

**Remarks Prepared for
David Friedman, Acting Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator
Lifesavers: National Conference on Highway Safety Priorities
“What Counts Most – The Lifesavers Mission”
Gaylord Opryland Hotel - Nashville, TN
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Thank you, Kendall [Poole, GHSA] for that kind introduction.

And thank you Lifesavers.

Thank you to each of you for working every day to protect Americans from the tragic consequences of highway crashes. There is no higher calling than working to save a life.

One year ago, I joined NHTSA as deputy administrator. I’m an engineer by training and spent much of my career working on fuel efficiency, and its nexus with safety.

So I jumped at the chance to help President Obama achieve historic increases in fuel efficiency and at the opportunity to dedicate myself to saving lives by improving vehicle and highway safety.

Little did I know that only eight months later I’d be asked to step in as Acting Administrator.

And the man I have to thank for this tremendous change in my life, this tremendous opportunity, is here with us today, former NHTSA Administrator David Strickland.

David brought incredible intelligence, excellent judgment, deep passion, and constant good humor to his job as administrator.

To know him is to respect him. Thank you, David, for your support and guidance, and I hope you and Robin have had time to get reacquainted after your very busy tenure at NHTSA, not to mention your years of service to the nation in working for Congress.

While we do miss David, he left behind a very successful NHTSA team that continues to make tremendous advances on safety.

As we move forward, we continue to be guided by our safety mission, as well as our nation’s need to save energy and the importance of informed consumers.

We continue to move forward as a data-driven agency, relying on sound science in our decision-making.

And we continue our constructive, ongoing engagement with all of our safety partners. Being able to work more closely with you has been one of the most gratifying and inspiring aspects of my past four months as Acting Administrator.

For decades, that partnership has been the foundation of success.

Since 1970, highway fatalities have declined by 36 percent.

Just in the past decade, we've seen fatalities fall by 22 percent.

Those are your numbers, your successes, as much as they are ours.

But the impact of your work also goes far beyond what the data can reveal. After all, how do you measure the value of a life saved?

How do you quantify a person's impact on the world because he or she survived a crash and contributed to our community?

Can you truly assess what it means to a child to have a mother or father return safely home at night and to be raised with joy rather than shadowed by tragedy?

We can put a number on those benefits but that will never truly capture the impact.

That is why we instead look into our hearts and into the faces of survivors and those of our family and friends. When we do that, we innately understand the value. It's why we do the work we do. And it's why I'm proud to be here today.

As someone who was an advocate earlier in my career, I understand your passion for progress and the frustrations that accompany working for change.

Whether you are doing it at the local, state, or federal level and whether you are trying to save thousands or one life at a time, the work takes patience and persistence. It takes faith in your mission and yourself. And the change can never come quickly enough.

So I appreciate the fight and the courage that you bring to our safety mission and I thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for all that you do to keep Americans safe from harm.

You'll find no better example of your effectiveness than what we've achieved working together to increase seat belt use and decrease drunk driving.

Today, if you get into a friend's car and don't immediately put on your seat belt, the driver is going to tell you that their car isn't moving until you buckle up. And it is now common practice for friends and family across America take on the role of designated driver or refuse to ride with someone who is drunk.

These sea changes in public opinion happened because you and your predecessors made clear that safe driving begins with the click of a seat belt and that no one should ever drive drunk.

And for those who don't get the message, our brave law enforcement officers will be there. Click It or Ticket and Drive Sober or Get Pulled over aren't just slogans; they are promises. Promises that are being fulfilled every day by our friends in uniform.

To keep Americans safe, we need to make similar progress on the issue of distraction. While likely underreported, the data we have tells us that, in 2012 alone, distracted driving claimed 3,328 lives in America.

Distracted driving might be a relatively new focus but fighting it begins with a tried and true — and effective — approach: better laws, aggressive education and outreach, and tough enforcement.

