

**Remarks prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Distracted Driving Summit
Fort Collins, Colorado
March 27, 2010
“Stepping Up for Safety”**

Thank you, Congresswoman Markey, for your welcome and the invitation to be here. It is a pleasure and an honor for me to join you for this event.

Secretary LaHood is extremely disappointed that his schedule prevented him from being here to support you in person. But you have his, and mine, and the entire Department of Transportation’s support in your efforts to stop Distracted Driving.

The Secretary of Transportation has made safety a priority for the Department, and Distracted Driving a personal cause. As the highway traffic safety Agency, we are on point and we take that duty seriously.

Distracted Driving is a growing problem—the numbers tell the story. But Shelley’s story brought home to me, as I’m sure it does to everyone, that the victims are not numbers. They are our daughters, our sons, our loved ones. They are the folks we see every day in our community. Numbers... statistics... distance us from the faces, the spirit...the essence of those lost too soon to this preventable tragedy.

I applaud the people of Colorado for stepping up on this issue and enacting Erica’s law last year, making it illegal for drivers of all ages to text message behind the wheel, and banning all cell

phone use for drivers under age 18. As the elected leaders closest to the public, your leadership is critical to the success of this effort. The first line of defense is personal responsibility... Each one of us stepping forward to do our part.

So what is the Department of Transportation doing? We will continue to support you with our national efforts. Last fall, the U.S. Department of Transportation held a summit on distracted driving. It was the first in the nation to call federal attention to this dangerous problem, and propose a range of realistic solutions.

We recently unveiled sample legislation that states can use as a starting point to craft laws prohibiting texting while driving.

Hopefully, this will help all the state legislatures currently considering such laws to move forward.

So far, 20 states plus D.C. have texting laws covering all drivers – Wyoming became the 20th state earlier this year. That’s a good start, but we’ve got to do better. I know lawmakers around the country are studying this seriously.

We’re seeking 50 million dollars in next year’s budget for an incentive grant program to encourage more states to pass these laws.

Meanwhile, we’re using our existing authority to prohibit commercial interstate truck and bus drivers from texting while driving, or using a handheld cell phone.

This decision sends a strong message that we don't merely ask commercial drivers to operate their vehicles responsibly – we require them to.

And in Syracuse, New York and Hartford, Connecticut, we'll be kicking off a two-year federally funded pilot program to test the effectiveness of highly publicized law enforcement efforts to change drivers behaviors and get them to put down their cell phones.

President Obama is making sure that Federal workers and contractor practice what we preach. He issued an executive order that prohibits all Federal workers from text messaging while driving on the job, and while using government-issued Blackberrys and other devices during off-duty hours.

On the outreach side, we're sponsoring a website, distraction.gov, which acts as a national clearinghouse for information on distracted driving. It also makes our position on Distracted Driving clear, and it details our commitment to work across the spectrum with private and public entities as well as advocacy groups to tackle distracted driving.

And we've succeeded in capturing Oprah Winfrey's attention; she's launched her own campaign against texting and driving.

I am extremely encouraged by the momentum building against Distracted Driving.

Decades of experience with seat belts and drunk driving has taught us it takes a consistent combination of leadership from elected officials at all levels of government, as well as public

education, effective enforcement, a committed judiciary, and grassroots advocacy, to make a dent in the problem. This experience shows that drivers can and do change their behavior over time.

We've come a long way on this issue in a very short time. I thank you for your part in raising awareness on this issue and taking steps to help control it.

Thank you.

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