

**N.C. ABC Board Association Meeting; Grove Park Inn, Asheville; Tuesday, July 24, 2007**

**Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much. It is good to see you. I have had a really wonderful six years working on the issue of childhood alcohol use, and I want to tell you a little bit about how it started. I guess the whole effort really began way back when I took that first job as an assistant district attorney, and I just saw Steve Culbreth, who is on the local board in New Hanover County. Of course, Steve was one of the ones who broke me in and really taught me to try a case because he kept beating me all the time. He made me a better lawyer.**

**That is probably when my interest in this particular issue began because I saw first-hand every single day from the first moment I walked into district court how alcohol mixing with a youthful vigor can really shortchange somebody's future. That was before we had a lot of the research about how alcohol affects the developing brain. And that was before we knew the brain continued to develop until age 21 or 22.**

**After I was a prosecutor for almost 10 years, I opened a private practice and saw the other side of this continuum. I started to see what Steve Culbreth, as a lawyer in private practice, sees all the time in terms of deaths and injuries caused by young people drinking alcohol.**

**Then we had our own child, who is now 22. We had to help him negotiate a lot of tough choices, especially during middle school years, which are important years of decision-making about alcohol issues for kids. That is one of the reasons why we felt it was important to work in that age group – ages 9 to 15. I am not telling you what you do not already know when I say beginning alcohol education in high school is way too late. There is no question that a lot of attitudes about alcohol abuse are formed way before that time. Talking about the issue and sharing factual information in elementary school and middle school is not too early.**

**Once Michael was elected governor, I began working on the issue with other spouses of governors throughout the United States. Our goal was to sign up as many other spouses as we could to work and join with us. We wanted to engage, on state and national levels, public opinion makers and public policy makers in a discussion about how alcohol affects children and to get on the nation's radar screen that this is a public health crisis that deserves our attention.**

**Well, six years later, we have 35 spouses in the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free – all governors' spouses. The most inspiring thing about it is that it is a growing movement. After Governors ride off into the sunset, as Michael will be doing in 18 months, the spouses continue to work with the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free. So we have 35 current spouses and 24 emeritus spouses – spouses whose governors have gone out of office, but they continue to work with us on a national level.**

**We want to engage state officials in a conversation about this public health crisis and give voice to what the research shows. We know that there are 5,000 deaths of young people in this country every year that are totally preventable because those 5,000 deaths are linked to**

**alcohol abuse. Whether it is a car crash or an overdose, we lose 5,000 young people every year.**

**New research has shown us that drinking by our youth can cause significant damage to the development of certain portions of the brain that govern logic and reasoning – right at the time that these children do not need their logic and reasoning impaired, the time they should be honing their skills and learning and thriving.**

**Studies show that children who begin drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to either become alcohol-dependent or alcoholics as adults. That is a scary statistic. We also know that many children are taking their first drink at age 12 – it does not matter what part of the country you are from – that is about the time they begin their experimentation.**

**We also know that as of 2005, this activity by our youth carries nationally about a \$52 billion price tag in expenses for all of us. In North Carolina, it is approximately a \$1.2 billion price tag in deaths, injuries, pain and suffering, lost work, court costs, fines – you name it. It is a huge number that we can do something about.**

**The good news is that people are learning the facts, and because of that we have made an inspiring amount of progress over the last six years, which is relatively a short period of time.**

**Nationally, there were 166 statutes that relate to underage alcohol abuse passed in 2006. This year, there have already been 129 pieces of legislation with a reference to controlling alcohol use by our children. So it is clear that many leaders in our country have realized that underage drinking is not a phase that should be smiled at and tolerated, but it is really a serious public health issue that needs attention. It threatens our children's potential and marks them for life or, in some cases, marks them for death.**

**As you know in North Carolina last December, the keg permit law went into effect in our state, and thank you very much to those of you who played a role in passing that. In the same month, the ABC Commission voted down a petition to allow distributors to give coupons and loyalty cards for discounts on malt beverages. Thank you for that. These are all public health stands that you all can take that the citizens of the state and the parents and the kids are most grateful.**

**Last March, the governor signed legislation that makes it illegal to purchase or possess or use an alcohol vaporizing device that delivers the kick faster. It is anticipated that he will soon sign House Bill 1277, which carries a pretty heavy penalty for one who gives alcohol to a minor. If one is convicted of this particular offense, he or she will have his or her license suspended for a year by the DMV. I have a hunch that particular legislation will pass. That is going to change the parents' behavior and social norms.**

**One of the main problems we have in North Carolina is the social condition of parents hosting alcohol parties for teens. This legislation will go a long way to changing that and it will save lives this year.**

**We all know that regulation fees, statutes delivering certain penalties and education is critical. I tend to work more in the education and awareness area because that is where I am more comfortable as a lawyer and a mother and as First Lady.**

