

Statement made by U.S. Representative Frank R. Wolf (R-Virginia, 10th District) at U.S. Capitol Press Conference, September 10, 2003:

I thank my colleague, Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard and her staff for their hard work and leadership on this issue. Underage drinking is a serious national health and safety matter. We know that young people who start drinking at the age of 15 are 4 times more likely to become alcoholics than those who start drinking at 21. Underage drinkers are more likely to try marijuana and cocaine. Underage drinking often results in car accidents, depression, suicide, and alcohol addiction. A study last year found that 72 percent of 8th graders have used alcohol in the previous year. Our children are exposed to many advertisements encouraging the purchase and use of alcohol each day.

The release of today's study by the Institute of Medicine is the result of Congress directing the National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine to look at a cost effective media campaign to reduce and prevent underage drinking. The report makes a number of recommendations addressing underage drinking, and Congress—exercising our oversight responsibility—will be reviewing these suggestions.

The report clearly shows that the alcohol industry is not doing enough to tackle underage drinking. Unless the alcohol industry pro-actively and aggressively moves to curb underage drinking, many of the recommendations in this report may become law. Experts have concluded that not enough is being done to keep youth from drinking. The alcohol industry has now heard that message loud and clear.

We in Congress will be watching the alcohol industry very closely to see whether they will take the lead in curbing youth drinking. If the industry does not take steps prevent our nation's children from being harmed, then Congress will. The alcohol industry has to be held to account if it continues to operate in a way that makes alcohol attractive to youth.

Finally, adults have to be engaged in combating this problem, and must be made aware that it exists, it is significant, and that they have a leadership role to play to reduce the continuing problem of underage drinking.