

Statement for the Record of John D. Welty
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Before the
Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the topic of "Under the Influence: The Binge Drinking Epidemic on College Campuses."

Tragedy often results in a call to action. Such was the case on October 7, 2000, with the alcohol-induced death of Adrian Heideman, an 18-year-old student at California State University, Chico. This incident was preceded a week earlier by an incident of alcohol poisoning at San Diego State University, and then followed ten days later by another near-fatal case of alcohol poisoning, also at San Diego State.

These were not the first deaths, nor near deaths, related to alcohol abuse on California State University (CSU) campuses. Nor are alcohol-related tragedies confined to California or the CSU system. Alcohol abuse by students at colleges and universities is a national problem, and the death of Adrian Heideman at Chico State prompted our Chancellor to a call for immediate action.

In December of 2000, Chancellor Charles B. Reed appointed a 21-person committee of presidents, vice presidents for student affairs, students, faculty, staff and alumni to review the CSU's alcohol policies and prevention programs. The problem of student drinking on college campuses is complex, but the question posed to the committee was simple and straightforward: How can we prevent any more tragedies?

The task we set for ourselves was bold and ambitious, but we knew from the outset that the potential for impact was far-reaching. The California State University is the largest public system of higher education in the country, with 23 campuses, 388,700 students, and 42,000 faculty and staff. The development and implementation of a comprehensive and system wide alcohol policy and program would go a long way toward changing the culture of student drinking on our 23 campuses.

The system wide Committee on Alcohol Policies and Prevention began its work in December of 2000. We began by meeting with state and national experts who provided us with research and insights into best practices across the country. From these discussions it became clear that presidential leadership would play a critical role on each of our campuses. First and foremost, it was made clear that CSU presidents must make this issue a priority on their campuses in a demonstrable way. The "Be Vocal, Be Visible, and Be Visionary" statement from the national Presidents' Leadership Group established by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention is an example of what our Committee envisioned. The Committee also stressed the importance of developing comprehensive alcohol policies at the campus level, policies that would be aligned with the new system wide initiative. In addition, the Committee emphasized that it was essential that alcohol policies be consistently enforced.

Student involvement in policy planning and program implementation was also identified as a significant factor in the success of our initiatives. In addition, through these consultations with state and national experts, it became clear that prevention and education programs must be offered by well-trained staff, and that treatment programs should be available to all students who need them. We also learned that it was important to gather data in a systematic way, in order to assess the nature and extent of the problem on our campuses, as well as the success of our policies and programs.

As a result of these initial consultations, the Committee continued its work with a focus on six key areas: comprehensive policies; consistent enforcement; education and prevention; training, intervention and treatment; assessment; and the development of adequate resources to sustain a long-term and comprehensive effort on our 23 campuses.

The Committee also recommended that the system adopt the “social norms approach” as a prevention model. The “social norms” approach uses informational campaigns to correct students’ misperceptions of drinking attitudes and behaviors on their campuses. Peer education programs were also stressed, along with the establishment of a broad range of campus and community partnerships that involve all stakeholders in the planning and implementation process.

In July of 2001, following a review of the Committee’s recommendations, the Board of Trustees unanimously adopted a comprehensive alcohol policy for the entire CSU. In addition, the Chancellor and Trustees committed \$1.1 million to support programs and planning efforts across the 23 campuses. Each campus received \$25,000 to begin the implementation of new programs and initiatives, with the agreement to match this amount from campus funds. Decisive leadership and the allocation of targeted resources were critical to move this effort forward.

Immediately following the adoption of the new CSU Alcohol Policy, each campus was charged with establishing a Campus Advisory Council to lead the planning and implementation efforts. On my own campus, at California State University, Fresno, our Advisory Council has representatives from student government; athletics; fraternities and sororities; residence life; faculty; staff and administrators in student affairs; campus health professionals and counselors; university police; alumni; a representative from our Parents Association; and several community representatives - including local bar owners; alcohol beverage vendors and distributors; local law enforcement officials; and a Drug and Alcohol administrator from the Fresno County Human Services system, a significant prevention organization in our community.

