



A Modest Proposal On Drinking and Driving

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As we approach the New Year, the #1 official alcohol drinking night of the Year, I have a modest proposal for the youth of America: Trade in your driver's licences for drinking licences.

It is astonishing to reflect on how much the automobile has changed our physical landscape and our culture. The legal drinking age in [most countries](#) around the world is 16 or 18, but in car-culture America it is 21. The main reason for this difference is more than just the usual American Puritanical attitudes, but rather a secular progressive movement led by groups such as [Mothers Against Drunk Driving \(MADD\)](#) to lower alcohol-related death rates on America's highways and byways. Prior to a 1984 Federal law linking highway funding to the 21 year drinking age (later upheld by a [1987 Supreme Court ruling](#)) each state set it's own drinking age. Since then the law (paternalism?) has been credited with saving thousands of lives on America's highways. It has also stood up time and again to ridicule at the inconsistencies between being able to vote, join the military, smoke cigarettes, buy firearms, get married, run for political office, but not have a pint of beer at a bar.

It is hard to argue with success and I would not want to go back to having drunk teenagers and cars mix like gin and tonic, but why should we let the state choose cars over alcohol for teenagers. In most places in America I guess cars are pretty much the only form of transportation and therefore more important than having the right to consume alcohol. But in urban areas like NYC, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco, where very few people, nevermind teenagers, own cars, and mass transportation is plentiful this one-size-fits-all law doesn't make any sense at all.

In the spirit of balancing individual freedoms of voting age citizens and limiting the carnage on America's roads, I have a modest proposal: At age 18, new voting age citizens can obtain a 3-year licence to **Either Drink OR Drive**, but not both.

This would empower the youth of America to be more responsible for their choices, a youth culture that values mass transit and carpooling. This one policy change could also take tens of thousands of cars off the road.

So, how about it America? Should we continue to let the car culture drive our drinking age restrictions, or should we let individuals choose their own path? Write your thoughts to Transportation Secretary Norman Minetta at dot.comments@dot.gov (that's the part of Federal government that has threatened to withhold highway funds) and tell them to let local governments set regulations on drinking and driving that are more appropriate to their transportation situation.



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