

Comments by Jim Champagne on Leadership South Central MADD/NHTSA Summit

I am honored to be here today with such a distinguished group of advocates and police officials as we engage in discussions regarding our nation's difficulty with impaired driving.

I have been asked to say a few words regarding leadership and the role it plays in combating one of our country's greatest public health issues – the drunk driver. Leadership is intensely personal and will be affected by our individual psychology, our life experiences and our training.

The fact that you are here proves that you are willing to do your part in stopping the carnage on our highways caused by impaired drivers. However, because of the positions you hold within your organizations, you have a unique opportunity to “lead the charge” for change within your State. Your willingness to provide leadership can lead to a change in attitude about drunk driving. We can say “no more” and we can change our future.

Drunk driving is a national embarrassment, costing the lives of nearly 17,000 people each year. Hundreds of thousands are injured in drunk driving crashes each year and countless families are scarred for life because of the drunk.

The only way to solve this national disgrace is to attack it locally, in your own city; throughout your own State. We must exercise the leadership needed to set DUI enforcement as a priority and keep it as a priority. MADD, Highway Safety Offices, and other advocates will do their job, so we must do ours as police administrators.

We must create a vision of how to stop drunk driving we must determine a plan of action to achieve the vision and we must “stay the course” never wavering. We live in the section of our country with the greatest impaired driving problem. I'm tired of trying to figure out “why” – I want to do something about it and I won't stop until drunk driving ceases to be a national problem.

You know what it takes in your State to stop drunk driving. If you need better legislation, go after it; if it takes an attitude change, work with those that can help share public opinion.

The bottom line is – you must be the leader; you must be willing to carry the message and then you must do what it takes to make sure the message is understood by all. Drunk driving can be stopped. Doing otherwise will continue to cost this country a toll too high to accept.