The new CSU Alcohol Policy stresses the importance of university partnerships with the external community, with an emphasis on working together to enforce existing laws; decrease the use of alcohol in the promotion of business and community events; reduce underage sales; and drastically curtail promotions that encourage binge drinking, such as “happy hours” and price promotions, where two drinks can be bought for the price of one, or promotions such as “women drink for free” nights. We also need to expand alcohol-free recreational events for young people both on and off campus. The new Alcohol Policy also recommends that campuses develop partnerships with our K-12 colleagues, and with community-based youth organizations in our regions. To be effective, our strategies must extend beyond the campus itself and encompass the larger, surrounding community.

I mentioned earlier that one of the recommendations adopted by the Board was the implementation of a “social norms” approach as the key prevention model on our campuses. Last year, the CSU co-sponsored the National Conference on Social Norms with the Bacchus and Gamma Peer Education Network in southern California. This year Bacchus and Gamma will hold its National Conference on Social Norms in Philadelphia (July of 2002). Many of the CSU’s faculty, staff and students attended last year’s conference, and we will send additional representatives to this year’s national meeting.

Social norms marketing methods have yielded impressive reductions in alcohol abuse on a growing number of university campuses. Studies have found that students tend to greatly overestimate the amount of drinking that occurs among their peers, and then fashion their own behavior to meet this perceived norm. Campuses are now conducting “social norming” campaigns to correct students’ misperceptions of peers’ drinking habits.

The social norms approach also advocates peer education programs, with students educating and encouraging fellow students on responsible and safe approaches to alcohol use. Many of these new programs and initiatives target first-year students on college campuses, as well as other students who are identified as members of high-risk groups.

I indicated earlier that one of the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees was the need to develop adequate resources to fund the many new and innovative programs that are necessary to reverse the problem of alcohol abuse on our campuses, and in our communities. I am pleased to report that in February of 2002, a memorandum of understanding was signed by six state agencies and the CSU system to address the problem of alcohol abuse among university students. The six state agencies include: Business, Transportation and Housing; the Department of Alcohol Beverage Control; the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs; the California Highway Patrol; the Department of Motor Vehicles; and the Office of Traffic Safety. This new partnership will focus on a broad spectrum of activities,

including educational efforts, prevention programs, and enforcement activities both on and off the campuses. Both regional and statewide approaches will be used, and the CSU will work with agency partners to cooperate on a legislative agenda that addresses issues related to alcohol abuse and its consequences.

The state agencies involved in the partnership have committed approximately \$2 million in grants to fund a number of initiatives on several CSU campuses. Several of the initiatives are designed to strengthen the enforcement of underage drinking laws, as well as a "Sober Driver Initiative" for all CSU campuses. This new relationship with our state agencies will help us make a real difference in the lives of our students, and in the lives of the citizens of our communities.

In conclusion, let me say that the Trustees of the California State University have adopted a policy that will ensure that positive changes are made and consistently monitored. Each campus is required to report to the Chancellor and the Board every two years on how well they are meeting the desired outcomes. The adoption of the new CSU alcohol policy establishes a clear framework for policies and programs that are now being implemented on all of our 23 campuses.

I would also like to offer several suggestions that the Committee might consider regarding how the federal government might be able to assist us with our efforts.

First, it is clear that we have much to learn regarding this complex and challenging problem. Federal support for high quality and comprehensive research is desperately needed.

Second, we desperately need to encourage individuals to enter careers in alcohol and other drug prevention and treatment. Policies that encourage people to enter these careers, along with support for their training, would make a significant difference in efforts to deal with this problem.

Third, I urge you to evaluate the programs that are currently funded, and to change the criteria so that institutions of higher education and governmental agencies would be required to work together in partnerships to address the problem of student alcohol abuse. There are too many examples of failure to collaborate which results in the ineffective use of federal dollars that are passed on to the states.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you again for this opportunity to testify on the efforts of the California State University to address the problem of student drinking on our campuses. I commend the Committee for convening a panel to discuss this important issue that is pervasive and persistent on our nation's campuses. As a society, we must not, and should not, ignore the consequences of student alcohol abuse. The California State University stands ready to work with the Members of this Committee to ensure that the "last call" will no longer be the final call for any of our students.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.