**In our efforts to moderate the impact of advertising on our children, the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free has been active, and we have key partners that we work with nationally. We joined with 37 of the nation's attorneys general to begin to work together on the alcohol issue. They are our public interest lawyers, and it is an issue that garners our media and public to intervene.**

**So we began to work with the attorneys general to engage the nation's distillers and brewers in a conversation about ad placement and use. In June, we were so pleased that through the attorneys general's hard work Beam Global announced it will only advertise its products in print and broadcast outlets where no more than 25 percent of the audience is under age 21. That might seem like a little dent to you, but it will have a big impact. We are very grateful to Beam Global. We are hoping that some brewers will join us. Beam Global's willingness to talk and to change represents what we hope will be an important shift by the industry towards shielding young audiences from alcohol messages that are embedded in their surroundings almost every day.**

**The Leadership works in many parts nationally, but one of our most valued allies has been the Office of the Surgeon General. We are pleased to welcome the Acting Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu on September 12<sup>th</sup> at the Millennium Center at N.C. State University, which is a public affairs program that I coordinate. I hope that you will be able to look on the web site and find out a little more about his visit. I am not sure that we have ever had a surgeon general come to North Carolina, and he is going to come and talk about the "Call to Action to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking" report that he issued in March. That is another project that the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free worked on. It is a nice, brief succinct, easily readable and usable gathering of research about how alcohol affects youth and what we see in terms of trends with alcohol abuse by our children.**

**One of the interesting and disturbing things we see in this research is that girls are catching up with boys in terms of when they begin drinking, frequency of drinking and how much they drink. It is really frightening, but we need to understand where we are in order to figure out where we are going. On the Surgeon General's web site, you can find the Call to Action. I was surprised how really readable and interesting it was. It brings a focus on what a serious public health crisis underage drinking is. At the same time, it also indicates that it is not a problem without a solution. It just takes the will to get busy about the business of doing something about it.**

**So we have come a long way. We would like to keep the momentum going. ABC Board members are really in a position to have a tremendous impact on childhood drinking in your communities. You have a wonderful network, as was demonstrated by this really wonderful, updated, fancy web site that is a great tool.**

**We know that some of the most effective programs on the state and national level begin on the local level. Because we are one of 18 Alcohol Control states, North Carolina really has a unique opportunity to influence alcohol sales policies and address underage alcohol consumption through a system of local boards. As a member on these local boards, you sure are in an important position of influence that I would love to tap into.**

**In the 2005-2006 fiscal year, the sale of liquor in North Carolina generated more than \$216 million. That is wonderful. Congratulations on a job well done. More \$7 million of that, which is about 3.3 percent of that \$216 million goes to alcohol education, which includes underage drinking.**

**Everyone can look at that percentages and maybe think about tweaking their underage sections up a little bit, by a few percentage points. That would be a great thing to think about. Please know we are very, very grateful for your support.**

**While it is often the appointing body can designate how the dollars are spent, I understand that, there are local agency boards that have assumed a leading role in shaping and ensuring that those profits that are generated by the retail stores are put to work in effective prevention strategies in their areas.**

**I think it is important periodically to take a look at reassessing what kinds of problems you have in your communities by gathering data or gathering your local community college or university gathering data to pinpoint what issues and problem points are and then making sure that that money that you are sending out is effectively addressing those issues.**

**Another thing I would like you to keep in mind is we do not know all about how alcohol impacts the developing brain, but we know a lot now and we learned most of it in the last 5 years. But what is shocking is the level of ignorance among parents and adults about how alcohol impacts the developing brain. Anything that you can do to share those facts which are equally understood would be really helpful. I have talked to parents who have college degrees and parents that have beyond college degrees, they have no clue that alcohol abuse by somebody in the age group of 12 to 15 causes permanent changes in the way people process information and exercise judgment. They had no clue. So you see, the education need is there.**

**Let me give you an example of some of the successful things that have gone on. The Mecklenburg County ABC Board— are you all here? Thank you for what you are doing. Each funding cycle board awards grants, see that way, they can really assess what is working and what is not. It gives them the freedom to take a different tactic. The grants range from \$10 to 25,000 and go to local nonprofits addressing substance abuse, prevention, education, treatment and research. This means that the funding goes to local organizations that know the challenges of their communities and they can activate strategies with proven track records for success. It also gives funding to those who gather the data that you can use to figure out where you are and where you want to go. The Mecklenburg Board also does a great job keeping its finger on the pulse of what is going on in prevention efforts in the community. For example, the Board realized that there was not any funding for Preventing Underage Drinking**

**Coordinator who is necessary to do the work in the area, they pitched in and funded the position for this past fiscal year. That is a great effort and I congratulate you for being so proactive.**

**It is also important, though, to realize that it does not always take a whole lot of money to make a difference and have an impact with education and awareness. The information many people need is free on the web and easy to access. Also, many ABC boards give most of their money to local governing boards, as you well know, whether it is county commissioners or city council. Your board may not have a whole lot of money left over, but this does not mean that your hands are tied. You still need to ask that local governing board to re-shift some of the priorities and allow the board to retain a small amount to either fund your own prevention program or to fund a worthy project or support the existing group, which is one of the best ways to really ramp up the ability to have an impact in your community.**

