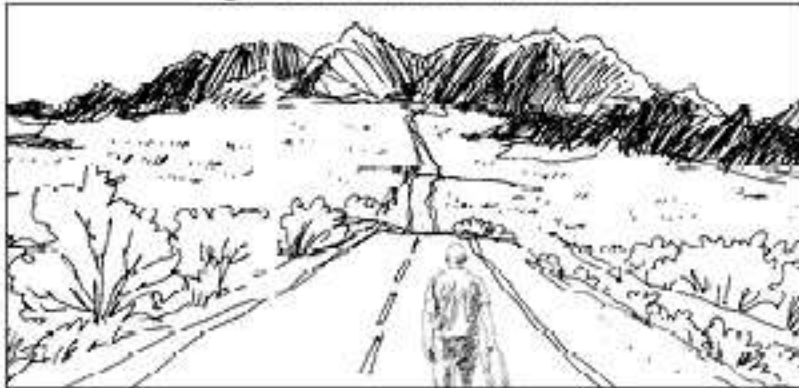




LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD: LAW ENFORCEMENT'S BATTLE WITH DWI

By William Aiken Jr.



Over the years as an advocate holding drunken drivers accountable while supporting the victims of their crimes, I've come to understand and appreciate the essential role of law enforcement. They are the front line deterrent. They keep the roads we share safe.

Not only on the enforcement side. Police are the most credible persuaders to get road safety laws passed. First, they're respected as on-scene responders. Second, their endorsements are coveted since their support isn't seen as a partisan issue of politics. It's a matter of safety. RID's lobbying efforts often get marred by the Dem/GOP divide.

Chief Brian Whipple, Patrolman Shawn Edouard offer their perspectives. Chief Whipple gives an administrative view, while Edouard shares his experience enforcing DWI laws.

FROM THE TOP



*Brian Whipple, Police Chief
Schenectady Police Department*

On February 26, 2026, Brian Whipple was sworn in as the new police chief of the Schenectady police department, replacing Eric Clifford. Whipple brings a stellar background as the new chief. He's a graduate of the FBI academy and has a master's degree in Public Safety. Previously, he's worked in various departments within the SPD.

TO THE GROUND



*Patrolman Shawn Edouard (right)
with Police Chief Brian Whipple*

When I contacted Chief Whipple to be interviewed, he suggested I reach out to his top anti-DWI officer, Patrolman Shawn Edouard. RID appreciates Edouard's generosity in taking the time to enlighten our readers with his street level perspective:

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NOTICE:

RID's newsletter is now online! Those who don't have access to a computer call (518) 729-8187 and we will send the newsletter via snail mail. If you want to support the work RID does, please send donations by visiting RID's Paypal account at www.rid-usa.org OR write to: RID-USA, PO Box 520 Schenectady, NY 12301

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER: DURING A TRAFFIC STOP, POLICE NEED TO HAVE AGENCY

By William Aiken Jr.



On January 20th of this year, I got rear ended while stopping at a traffic light, waiting to turn left. The other driver, pulled over into a nearby parking lot. Neither of us were injured. Then I called 911 and my insurance company as I waited for police to arrive.

It turned out the other driver had her license suspended. The officer wrote her a summons for the infraction. She had to appear in court at a later date. The deference shown by the officer was appropriate.

The woman was cooperative, admitting she was at fault.

In another fender bender I was involved in, the accident didn't go smoothly. The other driver changed her story. This incident happened before the prevalence of cell phones with cameras. There were no pictures to prove what happened or even a police report.

Anyway, the guilty driver's insurance agent had to do an extended investigation. He had to track down the passengers in her car to interview them. I had to file a detailed report of what transpired. All this took an additional month before my repairs could be covered.

The situation could have been resolved in a timely manner had the other driver simply been truthful. As a result, her insurance was cancelled. So I give the driver who rear ended me, credit for owning her mistake. In this day and age, honesty isn't automatic.

So I looked into what the law says about driving with a suspended license. It turns you can't do it. It's up to the officer's discernment to determine

the consequence. And that's how it should be. It gives an officer agency, flexibility in handling different situations.

If the public became aware that driving with a suspended license isn't being enforced, it would only create more irresponsible drivers out there on our roads. On an individual basis, I say yes. The officer should be able to decide when to cut someone a break during a traffic stop or car accident. It gives them some leverage. As a general policy, I say no. There's too many bad drivers on the road. Lax enforcement encourages bad behavior.

The bottom line is driving is a privilege. It needs to be adjudicated as such. Patrolman Edouard has it right: Non-enforcement guarantee laws will be broken more frequently. The rule of law needs to be respected. Scientific data from our past should inform us how our policies are crafted. Thus, the laws on the books need to be enforced, accordingly.



