

More Than Speed Limit at Issue

MUCH more is involved in persistent complaints about the federal highway speed limit of 55 mph than how fast we drive.

The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution ought to be an issue, along with matters of safety, fuel conservation, consumption of valuable time and road congestion that may result from holding motorists to lower speeds than cars and highways were built to handle.

The Tenth Amendment says: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited to it by the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people."

Note that the amendment provides that states may prohibit certain powers to the federal government. Could a state prohibit Congress from setting its local speed limits?

Perhaps, but this probably will never happen. The reason is that Washington officials use a more effective power to usurp authority that should rest in the hands of

state, county and city governments, local school boards and other bodies of government.

This power is known variously as matching funds, federal aid, revenue sharing, government grants, federal funding and economic blackmail.

Any highway traveler is aware that the unpopular 55 mph law is disregarded by a substantial number of drivers. Federal officials have warned state officials that they must enforce the federal law or have their road building funds cut off.

Whether the 55 mph limit conserves fuel is debatable.

Claims are made that 55 mph saves lives, but traffic deaths in 1978 rose 4.7 percent over 1977 to 50,145 persons.

Several legislatures, including Oklahoma's, have brought up bills to set their own state speed limits. They quickly put them down when opponents waved the federal aid banner.

A former official of the Environ-

mental Protection Agency said in a magazine article that "one thing that we in government knew is that cost-sharing is by far the most effective way to enforce regulations."

Economic power may have reached its ultimate when EPA was granted authority to stop local economic development by blocking construction of new industries in areas that don't meet EPA requirements.

Like individuals who have become permanent clients of welfare agencies, states and cities may be permanently attached to the federal aid pipeline.

For example, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) has applied for a federal grant to study, according to reports, "the impact federal aid has on urban areas in an effort to enable urban areas to make an impact on federal authorities."

What that means isn't clear, but it seems to imply that ACOG doesn't want to get off federal aid. It just wants to figure out more effective ways of getting more of it!