

The President's Radio Address *December 28, 1996*

As we approach the New Year, I hope all Americans will think about the blessings we share and our obligation to use those blessings wisely. The New Year is about opportunity, about renewed chances to make the most of our God-given potential. But as always, with opportunity comes responsibility; that is America's basic bargain.

Today I want to talk about one of our greatest responsibilities, taking care to protect ourselves and our children. One of the most important places to do that is on the road. Especially at this time of year, too many people pose a threat to themselves and to others by drinking and driving. That's why I fought to make it illegal for all people under 21 to drive with any alcohol in their blood, and that is now the law in 34 of our States. We should use the privilege of a driver's license to demand responsibility when it comes to drugs by insisting that teens pass a drug test as a condition of getting a driver's license. Let's send a simple message to our children, our families, and our friends: Driving under the influence of drug or alcohol is wrong; it's illegal; it can kill.

There's more we must do to meet the fundamental rules of safety. We must all wear seatbelts, which are the first line of defense against injuries and fatalities, saving 10,000 lives last year alone. We must use child safety seats for small children and always keep children 12 and under buckled up in the back seat, where they are safest. And we must all learn about the proper use of airbags, one of our most important safety tools.

In recent months, some concerns have been raised about airbags. But this much is clear: Airbags do save lives, almost 1,700 since their introduction. At the same time, airbags inflate with considerable force and can pose risks to children sitting unbuckled in the front passenger seat, instead of buckled up in the back seat where they belong. That's why our Department of Transportation is working with auto and insurance companies, safety groups, and parents and families to make airbags safer for children, so that together with seatbelts and other safety measures, they do provide the full protection our families need.

Researchers are now developing a new generation of "smart" airbags, which will determine the size of the passenger and inflate just enough to protect them without hurting them. But while we wait for this new technology, there are steps we can take now to protect our children.

This November our administration's Department of Transportation announced we would soon propose a series of short-term steps to make airbags safer for kids. Right away, we required better and more visible warning labels in cars and on child safety seats, so that no one forgets to keep small children buckled up in the back seat.

Today I am pleased to announce we are sending forward three additional proposals to protect our children, as outlined last month by the Department of Transportation. First, under these new rules, auto manufacturers will be able to install less powerful airbags, to reduce the risk to children and to smaller and older adults. Second, car dealers will be able to deactivate the airbags of any owner who requests it, as long as the owner understands the risk of doing so. For both of these measures, we will begin taking public comment next week, and they could take effect as early as this spring. Finally, effective immediately, we are extending a rule that lets manufacturers install cut-off switches in cars that don't have back seats or room for child safety seats. Those who cannot buckle a child safely in the back seat will be able to switch off the airbag while the child rides in the front.

Of course, airbags have always been just part of the solutions. In rear or side collisions, airbags are not even meant to inflate. That's why we must always wear our seatbelts: it protects us in all kinds of collisions. If there is one thing we can do to save thousands of American lives, it is to increase seatbelt use nationwide. Today I am directing the Secretary of Transportation to work with the Congress, the States, and other concerned Americans to report back to me with a plan to do just that.

The steps we are taking will make our roads safer and our children more secure. We are making airbags safer for our children. We are working to increase the use of seatbelts nationwide. And we are demanding the responsibility

that comes with the privilege of driving. That's the way to ensure that families go for a drive with safety, security, and peace of mind. If we'll all just take that responsibility, both on and off the road, if we all do our share to protect our children and our families and meet our obligations to each other, we will be able to seize the remarkable opportunities that this New Year will bring.

In this season of renewal, let us resolve to seize that opportunity and to rise to that responsibility, to make the most of 1997. Hillary and I are very grateful we've had the chance to

serve in this last year; we're very grateful for all the American people have done for our family in this past year. We wish you and your families a happy New Year, and we look forward to working with you in the years ahead to meet our challenges and make our Nation a stronger, safer place for all Americans.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10:41 a.m. on December 27 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 28.

Statement on the Resolution of the Korean Peninsula Submarine Incident *December 29, 1996*

I welcome today's official statement by North Korea conveying its deep regret for the submarine incident in South Korea last September. I am pleased that Pyongyang has pledged to prevent the recurrence of such an incident and has expressed its willingness to work with others for durable peace and stability on the Peninsula. This is a significant development, which I hope will contribute to the reduction of tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

I extend my appreciation to President Kim Yong-sam for his personal efforts to resolve the submarine incursion in a way that opens the door for future South-North dialog. The United States and South Korea have cooperated closely as firm allies to resolve this issue. I hope discussions can now begin to move forward on the four-party peace talks which President Kim Yong-sam and I offered last April.