William Aiken

William Aiken, Jr., President

Remove Intoxicated Drivers

SILENCE

By Betty Martin



*"The Most Common Way People Give Up Power
Is By Thinking They Don't Have Any."* Alice Walker

It's been 44 years since my daughter, Michele, was killed by a drunk driver. In my overwhelming grief and outrage I found a remarkable group of people who were speaking out, shouting out that driving while impaired by alcohol and other drugs should no longer be tolerated. The traffic court judge in my case told me to ring a loud bell, to speak out for victims

I joined the voices of strong advocates like Doris and Bill Aiken, Lillian Stern, Pat Gioa, Renee Barchitta, to mention just a very few. Their voices were loud and clear and people listened. Laws changed, penalties increased, messages were heard in schools, civic organizations, law enforcement, judges and yes, by our legislators. The media responded, reporting incidents of DWI injuries and fatalities.

Today in the chaos of economic insecurity, rising fuel prices, excesses in immigration reform resulting in death of American citizens, attempts to restrict free speech and voting rights - war, the voice for DWI reform and justice seems like a whisper overshadowed by daily assaults on our everyday lives. But - the influence of an industry that depends on the consumption of alcohol has not been silenced.

Instead it has become a subliminal promise of freedom from our individual circumstances. As football fans across the nation looked forward to the Super Bowl, and anticipation of what the new commercials would introduce us to, one commercial did not disappoint. Who could ignore the beauty and strength of the Clydesdale horse contrasted with a fledgling eagle who dared to ride astride and who ultimately spread its wings and soared above the horses in freedom and hope.

I could quote statistics that tell us that a nine year old has seen over 4000 alcohol commercials and by thirteen has started experimenting and that beer is the drink of choice for most young people, but those statistics among others are old hat. They've learned that anytime is Miller Time and Michelob was made for weekends and that you can climb mountains, sky dive and drive race cars. How many times have you sung along with Neil Diamond as he rode the train with "Rosie".

So where do we go from here? How do we make our whisper a sound to be reckoned with? Attend a Victim impact panel as an observer and write to your local newspaper about your reaction. Speak to youth groups about the effects of alcohol. Participate in National Crime Victims Rights Week April 19-25.

This year's theme is LISTEN. ACT. ADVOCATE. Support our law enforcement officers on the front line dealing with drunk drivers, crashes and injury or death. Plan your celebrations without having alcohol as the main beverage. Anywhere and anytime there is an opportunity to raise awareness make your voice heard. Even a whisper can resound loud and clear.

Support NYS Senate bill 2025-S53 by contacting our local Senators to lower the bad from .08 to .05. Join RID Stay informed. Your voice is a powerful tool. Call today!

Senate switchboard (518) 455-2800

Assembly switchboard (518) 455-4218

.05 Senate sponsor Liu (718)-765-6675

.05 Assembly Sponsor Simon (518) 455-5420

FROM THE TOP CONTINUED

Chief Whipple took some time to share his vision for law enforcement as it pertains to drunken driving. We also discuss what are the most effective measures to reduce DWI.

1) Before RID came on the scene, drunken driving was ubiquitous and socially acceptable. When did you first realize that DWI was a serious crime?

When I was in high school, a friend's father was arrested multiple times for DWI within a short period and ultimately went to jail. Watching how that situation affected their family was the first time I truly understood that impaired driving carries serious consequences, even when no one is physically hurt. It reinforced for me that these decisions can change lives in many ways.

2) Since 2000, DWI has consistently been the cause of over 10k fatalities annually. When did you first become aware of the magnitude of the harm and heartache caused by DWI?

I was involved in Youth Court during my early high school years. As part of that program, we attended a M.A.D.D. meeting one evening. Hearing firsthand from victims and families about the pain and loss caused by someone else's decision to drive impaired had a profound impact on me. It was difficult to listen to, but it helped shape my understanding of how serious and far-reaching the consequences of DWI can be.

3) Has your life been personally impacted by a drunken driver? If that's true, how did that experience shape your views on DWI?

I am grateful that my life has not been personally impacted by a drunk driver. However, throughout my career I have seen firsthand the consequences of impaired driving while responding to crash scenes where people were seriously injured or where innocent victims in other vehicles or pedestrians were harmed. These are difficult moments, and the images and experiences are something first responders carry with them long after the scene is cleared.

4) Combating DWI has been a combination of education and punishment. Which approach should our resources be more devoted to in order to curb DWI?

Both education and enforcement are essential, but to most effectively curb DWI, I believe resources should be

weighted toward visible and consistent enforcement, supported by strong education. People need to believe there is a real likelihood that they will be stopped and held accountable to change their behavior. When drivers feel they can get away with impaired driving without consequences, they are more likely to continue making that dangerous choice. High-visibility enforcement efforts, combined with meaningful education, especially for young people, as I experienced growing up, are both critical to reducing impaired driving and protecting our communities.

