

Maryland also has its own "disaster area." I am referring to the disaster of death and injuries which occur on our highways and public thoroughfares. True, this is not a declared disaster area of national emergency, as were the hurricanes and floods of past months, but this is an insidious stealthy disaster that plucks the lives of our unsuspecting citizens at a terrifying rate.

Webster in his dictionary defines "disaster" as, "a sudden or great misfortune which brings destruction of life or property or utter defeat." What could fit this description better than the deaths of 698 people in Maryland traffic accidents last year? In the four months of 1966, 232 persons already have died in traffic accidents. This is an increase of 25 persons over last year's record. This is not merely a statistic; this represents the men, women and children who on an ordinary day got into the family car to make an ordinary trip—only this trip didn't have ordinary results, for these people never returned alive. Examples like these have turned the streets and highways of Maryland into an undeclared disaster area.

This condition is not confined to the State of Maryland alone. Across the country, traffic disasters cost the lives of more than 50,000 people last year. An equivalent disaster rate at sea would require the sinking of 15 to 20 ocean liners. In the air, it would require 500 jet airplanes to crash which would mean an average of ten crashes a week. You can imagine the public uproar and national state of emergency that would provoke. Yet, each year the death toll from traffic accidents rises and we stand by, wringing our hands, apparently helpless to stop highway disasters.

The argument is made, of course, that more people are driving automobiles each year and so the resulting increase in traffic deaths is only a normal consequence. Now I ask you, can we resign ourselves to such passive acceptance to mass slaughter? No, I don't think any of us can—especially when we realize that four out of five traffic accidents result from avoidable driver errors. Driver errors . . . not faulty car mechanics, safety devices, or poor road conditions . . . but careless mistakes caused by drivers. This means that if drivers had exercised good judgement, the victims of four-fifths of our accidents would still be live, productive human beings today.

All the statistical evidence, all the safety improvements on automobiles, all the motor vehicle legislation give way to one compelling fact and that is that an overwhelming majority of traffic disasters were caused by driver errors and hence could be avoided by an act of the driver's will. Thus, as long as the man behind the wheel makes the final judgement for the