

**Remarks prepared for
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Good afternoon. Thank you, Lifesavers 27 for your warm welcome and the invitation to join you. Thank you, Terry, for your kind introduction, and thank you to the Lifesavers Planning Committee and the sponsors for their hard work and support in making this another outstanding conference.

I'm sure you've heard the old adage, "May you live in interesting times." Some say it is actually an ancient curse. It might sound great to live in interesting times. But we all

know, interesting times are times of change and turmoil and struggle. They are exciting, yes, but they can be tough.

Change is all about us. But as far as I can see, these are good times for the safety community. Our numbers are headed in the right direction.

I hope you all read about the good news former Secretary Peters released in December. New national data confirmed that our nation's roads are safer than ever before. Our projections for the first 10 months of 2008 showed that fatalities declined by nearly 10 percent over the same period in 2007.

The new data also showed the fatality rate for the first nine months of 2008 declined to 1.28 deaths per 100 million

vehicle miles traveled. Maintaining this rate for the remainder of the year would translate into 3,000 more lives saved on our nation's highways last year.

I know you are as encouraged as we are by the numbers. It is also important to recognize and acknowledge that this progress is directly attributable to the efforts of the people in this room, and your thousands of colleagues across the country, who work so hard to stop crashes on our highways.

We know that times are changing at NHTSA because we have a new Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Ray LaHood. And, we're waiting for the president to nominate his pick for the Administrator of our Agency. What I can tell you, though, is that Secretary LaHood has made a

commitment to safety. Both in his testimony to Congress at his confirmation hearings, and in his initial messages to the department, Secretary LaHood has vowed to keep safety as the top priority, and he has vowed to do so in a spirit of collaboration, transparency, and accountability.

I think those are key and reassuring messages from our new Secretary. He wants to listen to our partners, stakeholders and constituencies. And I like that reassurance. Because, like everyone in this room, I know how much work still needs to be done. You and I know that any death or injury on our roadways is one too many. And you also understand how much more we can accomplish working together than apart.

And it is the accomplishments of the individuals seated here on the dais that we are here to celebrate today. The individuals efforts of a group remarkable professionals, from a broad range of disciplines, which have made such a large contribution to the improved safety performance mentioned earlier in my remarks. My suspicion is that each of today's awardees senses that the work for which they are being recognized today is emblematic of the larger community represented in the audience today and its commitment to saving lives and avoiding needless tragedy.

So I am delighted to be here to pause and celebrate some individuals who have made a real difference in transportation safety. And I'd like to also say, don't stop doing what you are doing because we're making progress.

Don't stop, because your work changes lives. Your work

makes a significant contribution to improving the quality of life in communities across this great country.

So yes, these are exciting times. These are good times.

The body of work that you have accomplished over the years is tremendous. The work you carry on today is vital.

And on behalf of Secretary LaHood and President Obama, I thank you. Now, let's get on to the business at hand, honoring the NHTSA Public Service Award recipients for 2009.