

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 11, 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR MARCIA HALE

FROM: Lynn Cutler 

SUBJECT: Seat Belt Safety Issues

CC: Sylvia Mathews, John Podesta, Rahm Emanuel, Kitty Higgins, Bruce Reed, Craig Smith, Doug Sosnik, Gene Sperling, Ann Lewis, Dorothy Robyn, Elizabeth Drye

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As we discussed today, there is serious opposition among the bipartisan elected officials' groups and the Governors' highway administrators to Federal legislation that "mandates" enactments of primary seat belt laws. While Governor Glendening will be supportive, as will a few other elected officials, state and local elected officials have expressed their opposition loudly and clearly. I expect that is no surprise to anyone.

Thursday, stories appeared on the front page of *USA Today* and in the *Detroit Free Press* (see attachments) that essentially discussed the planned announcement of the initiative and the resulting tension between the Administration and the Governors. There was also an AP story (attached) that is more descriptive than sensational, and does not talk about the conflicts. The Detroit article also indicates that there may be softening of support for the Administration's position from the Big Three automakers. At any rate, Phil Recht at DOT has indicated that Ford got nervous because they did not want to upset the Governors. By the end of the day on Thursday, however, Recht had talked to enough people in the auto industry, and reminded them that they were on record before a Senate committee in support of the initiative, that he believes the support has solidified.

It would also appear that another potential difficulty is under control. That is the questions raised by some African American state officials about offering the police another reason to randomly stop motorists. However, meetings were held with the Urban League, the NAACP, and the ACLU and it has been reported to me that they are fine with the initiative. Some of these contacts were from DOT and some were made by the safety groups. As you know, Secretary Slater is scheduled to testify on this issue on Thursday, April 17.

In addition to the safety groups, I would think that we could get strong support from the medical community (especially emergency room doctors), from the insurance carriers and others.

Seat Belt Memo  
Page Two

Also, the coalition that was established on the air bag issue is putting together a public awareness and education campaign to increase seat belt usage.

Obviously, the President cares about this issue, and with good reason: the U.S. has a usage rate of 68%, the lowest among the industrialized nations. Of the people who die in car crashes, 50% are not wearing seat belts. Every year, 42,000 people die in car accidents, and this is the biggest killer among people ages 5-27.

On a separate issue -- that of the President issuing an Executive Order about mandatory use of seat belts on Federal lands, a preliminary check shows minimal opposition from the state and local groups, presumably because they do not have to enforce it.

# Plan links seat belt use, road funding

By Jayne O'Donnell  
USA TODAY

The Clinton administration is expected to announce a controversial plan to get states to increase seat-belt use or lose millions in highway funding.

The plan, which could be out as early as next week, seeks to push seat-belt use to at least 85% from 68% now.

The administration initially would reward states with extra money if they beef up enforcement of seat-belt laws and get more people to wear belts.

But the administration also has drafted legislation that would withhold highway funds from states that don't enact tougher belt laws or achieve big gains in belt use by 2003.

Governors strongly oppose such sanctions. So does Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz. He wrote to governors Tuesday asking them to voluntarily enact better belt laws and enforce them more aggressively.

"It seems to me (President Clinton is) going the way of the 55 mile-per-hour speed limit," McCain says. "That was so unpopular it was repealed."

The administration is determined to get belt use up — even if it gets heat from critics.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that seat belts saved 9,797 lives in 1995. If 85% of the population used belts, 6,920 more lives would have been saved, NHTSA says.

States can boost belt use anyway they want, but the administration will push for more stringent seat belt laws.

The plan is also expected to encourage states to hit motorists who don't buckle up with penalty points, which raise motorists' insurance rates.

Every state except New Hampshire requires motorists to wear safety belts.

But in most states, police can give you a ticket for not wearing your belt only if you are stopped for another violation, like speeding.

