

Save gas, kill people

S.O.B.'S STORY (spouse of boss) DAN HAMMES

So, why did he stop there?

Last week, our president decreed that the average mileage of all new cars should be 54.5 miles per gallon as of 2025.

That sounds really, really good.

If any thick-skulled taxpayers were too dull to fully understand just how wonderful this really is, various government agencies provided an abundance of press releases to explain what fortuitous we are to have such an enlightened leader.

Why, gushed a missive from the EPA, American consumers will save more than a trillion dollars every single year n a trillion dollars! - once President Obama's (who, incidentally, does not fly coach) vision on travel for the rest of us is realized.

Assuming we survive the mandate, that is.

But more on that later.

The real puzzler about our president's vision for transportation for other people is why he stopped at 54.5? Why not 62.8? Or how about an even 70 miles per gallon?

In fairness to President Obama, our government has been in the business of mandating average fuel mileage for years. Perhaps it is something bureaucrats here learned from bureaucrats in the Soviet Union. For years central planners there issued similar edicts.

Instead of mandating gas mileage, the elites there would decree how much corn would be produced, how many tractors built, tires made or gallons of mouthwash sold.

Not that it ever turned out that well. Consumers deserve more credit than some politicians give them. In the end, people will buy what they think is best for their families regardless what people in government may deem is best for the rest of us.

But back on topic.

President Obama's edict of last week may be a bit of a reach. If someone could make a vehicle that could provide safe, comfortable transportation AND get 54.5 miles per gallon, wouldn't they be doing it already? Of course this doesn't make him any different than previous presidents who pandered to the environmental lobbies.

But it is true this president is the most devout in his worship of all things green n despite repeated failures in his effort to change the laws of nature and physics.

It is unsettling that, like so many wealthy liberal-types, his preaching about the environment applies to other people. Let's not forget, this is the same guy who, rather than have the First Lady delay one day, sent his wife halfway across the world with a fleet of jets for a vacation. He is also the same guy who in a similar fleet of jets sent his 13-year-old daughter on vacation to Mexico.

All carbon footprints, apparently, are not created equal.

But even if government edicts rarely apply to the government-types who issue them, there are other reasons to question President Obama's latest green folly.

It will kill people.

A lot of people.

This is not news.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety determined years ago that when the federal government raises fuel economy standards people die. The institute estimates that a federal standard of 27.5 mpg kills 2,000 people every year.

The only way car manufacturers can improve the average mileage of the vehicles they sell is to make smaller, lighter vehicle.

Smaller, lighter cars offer less protection.

People die at a greater rate when they crash in smaller, lighter cars. Duh.

And the study showed that the difference in the size of vehicles involved in crashes does not have to be great to result in higher death rates. The institute tested minivans and compact cars in developing the estimate.

When tiny cars in the kind that can actually get 54.5 miles per gallon - were used in the tests, the death rate doubled.

Even if the estimate were off by 100 percent that is a lot of dead Americans.

And it is so unnecessary. There is no shortage of fossil fuel in this country - if the federal government would allow its development. There is more than enough to meet demand until technology produces a superior alternative.

It is nice that President Obama says he cares so much about the planet. It would even be nicer, of course, if he practiced just a little bit of what he preaches.

But hypocrisy aside, even people who travel by limousine can acknowledge that the higher fuel mileage standards come at too high a price. DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.