

DOT 86-10
Friday, April 30, 2010
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Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood Joins Oprah for 'No Phone Zone Day' to End Distracted Driving

WASHINGTON – As part of his continuing effort to put an end to distracted driving, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today participated in a special live episode of “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” dedicated to ending this deadly behavior. Secretary LaHood joined the show, which marked the first national “No Phone Zone Day,” from a rally in Washington, DC to encourage people to put down their phone and focus on the road when behind the wheel.

Secretary LaHood has been working for over a year to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. He convened the first National Distracted Driving Summit in Washington, DC last fall. His call to action to end this deadly behavior has helped spur anti-distracted driving legislation in many states, texting bans for commercial truck drivers and federal employees, revised employee policies on cell phone use, the creation of the first national victims’ advocacy nonprofit organization and pilot enforcement campaigns that will serve as models for law enforcement around the country.

“I’ve made it my mission to end distracted driving,” said Secretary LaHood. “We know that if we can get people to put away cell phones and other electronic devices when they are behind the wheel, we can save thousands of lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of injuries every year. I’m proud to participate in Oprah’s No Phone Zone Day.”

Secretary LaHood was joined for today’s broadcast by FocusDriven President Jennifer Smith, DC Police Chief Cathy Lanier and Gayle King at a No Phone Zone Day rally at the Newseum in Washington, DC. Oprah’s No Phone Zone Day program broadcast live from Washington and four other cities across the nation, including Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles.

Research by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) shows that in 2008, nearly 6,000 people died and more than half a million were injured in crashes involving a distracted or inattentive driver. Almost 20 percent of all crashes that same year involved some type of distraction. Though the worst offenders are the youngest, least experienced drivers – men and women under 20 – drivers of all ages are guilty of operating many electronic devices while driving.

Since becoming the nation’s top transportation official, Secretary LaHood has taken strong measures to stop distracted driving and to raise awareness about the dangerous practice.

Last fall, Secretary LaHood sparked a national conversation on distracted driving when he held a Distracted Driving Summit in Washington, DC, bringing together law enforcement, researchers, legislators, victims, and other stakeholders to get to the bottom of the problem. The Obama Administration immediately committed to lead by example; the President issued an Executive Order banning four million federal employees from texting while driving government-owned vehicles or their own vehicle while on official government business. Secretary LaHood also taped a national PSA on the dangers of distracted driving and launched a new government website – www.distraction.gov – to provide the public with a comprehensive resource for information and ways to get involved.

Secretary LaHood’s Distracted Driving Summit also led to the creation of [FocusDriven](http://FocusDriven.com), the first national non-profit victims’ advocacy organization dedicated to eliminating distracted driving. FocusDriven President Jennifer Smith attended and spoke at the Summit about the tragic loss of her mother after a driver talking on his cell phone crashed into her. After meeting other relatives of victims at the summit, Jennifer decided to form a non-profit modeled after the success of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. FocusDriven was launched at USDOT headquarters in January.

The USDOT is also using its regulatory authority to crack down on dangerous behavior behind the wheel. In January, Secretary LaHood banned commercial truck and bus operators from texting behind the wheel. The Department is also currently working on new rules to restrict the use of electronic devices by commercial truck and bus drivers, rail operators and to disqualify commercial vehicle driving privileges of individuals, including school bus drivers, convicted of texting while driving.

On the state level, the Department has worked to promote efforts to prohibit distracted driving by releasing sample legislation. Today, six states prohibit all drivers from using hand-held cell phones while driving and twenty-four states currently have texting bans.

In order to reinforce state laws, NHTSA launched pilot enforcement programs in Hartford, Connecticut and Syracuse, New York to test whether increased law enforcement efforts combined with public service announcements can get distracted drivers to put down their cell phones and focus on the road. Dubbed "*Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other,*" the pilot programs, which are similar to previous efforts to curb drunk driving and increase seat belt use among drivers, are the first effort in the country to specifically focus on the effects of increased enforcement and public advertising on reducing distracted driving.

Secretary LaHood has joined a number of high profile public awareness campaigns in addition to Oprah's No Phone Zone Day in order to get the word out on distracted driving. Recently, he unveiled the winner of a national anti-distracted driving teen PSA contest with the National Organization for Youth Safety. Secretary LaHood and American Idol Finalist Jordin Sparks also launched Allstate's "X the Text" campaign earlier this week in Washington, DC.

Secretary LaHood said, "We are working every day to put a stop to the needless deaths and injuries caused by distracted driving."

To learn more and get involved in the DOT's efforts to stop distracted driving, please visit www.distraction.gov.