Just 11 states have "primary" seat-belt laws: a police officer can stop you simply for not buckling up. The administration wants states to pass primary belt laws and enforce them aggressively.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 1997**

Detroit Free Press  
**freep/business**

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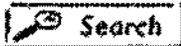
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## U.S. seat belt push vexes state advisers

April 10, 1997

BY JANET L. FIX  
 Free Press Washington Staff

WASHINGTON -- Even before he unveils his big push to boost seat belt use, a group of state safety officials is criticizing President Bill Clinton for promoting sanctions against states that don't pass tough belt use laws.

The National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives, in a letter obtained by the Free Press, has blasted a Clinton administration plan to penalize states that don't pass by 2003 belt laws that would allow police officers to stop and ticket drivers who don't buckle up.

Only 11 states have such laws. Michigan is not among them.

Fewer than two-thirds of Americans regularly buckle up -- a fact blamed for the deaths of 38 children and 21 adults killed in recent years by air bags. Most of those killed were not properly buckled, the government says.

Clinton hopes to change this by announcing later this month a major initiative designed to increase U.S. seat belt use to over 90 percent. A White House official is expected to meet today with federal safety officials to discuss that plan.

The president's seat belt plan is not expected to talk about punishing states that don't comply. Rather, the administration is separately pushing legislation that would provide for penalties against states that don't pass tough belt laws.

Clinton's pending plan will focus on rewarding states that do with financial incentives, safety groups say.

While dangling carrots in his public crusade, the big stick of possible sanctions is in proposed legislation that would redirect 1.5

percent of a state's federal highway construction money to safety education programs. After 2003, 3 percent of the money would be redirected.

But any talk of sanctions would surely rile some groups that oppose any federal effort that forces states to do something politically unpopular.

In an April 1 letter to Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Rodney Slater, the highway safety representatives criticized the use of sanctions. They chided the Clinton administration for not first consulting with them, because they are the people in 50 states who direct safety enforcement and education.

"DOT is making a decision which will significantly impact states without first discussing the issue with them," said Laura Ludwig, chairwoman of the highway safety group.

Sanctions are a bad idea, this group and other safety officials say.

"States don't like be told what to do by the federal government," said Phil Haseltine, president of the American Coalition for Traffic Safety, a safety education group funded by the auto industry.

"Now more than ever, state legislators are prone to get their back up if they feel they're being blackmailed by the feds."

Betty Mercer, Michigan's highway safety representative, agreed. "Incentives work because in every state there are different needs and different solutions," she said. "States know best what needs to be done to protect their citizens."

Haseltine's group has proposed incentive grants for states that pass belt laws that carry big fines and penalty points on drivers' licenses. Seat belt violations in most states carry less than \$25 fines and no penalty points.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan successfully used the threat of sanctions to get legislatures in all 50 states to adopt 21 as the legal drinking age.

But more recently, states and Congress balked at sanctions designed to force a national 55

m.p.h. speed limit.

LEVEL 1 - 1 OF 1 STORY

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AP Online

April 10, 1997; Thursday 11:46 Eastern Time

SECTION: Washington - general news

LENGTH: 347 words

HEADLINE: Clinton Weighs Tough Seat-Belt Plan AP-Clinton-Seat-Belt

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

The White House is considering an initiative to require states to stiffen seat-belt enforcement or lose control over millions of dollars in federal highway money, officials said today.

Aides said Clinton planned next week to announce the plan, which is still being revised.

The goal is to prod more states to adopt "primary" seat belt laws, which means police can stop you simply for not buckling up, or increase seat-belt use from 68 percent to 85 percent.

Every state except New Hampshire requires motorists to wear seat belts, but only 11 have primary seat-belt laws. Police in the other states cannot issue seat-belt tickets unless they stop drivers for another violations.

An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the measure likely would require states to adopt primary seat-belt laws by Sept. 30, 2002, or have 1.5 percent of their highway construction funds shifted to seat-belt enforcement programs. It would increase to 3 percent in subsequent years.

The administration may allow a state to forgo the primary seat-belt law if at least 80 percent of its drivers use seat belts.

The administration calls it a "soft sanction."

