

Statement before the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage
Drinking by Ralph S. Blackman, President and CEO

April 13, 2004

Good afternoon. My name is Ralph Blackman. I am the President and CEO of The Century Council.

The Century Council has been in existence for more than 13 years and the distilled spirits companies that fund it have already spent more than \$130 million dollars thus far in support of our efforts.

You may not be aware of two very important aspects of the Council's efforts that bear mentioning today.

First, the Council does not operate in a vacuum. We receive input from a national advisory board that includes representatives from the fields of education, the U.S. military, medicine, law enforcement and the judiciary.

The Council also works with an additional education advisory board. This body, is composed of educators, researchers and school administrators.

The Council's individual programming efforts also benefit from an open and transparent development process.

Since 1998, we have looked at the federal government as our partner in this regard. Now, the Department of Education, the NIAAA, the CDC, SAMHSA and the NTSB assist us in developing specific Century Council programs along with dozens of other relevant organizations.

However, I must tell you that we have been rebuffed by other federal agencies because of our industry backing.

Second, while the recent NAS report noted the evaluation of our Alcohol 101 program, it is but one of the Council's underage drinking programs that have undergone thorough evaluation.

The evaluation of our Cops In Shops program, called a Promising Practice by the Department of Justice, found it increased the perception of arrest and strongly influenced college students not to ask someone over 21 to purchase on their behalf.

College administrators using the Council's "Parents You're Not Done Yet" brochure found it helpful and effective for sharing information with parents and nearly three of four parents reported that they did not receive any other information about alcohol abuse and campus life.

And finally, the evaluation of the Council's Alcohol 101 Plus program, which in less than one year is already on nearly 2,000 college campuses, is underway and being guided by the Department of Education and the NIAAA.

The Century Council supports greater cooperation and coordination among federal agencies with regard to reducing underage drinking in America. Further, the Council supports SAMHSA's designation as the coordinator of this effort and I look forward to the committee's report. It is an appropriate first step that should be thoroughly vetted before Congress considers legislative action. However, I would urge the federal government to look beyond the beltway, and beyond the NAS Report, as this coordinated effort unfolds.

I can tell you first hand, from face-to-face conversations with teachers, principals, law enforcement and state regulators that there are thousands of individual community efforts that have all contributed to the dramatic decline in underage drinking over the past few decades.

We look forward to the opportunity to continue to work with the federal government and hope to work with those federal agencies, which have not yet joined us, in the future.

Thank you.