



Remarks of

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(Students Against Destructive Decisions)

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Administrator Curie, Members of the Committee, Distinguished Guests:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you. In my few minutes, let me give you a thumbnail about SADD and then offer my brief recommendations for the federal role.

As you may know, SADD was founded in 1981 as Students Against Driving Drunk and in 1997, changed its mission and its name to Students Against Destructive Decisions. Today, there are 10,000 SADD chapters in middle schools, high schools and colleges in all 50 states. SADD chapters are typically the home of some of the 50 percent of high school seniors who did not use alcohol in the last thirty days, but it is critical to our mission that we keep our doors open to all comers, those who are clear about their choices as well as those with questions.

Because the number one killer of teens remains highway crashes, about one third of which involve alcohol, our state coordinators and the national office work closely with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and state transportation offices to address safe driving and riding behaviors. Some SADD chapters and state operations also receive funds from OJJDP, Safe and Drug Free Schools, the AMA's Reducing Underage Drinking projects, and tobacco settlement funds. SADD charges no dues or registration fees, so our chapters are free to align with other youth-serving organizations with compatible missions. We are also proud to be a founding member of the National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS), a collaboration of over 40 national youth-serving, non-profit and government organizations, many of whom sit here, dedicated to promoting safety among our youth, currently funded by NHTSA.

We applaud the National Academies Committee for their thoughtful and comprehensive report. While SADD derives its longevity and credibility among teens from its commitment to the peer-to-peer model, we were pleased that the Committee recognized the complicity of the society at large in the issue. We agree that success in combating underage drinking requires a dedication throughout the population, and we commend the Committee for its creative and thorough approach to attacking the problem. We are particularly supportive of the suggestion for a national media campaign aimed at adults. Through our own *Teens Today* research, performed in partnership with Liberty Mutual Group, we have found that adults significantly underestimate the pervasiveness and seriousness of the problem of underage drinking. We are also supportive of the Committee's recommendation of a partnership of public and private groups, including groups represented here today, meeting under the auspices of an independent nonprofit foundation.

The question we were asked to focus on today is specific: what can the federal government do? I have the following suggestions:

1) Provide leadership.

The NAS report thoroughly documents the importance of this issue in our national landscape. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a more important public health issue for our teens today. If that is the case, the federal government has an obvious role to play in eradicating the danger. But the federal government can and must play another role. There are many interested parties with strong opinions about how to make forward progress on this issue. Sometimes the exertion of their energies actually stalls progress. The federal government has the mandate, the power and the responsibility to marshal these forces to work together and keep focused on our professed goal: preventing underage drinking among our youth.

2) Talk amongst yourselves.

At both the federal and state government levels, a youth component is included in virtually every agency's mandate. In this way, a youth agenda is included in each aspect of our national policy. Unfortunately, sometimes this operates against the interests of young people, as lack of communication, divergent perspectives and priorities, and turf battles undermine a united front. Regular and effective sharing of successes and failures would preserve valuable lessons learned, forestall repetition of missteps and safeguard public resources.

3) Attack the problem with the resources it deserves.

The NAS report documents the inequities in approach to various youth health issues. Unfortunately, the failure to devote adequate funds sends a message to adults as well as young people that we are not serious about this issue. We should identify new sources of funding and share funds from existing projects. It would be useful, for example, if ONDCP were able to include alcohol in its mandate. While SADD has been pleased to work with ONDCP to address the evils of marijuana, we should not hide from the fact that alcohol is the drug of choice for the vast majority of our nation's youth.

4) Get out of Washington.

The terrible effects of underage drinking hit us in our homes, our schools, our cars, our workplaces and our parks. The impact is very personal and very local. There is an incredible amount of energy and wisdom that exists among grassroots groups, and among guidance counselors, coaches, moms and dads and spiritual leaders. The federal government would benefit from tapping those local resources; starting from the bottom up rather than the top down.

5) Listen to the teens themselves.

Teenagers have a front row seat on these issues and eventually, the effectiveness of whatever you decide to do will be measured by the way large numbers of teens choose to act. After all, teens are the ones who are tipping back the bottles and putting the keys in the ignition to drive home unsafely – we need to reach them. I know many teens who are thoughtful and articulate on these issues, and would add

significantly to any discussion. Teens often have a perspective different from ours; they say things we don't expect them to say. We can learn from them if we listen.

None of these suggestions is radical. At SADD, our hundreds of thousands of students who struggle daily will welcome your commitment and stand ready to assist in any way possible. Thank you on their behalf.