The idea dovetails with an administration plan to make \$125 million available to states that adopt primary seat-belt laws or show that at least 80 percent of its drivers use safety belts.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: April 10, 1997

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# NATIONAL JOURNAL'S Congress Daily/A.M.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 1997

## Kasich Wants New Clinton Budget In Redux Of 104th

Pointing to a new study showing the Clinton administration's FY98 budget is far out of balance, **House Budget Chairman Kasich** Monday evening demanded the administration send a new spending blueprint to Capitol Hill. "I think the president and his team ought to send us another budget," Kasich told reporters after the CBO reported the administration's plan would result in a \$69 billion deficit in FY2002. The administration had estimated that using its economic assumptions — rather than the CBO's — its budget plan would result in a \$17 billion surplus in 2002. Administration officials had attempted to hedge their bets by including a trigger that would phase out tax cuts and increase spending cuts if its deficit targets were not met. Republicans, however, have rejected the triggers, and Kasich dismissed them again Monday.

In response Monday, White House officials disagreed with the CBO analysis and said the president would not resubmit a

budget since he already provided a safety mechanism to deal with such an eventuality. "We're not going to submit a new budget," OMB spokesman Larry Haas said. "We've submitted thousands of pages of material, and a mechanism to close the gap between the CBO and the OMB. We think we have gone the extra mile." He said the White House went out of its way to accommodate Hill Republicans by using the CBO's formula to calculate its tax proposals, while the CBO failed to meet repeated requests to provide its economic assumptions as a guideline for the administration. Although the White House clearly anticipated its budget would not achieve balance by the CBO's estimates, Haas insisted the OMB's assumptions are more accurate than the CBO's. "We feel that we've done about everything we can do. We don't think we need to do more," he said.

Kasich's comments Monday are similar to ones made by Republican leaders during the protracted budget talks of

*Continued on Page 4*

SCHEDULE
<b>SENATE</b> Convenes at 9:30 a.m. to resume consideration of S.J.Res. 1, Balanced Budget Constitutional Amendment, on which a final roll call vote is scheduled for 5:15 p.m.
<b>HOUSE</b> Convenes at 12:30 p.m. After 2 p.m., the House is scheduled to consider under suspension of the rules H.Con.Res. 31, Regarding Public Display of the 10th Commandments. No recorded votes are scheduled.
<b>SENATE COMMITTEES</b>
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>
<b>SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS</b> Full committee hearing on school lunch and breakfast programs. G-59 DSOB. 10 a.m.

*Continued on Page 4*

## Pitches Ahead For Projects In ISTEA

Thirty House members are slated to appear today and Thursday before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to plead their case on why special projects in their districts should be included in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act reauthorization. Of the \$156 billion authorized in the 1991 ISTEA bill, \$6.1 billion — or

5 percent — was dedicated over six years to specific projects requested by members of Congress. House and Senate committees have yet to decide how much will go toward member-requested projects in this year's ISTEA bill. Some call these projects "pork," while others call them "high priorities." How they are labeled is an increasingly sensitive subject for legislators who want to bring projects back to their home states or districts, but cringe when they are accused of profiting politically from the public trough. "All the attention given to these things is kind of skewed," Transportation and Infrastructure Committee spokesman Jeff Nelligan said.

Nelligan defended the process of members choosing where at least some of the ISTEA money goes, and emphasized the panel thoroughly reviews member-requested projects using a 14-point criteria to assure they are valuable investments. "These members vote for the [highway] taxes and distribute the taxes [through state-by-state formulas], so they should be able to have a say in where a small portion of it goes," Nelligan said. He objects to the term "pork" for such projects, preferring instead the term "high priority projects." But Citizens Against Government Waste President Tom Schatz argues state transportation directors are better qualified than

*Continued on Page 5*

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**WHITE HOUSE STAFFING MEMORANDUM**

DATE: 1/9/97 ACTION/CONCURRENCE/COMMENT DUE BY: 1/13/97

SUBJECT: Seatbelt Directive

	ACTION	FYI		ACTION	FYI
VICE PRESIDENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	McCURRY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PANETTA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	McGINTY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
McLARTY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NASH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ICKES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	QUINN	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LIEBERMAN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	RASCO	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RAINES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	REED 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BAER	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	SOSNIK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CURRY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	STEPHANOPOULOS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EMANUEL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	STIGLITZ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
GIBBONS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	STREETT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HALE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	TYSON	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HERMAN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	HAWLEY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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HILLEY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>Bowles</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
KLAIN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>Radd</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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LINDSEY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>Mathews</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<u>Coak</u>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

REMARKS: Comments ?

