

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2002

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to ask you to sign the following letter to the Commerce Committee encouraging them to hold hearings on alcohol advertising and its impact on children.

Last March, the NBC television network reversed its decision to air advertisements for distilled spirits products. However, children across our nation continue to be bombarded by advertising messages encouraging them to drink. In 2000 alone, the alcohol industry spent approximately \$1.4 billion on ads. It is naïve to think that this billion dollar advertising effort isn't reaching our kids and influencing them to drink.

Despite the fact that the alcohol industry claims that they do not target minors, alcohol commercials push all the hot buttons for teens. These ads use youth-oriented music, party scenes, and messages implying that drinking makes you more popular with your friends and more appealing to the opposite sex.

The evidence shows that teens are getting the message loud and clear:

- Alcohol is the number one substance abuse problem for kids in our nation.
- Even though drinking under the age of 21 is illegal in all fifty states, approximately 10.4 million kids in our country consume alcohol illegally.
- Kids start drinking, on average, when they are just 13 years old.
- Underage drinking contributes to increased alcoholism, illegal drug use, teen pregnancy, crime, and violence.
- Tragically, underage drinking kills 6.5 times more children than all other illicit drugs combined.

This is why we are circulating a letter to the Commerce Committee urging them to hold hearings on how alcohol advertising affects our nation's youth. I hope that you will join us in signing this important letter. Please contact Ellen Riddleberger or Sabrina DeSantiago at 5-1766 if you have questions or to sign on.

Sincerely,


Lucille Roybal-Allard


Frank Wolf

Dear Chairman Tauzin and Ranking Member Dingell:

We are writing to encourage your committee to hold hearings on alcohol advertising and its impact on children.

Last March, the NBC television network reversed its decision to air advertisements for distilled spirits products. However, regardless of this decision, children across our nation continue to be bombarded by messages encouraging them to drink. In 2000 alone, the alcohol industry spent approximately \$1.4 billion on ads. It is naïve to think that this billion dollar advertising effort isn't reaching our kids and influencing them to drink.

Recently, liquor producers and brewers began a substantial television advertising campaign to promote their new, youth-oriented, malt-based beverages known as "alcopops" or "malternatives." Many of these, such as Smirnoff Ice, Bacardi Silver, Captain Morgan Gold, and Skyy Blue carry liquor brand names, even though they are malt-based drinks, which contain no distilled spirits. This new advertising blitz of as much as \$450 million this year, is seen by many as a backdoor method for liquor companies to work around the television network's ban on liquor advertising.

These new developments are particularly disturbing given the toll underage drinking takes on our society. As you know, alcohol continues to be America's number-one substance abuse problem for our youth. According to the latest government data, approximately 10.4 million kids in this country consume alcohol illegally starting, on average, at just 13 years of age. Underage drinking contributes to increased car crashes, crime, violence, teenage pregnancy, depression, suicide, alcoholism, and illegal drug use, and costs our country an estimated \$52 billion per year. Tragically, underage drinking kills 6.5 times more children than all other illegal drugs combined.

While alcohol producers and trade groups have adopted voluntary guidelines to limit children's exposure to television advertisements for alcohol, a 1999 FTC report shows that only half of the companies surveyed abided by these voluntary guidelines. Further, we believe there are serious inadequacies in these guidelines for the placement of alcohol commercials. For example, the beer and liquor industries' codes allow alcohol commercials to air during times when up to half the audience is under the minimum legal drinking age. We believe such standards require serious evaluation by the Committee.

Given the grim statistics on underage drinking, the expansion of alcohol advertising on television, and its potential impact on our nation's children, we respectfully urge the Committee to schedule a hearing to carefully examine the increasing promotion of drinking on television and explore the effects that such advertising has on America's young people. Specifically, we ask that the committee review: 1) the appropriateness of alcohol-advertising placement on television and 2) whether voluntary alcohol and broadcast-industry advertising standards are effective in minimizing young viewers' exposure to alcohol advertisements.

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, alcohol-related

fatalities have increased for the first time in a decade. Other government data indicate that progress on reducing underage drinking has slowed. This is no time for complacency. Further delay in addressing this new threat to our children will only put them at greater risk in the future. Therefore we respectfully urge the Committee to schedule a hearing on this subject of vital importance to the children and families throughout our nation.

Sincerely,

Lucille Roybal-Allard

Frank Wolf