

3 Lectures:
18/1 & 1A-- December 14, 1988
18/2 December 16, 1988

Address

Presented to the
Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving
December 14, 1988

Testimony

Accompanied by Dr. Loren Archer, Deputy Director
Of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
In the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration
December 14, 1988

Remarks

Presented at the Closing Session of
Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving
December 16, 1988

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The next three presentations are all connected and were given over a three-day period. They're included in this archive because they give perhaps a better idea to the user of the way a Surgeon General's Workshop worked and what the potential spin offs could be.

The first is an address I gave as the charge on December 14, 1988, to the Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving. On the same day I was asked to give a testimony before a Senate Committee headed by Senator John Glenn, on the activities of the Surgeon General's Workshop itself. I was accompanied on this occasion by Dr. Loren Archer, Deputy Director of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in

the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA). Then two days thereafter, I spoke at the close of the Surgeon General's Workshop but not quite in the usual way. I introduced the closing remarks and then stepped aside while others from the Department of Transportation, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, spoke from their respective positions of expertise. I then returned and gave my closing remarks.

Let me say at the outset that we won in every aspect of these three days but it had not been easy. First of all, I learned just as I was about to give the charge, the Brewers of America had gone to federal court to get an injunction to prevent me from having the Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving. How could anybody, even an umbrella organization that is only interested in selling beer, have the gall and the guts to go before a federal judge and ask that a conference aimed at reducing the loss of life and the occurrence of disability after accidents from drunk driving, be forbidden to speak? Believe me it got my dander up and I didn't calm down for at least a week. The Brewers were joined by the Vintners of America and the federal judge refused to grant the injunction they requested but did instruct me that the meeting I had called as a closed meeting with invited guests only, would have to be an open meeting. But on the other hand he softened that ruling by telling me that, I and I alone, could make the rules of presentation before the workshop. This I did by forbidding anybody to take the floor or ask any questions, who had not been invited. Other requirements that the judge placed upon me and the workshop were all things that I planned to do anyway even though I had not advertised them to adversaries before hand. There was another undercurrent. There are a lot of people in organizations that would rather see people killed by drunk drivers than to chance a reduction in their own income. Edward O. Fritts, President of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), sent me a letter which he sent to the press before I received my copy. I wanted him and the NAB to be with us. I wanted everyone to hear the NAB's point of view, not only because broadcasters are very influential – as we all know – but because they also have so much at stake in this issue. They advertise the liquor that makes people drunk before they start to drive and kill people. I also invited Mr. John O'Toole, Executive Vice President of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), and Mr. Dewitt Helm, President of the Association of National Advertisers, the people who are the clients of the American Association of Advertising Agencies.

All three declined. O'Toole and Helm suggested that our workshop lacked good balance and said they had very little time to prepare for the discussion that no doubt would take place here. I think their complaints and suggestions were unfair. I know it's a troubling message for people such as that to face the fact that alcohol contributes to injury and premature death. They tried an old trick and that is to kill the messenger.

Mr. Fritts' letter from the NAB was unsettling because it contained this observation: "At best this workshop is designed to politicize the emotional tragedy of drunk driving. At worst it is a total abuse of the policy setting process."

Again, I am surprised at the transparency, the gall, and the greed of people who oppose education about drunk driving.

Inasmuch as over the past 7 years I had personally convened and conducted over a dozen workshops, I know without questions they do not politicize anything and they are the best policy setting process that I had at my disposal.

This workshop would contribute to better public policy just as previous workshops had in reference to organ transplantation, domestic violence, the needs of handicapped children and their families, and the role of self-help movement in public health. None of these workshops ever was identified by anybody as a way to “politicize an emotional tragedy.” And all of those workshops contributed significantly to the policy making process of the administration I served.

I have reviewed the way tobacco, broadcasting, and advertising industries behaved around the time my predecessor, the late Dr. Luther Terry, released the first smoking and health report 25 years ago. From that review I can see that, even at this early stage of discussion, there are already similarities of behavior.

It was a shame and I said so. I think none of my detractors had read Santayana who was so correct when he wrote: “Those who can’t remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

For twenty-five years the public health community has, in a responsible way, looked at the public policy implications and the research results of smoking and health as they came to light. From that information we in public health were able to plan for ways to help the American people to cast off this high-risk health behavior – smoking. And that meant principally, a long range and unremitting program of public education and instruction. Certainly drinking and driving is high-risk behavior amenable to education and instruction.

My feathers were badly ruffled by the National Commission Against Drunk Driving in that they provided a dilemma not easy to solve. One would think that the Commission and this Workshop would have the same presumed goal. That we should stand together makes sense. Yet Mr. Adduci – Chairman of the Commission – cleverly suggested to me in a letter of November 28, 1998, “You may be considering the following along with other options.” One of those was to “disregard the views and position of the National Association of Broadcasters.” Another was to postpone this meeting. And the third, was to notify all panelists that my office had overlooked or was unaware of the fact that the Department of Transportation had given the National Commission a \$1,000 grant to do a 16 month assessment of its initiatives.

In meeting with Mr. Adduci it was decided that he and I would let no light be seen between us as we stood side by side in this effort to reduce the carnage on the highways and streets. Further, either Mr. Adduci or his Program Director, Dr. Grant, would speak at the opening plenary session.

Yet when the confirmatory letter was faxed to me on the 13th, the day before this Workshop opened, there was a quid pro quo in return for Adduci's appearance, namely that my Workshop would not release conclusions until the Commission had completed its assessment project -- a minimum of 16 months. That was unacceptable to me and I thought it would be to the audience and the Commission (Adduci) refused to speak at the opening plenary session.

Adduci was not alone in asking that the findings of my Workshop be postponed. The National Beer Wholesalers Association and the National Association of Broadcasters with participating legal counsel in most intensive discussions Wednesday, Thursday and today, requested only a 45 day comment period followed by a 30 day delay before final publication. That's the kind of regulation one expects, when Congress or one of the Cabinet Departments issues regulations in the Federal Register. Nothing like that is ever deemed appropriate at something like a Surgeon General's Workshop. One last word. I chose to have this Workshop at the time that I did because December, coming as it does just before the Christmas and New Year holidays, is usually Alcohol Awareness Month. I really had great difficulty in realizing that so-called respectable members of the community had the gall to try to keep a respected Surgeon General from saving the lives of countless Americans.

I made a lot of promises, I kept them. I reported as was my usual custom -- those promises to a number of people not only during the last year of Mr. Reagan's administration but also during the first year of George H. W. Bush's administration. I even had one more Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving before I left office.

The user would do well to remember that at the time that this three-day conference was held, automobile "accidents" were responsible for the greatest number of unintentional injuries and deaths in children under the age of 14. Many of those "accidents" were caused by drunk drivers