RESPONSE:



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

THE DIRECTOR

January 7, 1997

'97 JAN 8 PM4:48

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Franklin D. Raines  
Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Raines", written over the printed name and title.

SUBJECT: Proposed Memorandum Entitled "Increasing Seatbelt Use Nationwide"

SUMMARY: This memorandum forwards for your consideration a proposed memorandum that was prepared by this office. The proposed memorandum would direct the Secretary of Transportation to prepare a plan to increase the use of seatbelts nationwide.

BACKGROUND: In your radio address on Saturday December 28, you directed the Secretary of Transportation to work with concerned parties to prepare a plan to increase the use of seatbelts nationwide. Seatbelts protect passengers not only in frontal crashes, but also in side, rear, and rollover crashes. Seatbelt use saves about 10,000 lives each year and about 70% of the population use seatbelts. Increasing seatbelt use would clearly save more lives and reduce injuries.

To implement your December 28th decision, the proposed memorandum would direct the Secretary of Transportation ("Secretary") to work with the Congress, the states, and other concerned Americans, including the automobile and insurance industries, and consumer groups, to prepare a plan to increase the use of seatbelts nationwide. The plan would address, among other things, state laws that require the use of seatbelts, assistance from the Department of Transportation to improve those state laws, and education efforts by the Department of Transportation to help the public understand the need to wear seatbelts. The Secretary would submit the plan to you within 45 days from the date of the memorandum.

None of the affected agencies objects to the memorandum.

RECOMMENDATION: I recommend that you sign the proposed memorandum.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT:           Increasing Seatbelt Use Nationwide

We have made steady progress in improving highway safety over the years. However, there are still far too many tragic and unnecessary deaths and injuries on the nation's roads. As a first line of defense, we must all wear seatbelts. Seatbelts protect passengers not only in frontal crashes, but also in side, rear, and rollover crashes, saving about 10,000 lives a year. I understand that about 70% of the population use seat belts. Increasing seat belt use will clearly save more lives and reduce injuries.

I hereby direct the Secretary of Transportation, working with the Congress, the states, and other concerned Americans, including the automobile and insurance industries, and consumer groups, to report back to me in 45 days with a plan to increase the use of seatbelts nationwide. The plan shall address, among other things, the state laws that require the use of seatbelts, assistance from the Department of Transportation to improve those state laws, and education efforts by the Department of Transportation to help the public understand the need to wear seatbelts.

The Secretary of Transportation is authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the Federal Register.

THE WHITE HOUSE,

# HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR

REPORTS ON THE SCIENCES, PLUS EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

## Seeking equivalent of fire alarm for biological warfare

By Anita Manning  
USA TODAY

MIAMI BEACH — The threat of an attack on Americans by enemies using biological agents is real, say Department of Defense experts, who are actively encouraging scientists at a meeting of the American Society for Microbiology here to come up with solutions.

DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, a low-profile but well-funded agency of the Department of Defense — its budget is \$2 billion a year — is financing unconventional research projects aimed at detecting and neutralizing biological weapons.

At present, when there is a threat of biological attack, a response team dons protective gear and attempts to identify the agent and decontaminate people, whether military or civilian. For many of these agents, such as botulism or plague, there are treatments or vaccines, "but not all," says Lawrence H. Dubois, director of DARPA's defense sciences office. "It's scary. And we're vulnerable."

DARPA was formed 40 years ago to develop research for the Department of Defense. It created the Internet and has focused on engineering and materials development for the military. Now it's looking toward biology, says Stephen S. Morse, a DARPA program manager. "We think the field is ripe for revolution," he says. "Our job is to help bring those technologies that are over the horizon to reality."