**Even the most modest investment in a project can help raise awareness and reinforce the message that alcohol can short-circuit a young person's future. The ABC Board from Sanford, are you all here today? Yep. Thank you for what you do. They designate a portion of their funds to essay project. As part of the project, students write essays on how they would discourage their peers from drinking alcohol and students with the best essays win a scholarship.**

**Every little bit can have an impact in reinforcing the message. Let me give you another example. In '04, the North Carolina ABC Commission approved a billboard advertising for liquor and the alcohol industry is required that at least 10 percent be designated to display your responsibility message. We have all seen these everywhere. We have seen them on the billboards, we have also seen them in television ads and heard them on radio ads. What is the message? Drink responsibly, right? That is great as a conversation opener that gets people thinking. But have you ever asked yourself, what is the definition of responsible drinking?**

**Well, some polling group asked that question and they got an incredible array of responses. There was no coherence to it all. There is dizzying array of responses when you poll people about that. It might be helpful to take a look at this message, "drink responsibly," and provide a clearer definition of responsible drinking that we can all understand and get our arms around as a beginning point for a social norm.**

**The National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIAAA, provides that for us and I think people call it "0-1-2." Responsible drinking means this: 0 drinks for people under 21, easy enough; 0 drinks if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant; 0 drinks if you are planning to get behind the wheel; 0 drinks if you are taking certain medications that interact with alcohol.**

**Here's the 1, 1 standard drink per day for women and older adults; and 2 standard drinks per day for men. Keep this in mind...a standard drink is a 12 ounce beer or a 5 ounce glass of wine or 1 and half ounces of distilled liquor. That is a good standard.**

**Wouldn't it be great to have that put on all the bags that you package alcohol in and send people out the door with?**

**You are not encouraging them to drink, but just giving them information so they know that National Institute for Alcohol and Alcoholism recommends that this is what "drink responsibly" really means. So we all have a clue as to what it means.**

**Sharing this information with the public begins the process of changing norms associated with alcohol abuse. Your outlets across the state can begin that process. The industry begins the conversation for us when they tell us to drink responsibly. It is up to us to define the norms. If people want to deviate from the norm, that is fine, just as long as you do not drive and hurt somebody or get above the statutory limit. But I think we have a role to explain what normal is.**

**There are also ample opportunities for you to partner with support local prevention groups who are working to change social norms. For example in Orange County the ABC Board— have we got Orange County here? Yes, we do. Thank you for what you do. They regularly attend meetings with the Coalition for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, which is one of our most active coalitions. Because board members and the community coalition have a great working relationship, the groups recently have come together to work on a number of projects that will really make a difference to save lives in Orange County. Projects on the county level are more successful when local prevention coalitions have the ability to assess a coalition's needs by gathering the data that measure the breadth of major problems and the efficacy of what is being done to address it.**

**I want to let you know that North Carolina has recently received a \$1.8 million grant that would be used to address alcohol-related traffic crashes and deaths in our state. As a part of the grant the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services— don't make me say that twice, please— has worked to identify 18 counties in North Carolina in which the rates of these crashes and deaths are the highest. We will give that information to you all so you will know where those 18 counties will be that will receive these grants, which involve a significant amount of money, divvying that money 18 ways.**

**These 18 counties are now in the process of looking at who was most likely involved in these particular deadly incidents and where they occur in a county. So they are looking for the hot spots. Each county can then form an advisory board, and it would be great to have a ranking member of a local ABC Board to serve with the group in those 18 target places to help develop and implement a specialized plan to address youth alcohol abuse in each community.**

**There are also 10 or 11 locally-based underage drinking prevention community coalitions, Chapel Hill is one of our most active ones and so is Charlotte, working to prevent alcohol abuse by young persons in our counties in North Carolina. They are made up of a very eclectic group— some parents, educators, business owners, law enforcement and other just concerned citizens. They are behind very excellent programs that concern a lot of other parts of the state. Where else can you find strategies that work? On your web site is a great place**

to start. Also the web site for the Institute of Medicine has some strategies that have been proven to work on a local level.

I want to thank you so much for your help in regulating and controlling the distribution of alcohol. Your work is important. It is a legal substance, we want people to have access to it. But we do not want it controlled completely by the marketplace, there has to be some type of control because it has such an impact on health, and specifically the health and development of our youth. Thanks for inviting me to come talk to you and update you a little bit about what is going on nationally and in the state. I hope that in the next few weeks, you will have the opportunity to think about how you and your board can take a fresh look at this public health issue. Think about what your response may be. We all wish every citizen in the state would take a moment to look at what we are doing to assess whether we are being effective or not. Underage drinking is everybody's problem and the solution is everybody's business. Thank you so much for having me today.

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