

**REMARKS OF THE HON. ROSA L. DELAURO
NRC/IOM REPORT ON UNDERAGE DRINKING
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2003**

Thank you for that kind introduction. Let me first thank Congresswoman Roybal-Allard and Congressman Wolf for putting together this event, as well as Dr. Edward Hill with the AMA, Wendy Hamilton with MADD and George Hacker with the Center for Science in the Public Interest. And, of course, my colleagues Congressmen Wamp and Osborne.

We come together today to bring attention to a problem that reaches into every home in America. When it comes to discussing young people and alcohol, we often speak of drunk driving and how that is the real danger facing young people today, but the truth is: drunk driving is only part of the picture. Underage drinking is, in itself, a problem – and as this report shows, it is a *serious* problem.

Today, the average age that children start drinking is 13 and more than 7 million young people describe themselves as “binge drinkers.” That is a shocking figure in and of itself, but what makes it so significant is that children who begin drinking before the age of 15 are 4 times more likely to develop a problem with alcohol than those who wait until the age of 21. Alcohol plays a role in the 3 leading causes of death among young people – suicide, homicide and accidental injuries like vehicle fatalities and drownings. Yet if you ask the average parent, the reaction is “not my child.”

So today’s report by the National Research Council and the National Institute of Medicine comes at an important time. It makes specific recommendations that I believe we need to consider if we are going to get serious about changing societal attitudes and reducing underage drinking.

The recommendations include a media campaign directed at adults to let parents know what a problem this really is. Children really do listen to their parents when they talk to them about issues like this. The recommendations include forming a partnership between the industry, government and other groups to fund an independent non-profit foundation dedicated to preventing and reducing underage drinking. And it suggests we consolidate and coordinate some of the Federal and state agencies that deal with underage drinking to better manage our prevention efforts – it is the same approach I have been advocating we do with our food safety agencies to cut down on the bureaucracy and improve performance. We should demand the same when it comes to protecting our young people from the dangers of underage drinking.

And even though marketers have taken some steps to limit the number of their ads seen by kids, as this report and a new FTC report show, it has not been enough. It only takes watching a Sunday football game with the incessant run of beer ads to recognize that young people are still inundated in the media by these advertisements. More needs to be done.

It is time that we recognize that underage drinking is a serious problem that demands a coordinated national and community-level response. With this report as our guide, I am confident we can do that.

So let me again thank the NRC and IOM for this powerful data and common sense suggestions. Thank you.