Thanks to your advocacy, 43 states and, D.C. ban all drivers from texting while driving. Twelve states and D.C. ban drivers of all ages from using hand-held cell phones while driving. Our research shows that when these laws are enforced, distracted driving incidents go down.

Just a few weeks ago, as part of Distracted Driving Awareness Month, we launched our first-ever national law enforcement campaign to crack down on distracted driving and a new promise: U Drive. U Text. U Pay.

Earlier this month, I was proud to join Secretary Foxx at a media event at DOT announcing our national campaign.

We were joined by two advocates—Liz Marks and her mother, Betty Shaw—and they showed us how tragedy can be turned into action to help save lives.

Liz was involved in a horrific crash. It nearly took her life. Her mother, Betty, was told by the police that that her daughter had been texting while driving, something she had promised her mom she would never do.

Betty wanted to know who her daughter was texting. She wanted to know what could have been so important that Liz would do something so dangerous. Who could it have been?

In the midst of her worry and wondering whether or not her daughter might live or die, Betty looked at Liz' phone.

And she found out that the last message Liz read was a text from Betty, her own mother.

Somehow, through that grief and pain, Liz and Betty have been able to share their message with America. And you can tell that it is making a world of difference for everyone who hears it. It certainly had an impact on me.

Liz and Betty also helped us unveil a new, powerful television ad that depicts a distraction-related crash.

If you've seen it, you know just how remarkable it is. It's been shared all across social media. And if you haven't seen it, please visit distraction-dot-gov. Watch it. Post it and tweet it so your colleagues and friends can see it.

We need to spread its message far and wide so that everyone understands the simple and horrible fact that, in all its forms, distraction kills.

We spend a lot of time trying to convince Americans to adopt safer behaviors on the roadway. But there are also instances where Americans need a little help to protect themselves. The perfect example is that of older drivers.

To be clear, older drivers are among the safest. But they can face age-specific challenges. We become more fragile as we age, and are more likely to suffer serious injury in crash. It can be challenging to get in and out of some vehicles. Arthritis sufferers may also have difficulty with some vehicle controls.

We can help seniors maintain their driving independence by directing them to resources that will help them adapt an existing vehicle or buy a new one that meets their specific needs.

And when it is time to talk, our resources can help them and their families judge—based on abilities, not age—whether they can continue to drive safely.

By helping seniors safely stay on the road, we're helping them to stay engaged in their communities, connected with their families, and enjoying the full lives that they deserve. It's an important effort and one that we will make a greater focus on the coming days at NHTSA.

Much as we can help older Americans adapt to changing circumstances, America's infrastructure and safety practices must also adjust to changing demands. That means working harder to protect pedestrians and cyclists.

Americans are increasingly voting with their feet—by walking, running, and cycling—as a way to get to work, school, or to stay in shape. Regrettably, we've also seen an increase in fatalities and injuries.

Pedestrian fatalities were up more than 6 percent in 2012, reaching 4,743 lives lost in that year alone. That's one pedestrian's life lost every two hours.

Injuries were up 10 percent in 2012, leading to one pedestrian injured every seven minutes (est. 76,000).

Cyclist fatalities and injuries were up too, with 726 lives lost and nearly 50,000 injured.

I believe there are four key components to improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

First, it begins with personal responsibility. We know that we all take risks as drivers, as pedestrians and as cyclists that we just shouldn't take.

As drivers we're sometimes in a rush and we don't keep our eyes out for pedestrians and cyclists in crosswalks—or we rush to get into those crosswalks before they do.

As pedestrians, we don't always use those crosswalks or make sure drivers see us before we step into traffic. And we walk while texting, not aware of traffic around us.

That all needs to change.

After all, two tons of metal, glass, and plastic can and will do irreparable harm to flesh and bone.

That's why NHTSA along with our colleagues at the Federal Highway Administration launched "Everyone is a Pedestrian," an education initiative and accompanying web site with tips to help walkers stay safe.

