



The Time to Change is Now
Building Intolerance to Drunk Driving and Underage Drinking

Platform Statement of Miss America 2006 Jennifer Berry

America has made great strides in reducing drunk driving and its horrific consequences. The accomplishments of my platform partner, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), have been astounding: they have helped save more than 300,000 lives and countless injuries.

But a staggering amount of work remains to be done. Alcohol-impaired driving is America's most frequently committed violent crime. About every 30 minutes another American dies on the highways in an alcohol-related traffic crash and dozens more are injured. One-third of traffic deaths among 15-20 year olds involve alcohol.

I have experienced firsthand the tragedy that drunk driving causes. One of my high school friends was killed when riding with an underage drunk driver who lost control of the car. My friend was only 15 years old.

To continue the important work of keeping our loved ones and roadways safe, today's leaders must do more. We are charged with a higher level of action, called to make significant changes in the way we address drunk driving and underage drinking.

These problems demand a new level of *intolerance*. My goal for the coming year will be to use my opportunities for awareness and education to build that intolerance.

Intolerance is a strong word and it is not used lightly. But the fact remains that drunk driving is 100 percent preventable, yet it continues to be a plague of human behavior that we as a society continue to tolerate. Witness the daily reports of alcohol-related deaths and injuries. Also consider the countless young Americans that drink alcohol underage—continuing a dangerous and even lethal “rite of passage” that puts them at risk for neurological impairment, violence, traffic deaths and other life-destroying consequences.

It's time to say enough. Intolerance is the right word and the right goal.

I also want to see the same kind of intolerance applied to underage alcohol use and build true intolerance through one of our most powerful weapons: education.

I will approach the underage drinking issue globally. It's a multifaceted issue that requires a concerted and comprehensive effort. Every tool is important. Stricter

legislation is key. Parental supervision is paramount. Teacher involvement is critical. All of us must work together to protect young people.

Given the right education by adults, children have a better chance of living safe and healthy lives. We need to weave a commitment to decision-making education into the fabric of society. Equipping parents, teens, children, teachers, legislators and other influencers should be our clarion call. It's our best hope of continuing the progress and saving future lives—making a real difference at home, school and in the community.

I have worked with thousands of Oklahoma students of every age. Getting through to a young audience requires a realistic approach. We must speak with respect, understanding and compassion. We must be sincerely committed to educating them in honest, open detail about the consequences of making bad and illegal decisions.

The focus is *making good decisions*—safe, healthy and legal choices about alcohol. Young people from kindergarten to college understand this at the most basic level. This is the message that youth universally respond to. It is a foundation on which we can build a pillar of strength. Teaching decision-making skills literally from day one is the single hope of giving our children a fighting chance when they reach the peer-pressure years.

Rallying schools, teachers, parents, youth, legislators and corporate America to help stop drunk driving and prevent underage drinking by implementing proven-effective initiatives and programs will be my mission. With MADD as my platform partner, I will capitalize on every opportunity to make a positive difference and honor the memory of my friend to help save as many lives as possible.
