“Support 21” Coalition  
Press Conference on Minimum Drinking Age Law  

Tuesday, October 9, 2007 - 10:30 a.m. EST  
National Transportation Safety Board Conference Center  
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  

Statement of George A. Hacker,  
Director, Alcohol Policies Project  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  

“Since its adoption throughout the United States in the late 1980s, we have learned enough about the benefits of the 21 minimum legal drinking age to know that it would be a disastrous mistake to lower it. Doing so would merely doom many more thousands of young people to premature death and other severe alcohol-related problems. Despite wishful thinking on the part of some, there is no evidence that a lower drinking age would result in fewer alcohol-related problems among young people, and quite a bit of evidence that refutes that view. Since passage of the National Minimum Purchase Age Act in 1983, the percent of high school seniors who report any alcohol use in the past year has dropped nearly 20% (from 88% in 1983 to 73% in 2006) and the proportion who report binge drinking has declined nearly 40% (from 41% in 1983 to 25% in 2006).  

Simply having age-21 laws on the books, however, is no panacea. Confronting deeply ingrained alcohol problems requires a real commitment to an effective, comprehensive national prevention strategy. The National Academies of Science Institute of Medicine outlined that evidence-based strategy in a 2003 report to Congress. Among other elements, that groundbreaking report highlighted the need for:  

- a well-financed, visible, adult-focused national media campaign to discourage underage drinking;  
- higher taxes on alcoholic beverages, especially on beer, to deter youthful drinking and provide funding for prevention and treatment programs; and  
- stronger coordination among federal agencies that manage programs addressing underage drinking issues.  

The Congress took an important first step toward implementing some of that report’s recommendations when it passed the modest Sober Truth on Preventing (STOP) Underage Drinking Act in December, 2006. Much more needs to be done.”  

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