

Thank you for inviting me here, today.

I appreciate the work of SADD – Students Against Destructive Decisions - - in their effort to promote seatbelts and other good ideas.

As your name suggests – it is somewhat “SAD” to be here today – because it is the birthday of your former President, Andrea Ordalen.

It is tragic to die in such a way, especially at an early age.

But the best way to remember Andrea, is to never forget what she stood for.

It makes me proud to know that SADD is continuing Andrea’s dream – of promoting common sense and good decision-making.

I am *honored* to be with you today.

I congratulate all of you for gathering in the midst of the Holiday Season to focus on something very serious.

We tend to think that the holidays are only a time to enjoy ourselves and have fun.

But if you think about it – the Holidays all have something in common...

Whether you celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah or Kwanzaa - - It’s all about life, the value of life.

Seatbelts are about life, too.

Every time you sit behind that wheel, it’s decision time.

It’s time to make the right decision on how to safely get to where you want to go.

It’s time to buckle up.

As the poster says, “Use your head!”

It really comes down to personal responsibility and common sense – not just in driving, but in every part of your life.

How many of you are seniors – getting ready to graduate in the spring?

You’re facing a lot of important decisions right now.

You’re figuring out the next step in your path of life.

I want you to always remember that the person most responsible for your life is YOU!

There comes a time when you turn 18 that your parents hand over *their* responsibility.

It's a bit scary, but it's also kinda fun. It *can* be, anyway.

And don't expect the Government to take responsibility for you.

I know all of you must have studied the Declaration of Independence where it says – you have the rights of
“Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness.”

The Government can help protect your life, and it can help secure your liberty, but only *you* can pursue happiness.

The government can't pursue happiness for you.

And that's good, because only You can decide what your dreams are.

Only You know what makes you happy.

That's the American Dream – the freedom to decide how to live your life and be what you want to be.

When America fights for its freedom – that's what we are talking about.

. . . the freedom for you to pursue your life's dreams.

That's why I am so proud to be an American – I'm patriotic because I was given the freedom to seek my dreams.

I *chose* to join the Navy and become a SEAL

I *chose* to become a professional wrestler.

And I *chose* to run for Governor.

Of course none of it was easy. It was a lot of hard work.

But I also enjoyed it. It's gratifying when you reach your goal.

With responsibility comes rewards.

I also chose a teacher for my Lieutenant Governor.

Mae Schunk is a perfect example of someone who takes responsibility for her life.

She decided on her first day of school that she wanted to become a teacher.

And did you know when she entered school she didn't even speak English?

She spoke Croatian – because that's what her parents spoke at home.

But she learned English – and she taught her father English, too.

He was her first student.

He encouraged her to go to college and pursue her education.

Even though he couldn't help her pay for it.

She *worked* her way through college – often taking more than one job at a time.

At this time of year, Mae Schunk and her husband used to gather pine branches in the woods, and make Christmas wreaths in their kitchen to make money.

She knows the value of hard work and responsibility, and that's why I chose her as my Lieutenant Governor.

She's been very busy visiting all the school districts in the state – so she can tell me what's happening in the world of education.

But I also like to see things for myself.

That's why I appreciate talking with students whenever I can.

You're at the stage where you're learning to balance fun and responsibility.

You know that the joy of learning how to drive is balanced by the responsibility of driving safely.

You're becoming so smart –

I don't have to tell you that the War Against Terrorism is more important than a new Twins Stadium.

I don't have to tell you that graduating from high school is more important than going to the homecoming dance.

And I don't have to tell you to wear a seat belt.

I only need to tell you this: I respect each and every one of you.

And I know you will do your best to find your dreams in life.

And together, we will work to make Andrea's dreams come true.

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