

Subject: Great Phase III - 2007!

Hi Everybody –

On my trip back to Maryland, I had a chance to reflect on what we are all accomplishing through your efforts. What a great feeling that encouraged! Awareness is being raised, officers are better empowered to enforce and educate, first responders are seeing new ways to keep folks safe and share the message, and some of the communities that need educational resources most are finally getting more. The end result is certain to be that good information leads to better choices and fewer injuries!

One of the things that struck me, during last week's experience, is that the people most likely to die in motor vehicle crashes don't always have the same access to information, legislation and safety devices as many others. While Montana occupant protection legislation desperately warrants improvement, it seemed odd to many participants that the parallel tribal laws are even more in need of updating toward best practices. Not only that, but consistency in law awareness, enforcement, judicial support, educational resources, and even access to adequate restraints can also be improved in some of the communities visited.

We all know that we are involved in these efforts because motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death for ages 4 through 34, and a leading cause of death and injury for all age groups. What not everyone is aware of is that Native Americans are twice as likely to die on roadways, according to statistics collected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and that crashes are the number one cause of death for ages 4 through 44 (another set of 10 years) among this part of our population. The huge disparity in deaths and injuries sustained deserves special attention, and I applaud you for making that happen.

The energy shift that I witnessed was amazing! As people increased their awareness of the issues, many started exploring ways to improve education and enforcement, and working together to improve the safety of families. Some were even talking about ways to improve tribal and state legislation and resources. All of this happened in the presence of, and often with the direct involvement of local leaders. Because Patty Carrell had worked with leaders to initiate the programming, and was personally available to each participant to answer questions and provide direct contacts for ongoing support, folks seemed even more enabled to take action. In my experience with educational programs, I have seen that this kind of direct cooperation is extremely effective.

I look forward to hearing about more progress, cooperation and communication, as we move forward. As long as we all do our part to keep the momentum going, I know that I will! In the meantime, I have attached a small photo presentation of our week. It will show you some of the great people we had a chance to work with.

Thanks for all that you are doing!

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