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James C. Hagerty, Press Secretary to the President

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have today signed H. R. 9821, the "Federal Aid Highway Act of 1958," which authorizes increased Federal assistance to the States for the construction of roads and highways. I approve this bill with serious misgivings because of certain of its provisions which I regard as grave defects. Some of them could even create unfortunate precedents that may be difficult to disregard in the future.

The principal factors influencing me toward favorable action are three. The first is the desirability of speeding up construction of our badly needed system of Interstate Highways, as was proposed in recommendations I recently submitted to the Congress. The second is the hope that in the acceleration of work on this system and on the other federal-aid highway programs some impetus may promptly be given to public and private efforts to increase employment. The third is the temporary character of what I believe to be the faulty provisions of the bill; only because these are not permanently contemplated can I give my approval to this legislation.

Important progress has been made in the development of an improved and enlarged highway system under the Highway Act of 1956. Under this Act and related legislation, Federal expenditures for public roads will approximate 2.3 billion dollars in Fiscal Year 1959. This is over half a billion dollars more than in the present fiscal year and two and one-half times as much as in Fiscal Year 1957.

The expansion and improvement of our roads and highways have been major factors in the development of our economy and will continue to be so in the years ahead. Nevertheless, the defects to which I refer seem to me to be so serious that I am constrained to invite special attention to them in the hope they will be completely eliminated in future legislation.

The first and most important of these defects is the violation of the long established principle of a 50-50 sharing of Federal and State costs of federal-aid highway programs other than the Interstate System. H. R. 9821 substitutes, in the added program authorized for this year, a two to one ratio for this long established principle. I deplore the possibility that some may try to use this departure from a sound arrangement as a precedent for emulation. This I would resist.

The second defect is the provision for Federal advances to State governments to finance most of their one-third share of the cost of the additional primary, secondary and urban highway construction authorized by this legislation. Here again we could create a damaging precedent for the future.

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