues.

We titled our presentation today "Stop the Epidemic" and the reason we say it's an epidemic is because it is in fact that. We don't have a solution today, we aren't looking to point fingers and place blame. But what we do want to do is ask for your attention and awareness around this issue. You have already given your time and attention but there are some other avenues we'd like for you to give some thought to. Nationally, roadway safety is a serious public health issue. In 2003, there were over 42,000 fatalities and almost 3 million injuries on our nation's roadways. We're here to let you know that three major agencies do consider these deaths and injuries to be one of our state's most serious public health problems.

We've talked about the emotional and human toll that these motor vehicle crashes take, and we cannot place a monetary value on a human life, yet we must acknowledge that they also take an economic toll. On a state level, fatal and injury crashes cost every person in Kansas more than \$1,015 every year. Last year, it totaled more than \$3 billion dollars. The share borne by taxpayers is staggering: national averages indicate that the public pays 12 % of the cost of crash injuries treated in an emergency department, 26% of the cost of injuries requiring hospitalization; and 48 % of the cost of injuries treated in a rehabilitation hospital. That's the public cost, not the individual's cost. Even the economic impact associated with not wearing a seatbelt is staggering. It's reported that, on average, hospital cost for unbuckled crash victims are 50% higher than for a belted victim. Society, not the victim involved, bears about 85% of these costs. As high as these costs may be, they fail to account for the pain and suffering caused by life-altering injuries and deaths.

KDOT is funding programs such as Click It or Ticket program and state-wide sobriety check points. KDHE leads Kansas SAFE Kids, Inc. We are doing many things but we still have an epidemic. The goal is a simple one, the solution is more complex.

Senator Palmer voiced concern with the high number of deer related accidents and suggested that Wildlife and Parks be included in the effort to seek ways to decrease the number of vehicle related deaths and injuries. She also mentioned alcohol being a factor and asked the presenters if there was a list of priorities of things that need to be worked on.

Secretary Miller said that 44% of the fatalities are alcohol related, so clearly as we go down the list of contributing factors it's a very large one. They have a lot of information and are trying to get a little smarter and more sophisticated in how to interpret and use it. They have started a project, working with Kansas State University, called a data mining activity, attempting to go into the data they already have and making better use of it and answering the kind of questions being asked. If we were going to start putting a range of where to start addressing the problem, how would we do that? All of these things are being looked at. They have people who's main focus is looking at traffic safety, both in Colonel Seck's department and in hers. They know a lot but the question is how can things be done better. Secretary Miller said that they are in the raising awareness and fact gathering stage and not yet to the making recommendations stage.

Secretary Bremby again stressed that 85% of the cost, of injuries associated with the folks not belted, are public costs.

Secretary Miller introduced Wendall Meyer, Assistant Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration. His organization is very interested in lowering the national fatality rate and they are very helpful to the state.

Chairman Donovan asked if there were any federal funds available to help promote safety. Secretary Miller said the funds were usually given as an incentive for states to pass laws. For instance, when Kansas went down to a .08 law for drinking, it gave us the opportunity to receive some funds. She thinks there are incentive funds for having a primary seat belt law.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.

Next meeting is scheduled for March 22, 2005.