Second, we need to provide infrastructure that reflects Americans' changing approach to mobility. We need to provide room for bikes and pedestrians as well as cars.

For example, we need to take approaches to intersection design that can enhance, not undermine, the safety of pedestrians. Our Everyone is a Pedestrian site provides resources for local leaders, city planners, and others to help them provide safe walkable neighborhoods.

Third, we also need to make good use of available vehicle technology. As one example, NHTSA recently issued our final rule mandating rear visibility cameras, which will help protect pedestrians. On average, there are 210 fatalities and 15,000 injuries each year caused by backover crashes, the majority of whom are children younger than 5 and seniors over 70—our most vulnerable family members.

Rear visibility cameras can help save lives and prevent those injuries and they will now be mandatory on all new vehicles beginning in 2018.

Fourth, and finally, we need more education and tougher enforcement.

We know that when we tie education and enforcement we can change attitudes about unsafe behaviors and save lives. If we want drivers to yield to pedestrians, pedestrians to use crosswalks, and cyclists to obey traffic rules, then each needs to know that failing to follow the law will result in a ticket.

That is the proven way to protect all roadway users and on Friday I announced \$1.6 million in new pedestrian safety grants to enhance education and enforcement in Louisville, Philadelphia, and New York City.

Finally, before I leave you today, I want to ask you for help on two additional issues. You already do so much to keep our roads safe, but I know that if I put a challenge to Lifesavers you'll take it up and help get the job done.

Issue number one is car seats and recalls.

You've helped Americans understand that an age appropriate car seat is an essential purchase for parents. You've helped make sure those seats are installed and used properly. Those efforts must continue.

But now, I ask you to also join me in working to make sure that every car seat is registered and that parents are much more likely to get them repaired when there is a recall.

Only about 25 percent of car seats are registered. That means many of the parents who own that other 75 percent of car seats won't be aware of recalls that could affect the safety of their child.

One of the largest child seat recalls in history is now underway.

It is a reminder of why we urgently need your ideas and input on how we can get many more moms and dads the information they need so they can keep their kids safe. My team and I are and will continue reaching out to many of you on this effort in the coming weeks.

Finally, I want to talk to you about an issue that's close to my heart because it's about supporting our friends and safety partners in law enforcement. The people we at NHTSA ask to go out every day and put their lives on the line to keep Americans safe from traffic crashes.

You might know that all 50 states [not DC] now have "Move Over" laws that require drivers to change lanes or slow down when approaching a law enforcement or emergency services vehicle that's parked or stopped on the roadside. Too many Americans, however, do not know that these laws are on the books. And it's putting lives at risk.

Today, getting struck by a vehicle while stopped on the road doing their job is the fourth leading cause of death among law enforcement officers.

We must change that.

At DOT, we're exploring technology that may provide officers who are out of their patrol car with advanced warning of a vehicle that's traveling too close so they can get out of harm's way.

But we need your help too. The public needs to know that when you see officers or troopers pulled over then you're supposed to move over. We are developing and will soon share materials to help more and more people get the message.

So, please, help NHTSA in this effort. Let's work together to spread the word and protect the men and women who do so much to protect us.

We've covered a great deal of ground this morning and we have a great deal of work to do. But what it all comes down to, what we're really talking about is saving lives and protecting what is most precious to us: our families, our friends, and our neighbors.

As an engineer, I look to the data to measure our progress and evaluate solutions. We have to have that hard-headed approach because the data helps tell what works and what doesn't in highway safety.

But as a father, a son, a husband, and as a friend, I know that the real value of our work can't be seen just in the data.

So, as engineer driven by both data and passion, I could not be happier to be here and be part of a family dedicated to the worthiest of missions. By working together to strengthen laws, toughen enforcement, and improve education, we've saved lives.

And it's the people here today who will keep this progress going. It will happen because of your passion and commitment to make our streets, our communities, and our lives safer.

We commend you for your service and look forward to building a stronger safety partnership with all of you as we accomplish our shared mission. Thank you.

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