5) Drunken driving has plagued society for so long, the public seems numb to it. Going forward, how optimistic are you law enforcement can serve to deter driving drunk?

I am optimistic that law enforcement can continue to play a meaningful role in deterring impaired driving. Today, agencies have more tools than ever to spread prevention messages, including the use of social media, which allows us to reach large audiences at little to no cost. At the same time, increased funding dedicated specifically to DWI enforcement, the creation of specialized traffic units, and a growing recognition among police leadership of the devastating impact impaired driving has on communities all contribute to stronger, more focused efforts.

By combining proactive enforcement, targeted education, and modern communication strategies, law enforcement can help reduce impaired driving and improve safety on our roadways.

6) What should law makers be focused on in order to keep the roads we share safe?

Lawmakers should focus on policies that support effective enforcement and establish penalties that create a meaningful deterrent to impaired driving. In many cases, when we read about the outcomes of DWI-related trials, family members of victim's express frustration with the limitations of the penalties available under current New York laws.

Ensuring that laws both hold offenders appropriately accountable and reflect the serious impact impaired driving has on victims, families, and communities is an important part of strengthening public confidence and improving roadway safety.

TO THE GROUND CONTINUED

1) When did you decide to go into law enforcement? Was there an event or experience that inspired you to serve your community?

I decided at an early age that law enforcement would be my potential career. My recently retired father served as a police officer for 21 years and often served as an inspiration at home. At a young age I took an interest in policing whether it was hearing stories, going on ride-alongs, or watching the COPS TV show. When I made the decision to apply, go through an academy, and soon graduate, DWI enforcement always remained on my mind.

2) Before RID got started, drunken driving wasn't considered a crime. What changes in the public's attitude towards DWI have you noticed since you joined law enforcement?

Since I've joined law enforcement, I have only noticed a change in public's attitude towards DWI when a preventable tragedy happens. Like any major news headline, it will become the talk of conversation for a short period of time then often fade into the background of discussions.

Since joining Schenectady PD's Traffic Unit, I've made over 80 DWI arrests within a roughly 1.5-year period. While it was most people's first time being arrested, it likely was not their first time drunk driving. It is not too far to assume that the more you do something wrong and get away with it, the more comfortable you get with doing it. If nothing bad happened last time, then the thinking is that nothing bad will happen this time.

3) RID has been trying to lower the BAC in NYS for some time. Surprisingly, some law enforcement opposes it. They believe changing the legal BAC would require retraining its officers. What are your thoughts on having a .05 BAC threshold?

I am open to having a .05 BAC threshold if proper studies are conducted in which the legal system and scientific community are willing to accept. A BAC of .05 can still negatively impact a person's driving. If we can view using your cell phone while driving as dangerous, we should be able to view anything that negatively impacts your driving as the same.

4) In the 90s and 2000s, the campaign "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk" was effective in curbing DWI. Now with Uber and Lyft it's become obsolete. Ride sharing services haven't reduced DWI fatality rates as was promised. In today's world, what do you see as effective messaging to

encourage people to drive sober?

I believe messaging needs to include the fatality rates more often. I feel people don't often realize the danger they are posing to themselves or others. If you wouldn't drive your car home blindfolded, why would you risk drunk driving? Sure, you have a chance to make it to your destination in both scenarios, but now you're gambling arriving there either in your car, in handcuffs, or in a casket. Is that a bet you're willing to take?

5) I was rear ended by someone driving with a suspended license. That infraction seems to be flaunted more frequently. What can be done to get the public to respect our traffic laws? Is more education needed? Tougher penalties?

I believe the penalties need to be harsher for driving on a suspended license. In other states, if you're caught driving on a suspended license your vehicle can be impounded for weeks at a time and you can be taken to jail.

In New York, your vehicle can be towed, and you'll likely receive a roadside misdemeanor ticket. Often, people with a suspended/revoked license will consistently drive despite their driving privileges being removed. They know that most likely they'll only receive a roadside misdemeanor summons and have someone else pick their vehicle up from the tow yard.

6) You've personally witnessed the horrors of DWI up close. What message would you like to instill in drivers who might want to go out to socialize?

If you plan to go out and drink, please plan a safe ride home. Just because you think you're sober enough to drive does not actually mean you are. Countless people have been hurt by the actions of themselves and others who made the wrong decision to get behind the wheel. If you're not going to be selfless to not endanger others, be selfish enough to not endanger yourself.

7) Are you optimistic about the future regarding drunken driving?

I am optimistic about the future regarding drunk driving. I'm looking forward to more police departments investing in their own traffic units to target impaired drivers, as well as lawmakers bringing harsher consequences to impaired drivers. Without more officers looking for impaired drivers, the less likely someone will be held accountable.

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RIDley to the Rescue



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