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Statement by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Institute of Medicine's Report on Underage Drinking
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We are here today to highlight a report by the Institute of Medicine concerning the crisis of underage drinking and its recommendations on how our nation can effectively address this national tragedy.

The Institute of Medicine is to be commended for issuing a report based on solid, scientific evidence that provides a commonsense framework with steps needed to effectively address underage drinking in our country.

I welcome my colleagues Frank Wolf, Zach Wamp, Rosa DeLauro, and Tom Osborne and thank them for being here today.

We have been working together in a bipartisan fashion for several years to draw attention to the crisis of underage drinking and what can be done to combat it.

The report issued today by the Institute of Medicine supports the many years of extensive research that has found underage drinking to be a health crisis with a significant adverse impact on individual lives and society as a whole.

The Institute of Medicine's report includes a comprehensive list of recommendations on how to address best this grave problem of underage drinking, including advertising restraints, suggestions for the entertainment industry, and increased alcohol excise taxes.

I'd like to focus on one of the report's primary recommendations, for which Congressman Frank Wolf and I, with the support of Congressman Zach Wamp and many others, have been advocating for several years: the need to have a national media campaign.

What is noteworthy about the Institute's recommendation is it focuses on educating parents. This attests to the important role parents have in the lives of their children and the need for parents to have accurate information.

Many parents do not recognize the prevalence of underage drinking or the risks to their own children.

In fact, the report found that many parents underestimated the use of alcohol by their children; for example, parents thought over a quarter of youth who drank heavily were non-drinkers, and less than 1/3 of parents were aware of their teenager's drinking.

The report's findings tell us that if we educate parents about the facts of underage alcohol use and its consequences, parents can play a key role in limiting underage drinking.

And what are some of the facts parents need to know?

These are just a few of them:

Over 10 million kids in the U.S. consume alcohol illegally, although drinking alcoholic beverages under the age of 21 is illegal in all 50 states;

Drinking drivers under age 21 are involved in fatal crashes at twice the rate of adult drivers;

Underage drinking has a strong correlation with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor school performance and suicide;

And youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 quadruple their chance of becoming alcoholics.

Such facts demonstrate the gravity of the problem in spite of the fact that the alcohol industry may argue that they are committing record resources to combat underage drinking and therefore a national media campaign and other recommendations in the report are unnecessary.

The reality is the stakes are too high for our children and society to do nothing.

The problem is, as the report reminds us, the stakes for the alcohol industry are also high. For example, illegal teenage drinking accounts for up to 20% of the alcohol consumed in the U.S. every year.

In fact, we have displayed here a representation of exactly how much our kids are actually consuming each month – as you can see, it is significant.

The report also cites statistics from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth that in 2001 the alcohol industry spent \$23 million to air 2300 responsibility messages, but spent \$811 million on over 200,000 product advertisements.

In fact, America's youth were 93 times more likely to see an industry ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging underage drinking.

While the alcohol industry sponsors some programs aimed at reducing underage drinking, clearly more needs to be done.

Therefore, I strongly endorse the report's recommendation to form a national partnership with the alcohol industry communities and public and private stakeholders to more effectively address this crisis of underage drinking.

When we talk about an effective strategy for combating underage drinking, one question is always raised: how much will it cost?

But what about the cost of doing nothing?

According to the Institute's report today, the social cost of underage drinking is \$53 billion a year.

Not to mention the daily cost of young lives lost from automobile accidents, increased suicides, unwanted pregnancies, lost academic performance, increased youth violence, and long-term brain damage.

In closing, the Institute of Medicine report provides us with a comprehensive strategy to address this crisis.

This bipartisan group of Members you see standing here is an important component of the recommended partnership among federal lawmakers and other stakeholders needed to confront this health crisis.

My hope is that this report will persuade other congressional colleagues who have not been supporters in the past to join us on behalf of our kids and on behalf of our society.

Only by working together can we confront this health crisis and reduce the terrible toll it is taking on our youth and on our nation's future.