What are some of the problems we face on the roads? What laws could be changed to accomplish that goal? How can you contribute to improving road safety?

Combatting Drunk Driving On The Roads
Paloma Socorro

One huge problem on the roads are drivers under the influence. Drunk driving accidents make up an alarming percentage of car accidents in the United States. In 2016, 28% of all traffic-related deaths in the U.S. were the result of alcohol-impaired driving crashes, and that is solely fatalities, not including the number of crashes where people survive, but are injured (CDC 2020). Moreover, there are a staggering 111 million self-reported alcohol-impaired driving episodes every year, which means that millions of drivers get on the road under the influence, putting themselves and others drivers at risk (CDC 2020). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, almost 30 people die each day in drunk driving crashes in the U.S. — totaling more than 10,500 lives lost (2018) and costing more than $44 billion in death and damages (2010) (NHTSA 2020).

An innovative preventative legislative initiative I brainstormed that could be set up to combat drunk driving and improve road safety is a safe, no-questions-asked phone line to police, comparable to New York State's no-penalty 911 Good Samaritan Law. The Good Samaritan Law "allows people to call 911 without fear of arrest if they are having a drug or alcohol overdose that requires emergency medical care or if they witness someone overdosing" (NYS Department of Health 2020). With increased technology these days, apps like Uber and Lyft allow people to call a car service to bring them home, intoxicated or not. Let's say someone hypothetically says, "I can't afford an Uber/Lyft" or "There's no Ubers/Lyfts available in my area" or "I don't have either app on my phone and I'm too intoxicated to download it." Then the last resort could be this "911 Pick You Up Law," where cops can pick up someone who is intoxicated and has no ride or other way to get home safely, and take them home, no-penalty. The individual would then be responsible to go back and get their vehicle the next morning when they are sober, but it may save a life.

In regards to safety of the passengers, there would also need to be police protocol and consequences in place to ensure that no one is taken advantage of, put in an uncomfortable position, or discriminated against. For example, despite the fact that women make up a smaller percentage of the police force, there could be mechanisms in place where if a young female calls in the station for the hypothetical "911 Pick You Up Law," they could request to have a female police officer be the one to pick them up and take them home, if a female officer is on duty. Or. there could be required video footage. These are just sample ways to incentivize the comfort of people to use the resource.

Ride-hailing companies like Uber could also adapt this idea (potentially collaborating with elected officials) and test out an emergency fund for drunk driving prevention, where money is allocated into a fund which gives each user at least 3 times they are able to use an "emergency—drunk driving prevention" feature. Again, to deter people from taking advantage, it would have to be heavily made aware across the app/users that this was an absolute-last-resort option. Accountability would be through drivers/passengers, and penalties for reports of untruthful people. Moreover, having a set number of times they are able to dip into the fund may encourage people to only use it in extreme scenarios.

While at the end of the day, there may be a wide range of reasons why people drink alcohol and get behind the wheel, despite the danger and risk, individuals can set a positive example and standard for themselves and the people in their life. Young adults can educate themselves and their peers, and hold themselves, their peers, institutions like the police, and car companies (as a consumer of their vehicles) accountable. These actions may ultimately dissuade people across all age groups to not drink and drive, overall lessening statistics of intoxicated drivers and victims impacted by drunk driving accidents.

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