

**Prepared Remarks**  
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**Lifesavers National Conference on Highway Safety Priorities**  
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**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Thank you, Bill for that kind introduction. Thank you, Lifesavers for your commitment to preventing deaths and injuries on America's roads and highways.

I want to start on a personal note. I know many of the people in this room are in law enforcement or emergency response. So, from the son of a motorcycle officer, first: thank you for your service. Second, as you know, all 50 states have Move Over laws that require drivers to change lanes away from police, fire, and EMS personnel when they're working on the roadside. And in all 50 states, too few drivers know and obey these laws. That has to change. I am asking everyone here today to help improve public understanding and observance of Move Over laws. Let's work to better protect the men and women who do so much to protect all of us.

Now: Raise your hand if you're from Utah! Just a few days ago, Utah became the 34<sup>th</sup> state, and the first among the six states in NHTSA's Region 8, to pass a primary seat belt law. Let's hear it for Utah.

This luncheon gives NHTSA the opportunity to celebrate that kind of success. It's a chance to fight for safety by saying a public thank you to those with us in that fight. And to plan for even greater reductions in fatalities and injuries on America's roads.

Here are just a few examples of how much progress has been made.

Seat belt use in America: Up. Way up. Nationwide seat belt use was at a record high of 87 percent in 2014, up from just 60 percent 20 years ago.

Drunk driving: down. Way down. Drunk driving fatalities were down 3 percent from 2012 to 2013 and down 21 percent since 2003. And our Roadside Survey found the number of drivers with alcohol in their system has declined by 80 percent since our first survey in 1973.

Distracted driving. Also on the decline. The number of people killed in distraction-affected crashes fell to 3,154 in 2013 from 3,380 in 2012, a 6.7 percent decrease.

So many of the indicators are pointing in the right direction. The people in this room today are a big reason why. And you will all be essential to further progress in the days ahead.

Today, in addition to thanking you for your efforts, I want to discuss with you some of the challenges in road and highway safety, how together we can address them, and how we will

work to ensure that we achieve our mission of reducing deaths and injuries due to automotive crashes.

In all of the work I will describe today, time is of the essence—and not just because there is a two-year expiration date on my tenure. No, time is of the essence because, for all our progress, 32,719 people lost their lives in automotive crashes in 2013. That’s 90 deaths every day. More than 250 people injured every hour.

They were mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, loved ones, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. All of their deaths were preventable. They deserve all of our best efforts to prevent additional deaths and injuries. Every American, whether they drive, ride, or walk, should arrive at their destination safely. All of them. Every time. There are no acceptable losses.

Achieving this goal will require the help of everyone at Lifesavers. It also requires improvements at NHTSA. We’re tremendously proud of our long record of reducing deaths and injuries on America’s roads. But can do more. We can do it better. And in the next two years, we will strengthen what works, fix what doesn’t, and ensure that our agency is using every tool at its disposal to save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce crashes. With that in mind, let me briefly describe three specific NHTSA priorities for the next two years.

First, we’re strengthening how NHTSA identifies and recalls vehicles and equipment with safety-related defects. As it stands, resources – including people, technology, and authority – present challenges to NHTSA’s efforts in this area. We’re addressing these issues through multiple mechanisms, such as seeking more people, new technologies, and increased authority. We are taking any actions allowed under the law to hold manufacturers accountable. And where we lack the authority we need, Secretary Foxx has asked Congress to help us protect Americans from defects.

Second, we are strengthening NHTSA’s core safety programs. They are the foundation for the successes on seat belts, drunk driving, and distracted driving. That foundation is strong and it will become stronger over the next two years.

The Agency has some well-established and highly successful campaigns that are household names, such as ‘Click It or Ticket,’ and ‘Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.’ These campaigns are changing attitudes and saving lives.

Our grants to states and local governments are a foundation for our safety work across the nation. Secretary Foxx has also made our work on pedestrian and bicycle safety a major priority across the Department. They are a focus of his groundbreaking transportation study, titled Beyond Traffic, and we’re looking toward both traditional and technological approaches that can help reduce these deaths and injuries.

But in all of this, and in many other of our safety programs, I will be asking, ‘Where can we innovate and improve upon success? Can we explore new and different ways to keep Americans safe on our roads?’

Another priority we will be emphasizing and supporting technology innovations. They have been critical to saving lives and preventing injuries on our roadways.

From the most basic, like a seat belt, to the newest technology, like collision warning and automatic braking systems, these innovations have played a critical role in furthering safety.