The agency is prepared to spend \$80 million a year on research projects Dubois calls "high risk," because they have a good chance of failing but a "high payoff" if they succeed. Among them:

► Researchers at the University of Alabama are trying to develop a small biosensor that "could tell you if the person next to you is breathing tuberculosis or flu," says DARPA program manager Mildred Donlon. Ideally, she says, it would be small enough to be held in the hand or worn on the body and would detect in minutes what sort of biological contaminant is in the air.

"We hope our level of concern will never have to reach what exists now for radon or smoke detection," says Shaun B. Jones of DARPA, "but having said that, it might. We want to have tools that an individual could carry like a Walkman or put into the home like a smoke detector." (Biological attacks) aren't advertised. They're something we have to worry about in our cities, at conventions. We have to deal with the fact that we will be surprised, but we will be able to respond as quickly as grabbing a fire extinguisher off the wall."

► A project at the University of Virginia has researchers experimenting with ways to arm the body with "blood scrubbers," polymers tacked onto red blood cells that have been found to reduce by 1 million times the level of disease-causing organisms in the body.

If the research pans out, says Dubois, it could be used before exposure or afterward, and could be effective against many different pathogens. "The investigators are generating results that could be used with Ebola or Marburg," he says, referring to two fatal viruses for which science has no prevention and no cure.

Still, results will come slowly, Jones says. "There is a lot more good science that needs to be done. But we've demonstrated proof of a concept ... and it's very exciting."

USA TODAY  
TUESDAY, MAY 6, 1997

# An 'epidemic' of aggressive driving

## Angry motorists, not drunks, now top list of commuters' concerns

By Kevin V. Johnson  
USA TODAY

CHICAGO — Tom Bracken, 56, a pleasant English professor, has noticed distinct changes in his driving since he moved to Chicago from the suburbs five years ago.

Before, he rarely honked his horn. Now, "I honk my horn if the traffic stops to let somebody back into a parking place," he says.

But that's just the beginning. "If somebody tries to pass me on the right, I speed up," he says. "I make left turns after the light turns red, even if I'm the second or third person in the lane." And on the highway, "I get in the left lane and sort of tailgate anybody who isn't doing the speed of that lane. I never used to do any of that." Why does he do it now? "I don't know," James says. "Aggressiveness begets aggressiveness, I guess."

Maybe.

A new poll by the Potomac chapter of the Automobile Association of America (AAA), serving the Washington, D.C., area, says that 44% of area drivers think aggressive driving is the biggest threat to highway safety. Respondents said they were more worried about aggressive driving than about drunken driving. And over half confessed to having been aggressive drivers themselves in the last year.

The poll reinforces a study of more than 10,000 media and police reports, done for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, that found a 51% increase in violent driving incidents between 1990 and 1995.

"It's an issue of concern all over the country," says Stephanie Faul of the AAA Foundation. "There is a perception that it is getting worse."

"It's becoming a national epidemic," says Bob Wall, traffic safety coordinator for the Fairfax County, Va., police, who speaks on the issue around the country.

"There's no official definition of aggressive driving, but almost everybody knows it when he or she sees it. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) list currently includes: weaving in and out of traffic, excessive horn honking, running red lights, tailgating, passing on the right, making obscene gestures, screaming and headlight flashing. NHTSA says about 66% of all traffic fatalities annually are caused by such behaviors — more, even, than fatalities involving alcohol.

These actions are illegal in many jurisdictions. But laws are seldom enforced because citizens don't tell police it's a priority, says Lisa Sheikh, a Washington area child welfare researcher who started Citizens Against Speeding and Aggressive Driving, modeled after Mothers Against Drunk Driving. "For years, we've asked police for protection from murderers and rapists, but not from tailgaters and



By Robert Harshbarger, USA TODAY

Putting on the brakes: Bill Barth, right, tries to get his aggressive driving under control with the help of therapist Arnold Nerenberg, who advises his patients to have compassion for other drivers by thinking of their own mistakes and visualizing nonaggressive responses.

## Shifting gears on behavior

Therapists and traffic experts are beginning to use strategies that aim to help drivers recognize and change their behavior before they act it out.

"People typically continue their behavior until it becomes painful enough for them to stop," says Julie Hinton, director of the Safety Council of the Ozarks in Springfield, Mo.

