

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Hearing on “Enhancing Vehicle Technology to Prevent Drunk Driving”
March 14, 2019
*As Prepared for Delivery***

Good morning and welcome to the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee hearing on Enhancing Vehicle Technology to Prevent Drunk Driving. “Drive sober or get pulled over” is a phrase we all remember hearing in the classroom or on television and it remains just as important a message today as it ever has.

Drunk driving is a significant public health concern that tragically cuts life short for so many – not just those that make the reckless decision to get behind the wheel after consuming alcohol but our family and friends on the road in the wrong place at the wrong time. Although alcohol impaired driving has decreased by about 30 percent over the last three decades it remains a serious and fatal risk on our roadways claiming almost 11,000 lives each year. The status quo is not acceptable. We can, and we must do better.

Drug impaired driving is also on the rise. Drug use and abuse have increasingly become central social issues. On opioids, last Congress we passed a comprehensive bipartisan package to help combat the epidemic, expand access to treatment, and protect our communities. But opioids aren’t the only drug making

our roads less safe--- so is marijuana. In fact, marijuana is the most common drug found in fatally injured drivers. It increases drowsiness and decreases reaction speed – both of which severely limit a driver’s ability to operate a vehicle safely.

In 2012, my home state of Washington legalized marijuana and Washingtonians have seen decreases in roadway safety since then. In 2017, the Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area conducted a report on the effects of marijuana. The report produced some pretty disturbing results. One in five 10th graders and one in four 12th graders reported riding with a driver who had been using marijuana. One in six 12th graders admitted to driving a vehicle within three hours of consuming marijuana.

The percentage of marijuana-positive drivers has more than doubled from 7.8 percent to 18.9 percent and fatal crashes involving marijuana have spiked to almost 13 percent from 7.8 percent prior to legalization. The increase in recreational use of marijuana poses a serious threat to roadway safety. We must learn from the lessons we’ve seen in my home state and make sure we are focusing on addressing drug-impaired driving and alcohol-impaired driving.

On this committee, it’s our job to explore how technology and innovation can improve people’s lives--- even save their lives. For example, ridesharing technology platforms have given people better and more options to get home safely. By providing an easy and user-friendly option, more people are opting for

ridesharing rather than getting behind the wheel after drinking or taking drugs. The subcommittee has been working on these issues for years, highlighting the sharing economy at a Disrupter Series hearing in 2015.

We should not lose sight of the fact that we lose almost 40,000 Americans on our roads every year. 94 percent of car crashes are caused by human error. Whether it be driving while tired, distracted, or, after drinking or taking drugs, human error causes crashes. Self-driving cars offer a technology-based solution that will save lives if the government regulations are updated from their 1970s approach over brake pedals and steering wheels.

I joined Republican Leader Walden and Representative Latta on a letter to Chairman Pallone yesterday asking that we continue work on the issue in a bipartisan manner again this Congress.

I commend Chair Schakowsky for her leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you. I want to thank our distinguished panel for your willingness to engage in this discussion today. I would welcome further discussions with leaders who offer other technology-based solutions to protect Americans.

I yield back.