In fact, a recent NHTSA study estimates that safety technologies have saved 613,501 lives since 1960. Those 613,000 lives saved are the most important reason to support and nurture technology innovations that enhance safety.

So those are three of our priorities for these next two years. We have an ambitious agenda. But it is achievable. And all of this work will be guided by three principles.

First, effectiveness. NHTSA will look for every opportunity to be more effective. And we will use every tool available to us to achieve our safety mission.

The second principle is communication. We must expand public understanding of our work and its benefits across all platforms. Transparency is the watchword.

Our third guiding principle is innovation. Across the board, we need to look for opportunities to innovate everything we do. And in areas where NHTSA is already doing something well, then we will constantly be asking ourselves, 'How can we innovate and be even more effective?'

How are we putting those principles into action to meet those three priorities? Well, I want to share with you two new efforts that will support your work and enhance our roadway safety efforts.

The first is an instance of looking to build on one of our strengths. As I've mentioned, we've made tremendous strides on seat belts. But there's one age group that presents a challenge: tweens. As children get older they're less likely to buckle up. Over the past 5 years, 1,552 kids ages 8-14 died in crashes, and almost half of them were not wearing a seat belt.

As a parent, I know that raising a child, particularly when they reach their 'tween' years, can involve a lot of negotiations. But there's one issue where parents cannot negotiate: seat belts.

When it comes to tweens and seat belts, it can't be a discussion. Everyone is buckled up before the car moves. Period.

That's why we're engaging with parents in our new Never Give Up Until They Buckle Up tweens campaign. Four days ago, we took to social media to promote our new campaign with a Twitter chat to help spread the word. We've produced TV, radio, outdoor and online advertising to encourage parents to never give up when it comes to seat belts.

Our second piece of news is close to my heart because it involves an issue on which I've spent a lifetime of study: drowsy driving.

Drowsy or fatigued driving is an elusive behavior which is difficult to measure objectively. Current estimates range from 2 percent to 20 percent of annual traffic deaths attributable to driver drowsiness or fatigue. What we do know is that, while not everybody drinks, or texts, or speeds, lack of sleep is a problem we all face. And falling asleep at the wheel at 70 mph is a recipe for tragedy. Today I'm announcing a NHTSA initiative to prevent more of those tragedies.

First, we're a data-driven agency, and we need better data. We're launching an effort this year to better measure and estimate the drowsy driving problem, so we know what we're up against.

Second, we're going to do what we've done so effectively with other safety problems, and begin developing and testing public awareness campaign techniques that drive home to Americans the dangers of drowsy driving.

We're going to work closely with our partners in the states to learn what legal and enforcement strategies are most effective, beginning by looking at the impact in the handful of states that have passed laws specifically targeting drowsy or fatigued driving.

We're going to develop strategies specifically targeting populations especially vulnerable to drowsy driving. And we're going to comprehensively examine the role that driver aids, in the car and outside of it, can play – everything from high-tech solutions like computer algorithms that detect when you're getting sleepy behind the wheel, to old stand-bys like rumble strips on the road.

It's a comprehensive approach to a tough problem – a problem I've worked on all my professional life. But I know this is another opportunity for NHTSA to make a real difference and save lives.

In the final analysis, whether we're talking about enforcing tough roadway safety laws, improving the safety of our vehicles, or researching stubborn highway safety challenges, or building coalitions for better public policies, our ability to achieve progress comes down to this: men and women who are willing to lead. Today, we recognize several leaders, but I'd also like to mention one more, Jesse White.

Jesse is now serving a remarkable fifth term as Illinois Secretary of State. Far more notable than the length of his tenure is his effectiveness on road safety, which is now recognized across the country. From strengthening DUI laws, to reforming the commercial and the teen graduated license programs, to leading the charge on distracted driving, his efforts have helped Illinois reduce drunk driving deaths by 60 percent and teen driving deaths by more than 57 percent. Please give Jesse a round of applause for his efforts in Illinois. It's truly amazing.

That's leadership. That's progress. And every single person here today is contributing to that effort. At NHTSA, in the states, and with our safety partners, from Administrators and Chiefs of Police to safety advocates and our police on the streets, all of us can work to save those sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors we're losing every day on the highway. We know it's true because of the people here today. Our Lifesavers. Just look around and you'll see someone whose dedication and hard work has helped to save lives.

That's why I'm so excited about the lifesaving work we're going to do in the next two years. On behalf of President Obama, Secretary Foxx, and everyone at DOT and NHTSA, I congratulate today's honorees; I thank you all for your work and effort. And I look forward to what we will accomplish together.

Thank you.

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