

zero tolerance

June 21, 1995

Senator Robert Byrd
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Byrd,

Drinking and driving by young people is one of the nation's most serious threats to public health and public safety. I am deeply concerned about this ongoing tragedy which kills thousands of young people every year. It's against the law for young people to drink. It should be against the law for young people to drink and drive.

As you know, earlier this month, I called on Congress to make Zero Tolerance the law of the land. I support your amendment to the National Highway System Designation Act which would achieve this goal.

A decade ago, we decided as a nation that the minimum drinking age should be 21. In 1984, President Reagan signed bipartisan legislation to achieve this goal, and today all 50 states have enacted such laws. Our efforts are paying off -- drunk driving deaths among people under 21 have been cut in half since 1984.

But we must do more. Twenty-four states and the nation's capital have enacted Zero Tolerance laws which consider a driver under age 21 to be "driving while impaired" after just one full drink of alcohol. These laws work -- alcohol-related crashes involving teenage drivers are down as much as 10-20 percent in those states. If all states had such laws, hundreds more lives could be saved and thousands of injuries could be prevented.

I commend your efforts today, and I urge the Senate to pass strong legislation to make this the law of the land.