She is co-creator of an eight-hour video course aimed at reducing aggressive driving. A 1994 review of the program in Massachusetts — where drivers were offered

the course in lieu of license suspension — found that the drivers had 77% fewer accidents in the year after taking the course than the year before.

"If you can get people to look at their behavior and see what's coming, you can hopefully get them to change before the consequences become too painful," Hinton says.

Meanwhile, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers this advice to people who encounter aggressive drivers:

▶ Do not challenge them

by speeding up or attempting to hold your own in your travel lane.

▶ Avoid eye contact.

▶ Ignore gestures and refuse to return them.

▶ Report aggressive drivers to the appropriate authorities.

▶ If you have a cell phone and can do it safely, call the local police.

▶ If an aggressive driver is involved in a crash farther down the road, stop a safe distance from the crime scene, wait for the police to arrive and report the driving behavior you witnessed.

speeders," she says.

Last year in McLean, Va., a tailgating incident between drivers in a Jeep and a Beretta quickly escalated to a race. And then, according to witnesses, the drivers — traveling at speeds well over 30 miles an hour — swerved into oncoming traffic. Three people were killed in a four-car crash that saw the Beretta burtle into a van.

Police took notice. In the Washington, D.C., area, a crackdown on aggressive driving that involves 20 police agencies started April 29. The campaign, called Smooth Operator, runs until September and includes four separate weeks of intense "enforcement waves," interspersed with random crackdowns on offenders.

"The idea is that people are getting too upset and driving too fast," says Wall, the cam-

campaign coordinator. "We want to yank their chains and say, 'Hey, cool out.'"

But experts say aggressive driving has a welter of causes and curbing it will require more than just traffic tickets. To begin with, drivers feel "a baseline physical buzz," says Carol Tavris, author of *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (Touchstone Books, \$11). "Driving is a stressor, and the body generates adrenalin and stress hormones to help you deal with it. The body basically does all the things it would do to prepare you to fight. So a provocation that you might otherwise laugh off can more easily set you off."

California psychologist Arnold Nerenberg is more blunt: "You feel like you're in a war."

Psychological factors, on the other hand, arise both on and off the road. On the road, driv-

ers are mentally stressed simply because congestion is increasing. In the last 10 years, according to NHTSA, the number of vehicle miles driven annually is up 35%, while the number of miles of road has increased just 1%. The number of vehicles has also risen.

And lives are faster paced. "We'd probably all like to just e-mail ourselves from Point A to Point B," Sheikh says.

That pace, says Redford Williams, director of the Behavioral Medicine Research Center at Duke University, means that frequently "people are not as much in control of their lives." And that means an increase in hostility. Result: At least 20% of adults, Williams says, have hostility levels serious enough to be a health hazard.

All of which is compounded by a cultural change that, Tavris says, de-emphasizes civility.

"It used to be there was a rule of courtesy, for the road just as for writing thank-you notes. Now, everything is a personal insult." And we react in line with years of pop psychological advice that says "anger is good to get out," Tavris says. "Never mind who it lands on."

Especially if we are in a car. "If someone on the road upsets you," Nerenberg says, "that individual's whole identity is encapsulated in this bad thing he did. He is not seen as a whole person. There's an urge to express your aggression on this anonymous other, to think, 'I can't let him get away with this.' The thin veneer of civilization is removed."

And a car, which literally cocoons the driver in a shell, offers anonymity in a virtual tank. "You feel like you're invincible," says Richard Wark, researcher at the Northwestern University Traffic Institute. "They provide a buffer zone" that makes it easier to de-humanize the other driver than it would be if, for instance, you were walking down a crowded hallway. "Face-to-face contact with others acts as a restraint, and people are much more polite," he says.

Nerenberg says he advises patients to have compassion for other drivers by thinking of their own mistakes and to visualize nonaggressive responses without acting it out.

"Actually," he says, "half the battle is recognizing that you have a problem."

Still, suppressing aggressive desires is difficult. "Nothing makes me happier," Williams admits, "than to have a really fast car and be at the head of the line at the light and leave everybody in the dust."