“Lots of things happened when mothers came together”: Stephanie Manning of Mothers Against Drunk Driving on parent and survivor advocacy and galvanizing the political will to pass legislation.

Rollo Romig

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Rollo Romig: Could you introduce yourself and give me an overview of your work?

Stephanie Manning: My name is Stephanie Manning. I serve as Mothers Against Drunk Driving’s (MADD) chief government affairs officer. MADD is an incredible nonprofit that I've been connected to for about 25 years. I worked with MADD in the '90s on the national 0.08 campaign to set the national blood alcohol limit to 0.08%, when most states were at 0.10% and there wasn't a national limit. We created that.

I left MADD in 2004, only [so that I could] work as a congressional staffer on the House Transportation Committee, overseeing safety programs on this specific topic. And when I left the Hill several years later to start a family, MADD asked me to come back as its lobbyist. I did lobbying for MADD for about 14 years as a consultant, and then about five years ago came back in this role as MADD's chief government affairs officer. So, my entire career has been dedicated to MADD in one way or another.

MADD's mission, and the victims/survivors who really represent why we're here, are the reasons why I've been dedicated to this for as long as I have been. It's because of the people involved, and the stories that victims and survivors share. Getting involved with MADD in the '90s and walking victims and survivors around Capitol Hill to meeting after meeting after meeting for years—it's something that sticks with you when you're in your 20s. You're being introduced to this whole world. I was in the right place at the right time with the right people and got to witness history.

MADD exists, as most of the public knows, to stop drunk driving. We also work on drug-impaired driving, drugs other than alcohol. Our founder's daughter was killed by a drunk driver in California. She connected with another mom in Maryland, whose daughter had been seriously injured. When those moms came together in 1980, a movement started. Lots of things happened when mothers came together with injured children at press events in Washington D.C. or with pictures of their children who are no longer here and are never coming back because of somebody else's illegal choice to drive impaired.

At the time, "one for the road" was a common phrase. It was something that people would laugh about. It wasn't really taken seriously. Law enforcement would say, "All right, be careful driving home. I'll follow you to make sure you get there okay." That's how it was treated before MADD victims and survivors banded together and brought national attention to this issue through media events, where parents were sharing their stories about what was happening to them and their families from all across the country. We were in afterschool specials and on the cover of *People* magazine. These crashes were occurring at different times of day in different parts of the country on different roads in different states, individually, and going through the court system. The movement didn't begin until everybody came together with one voice to say that this is a national problem that needs to be addressed from the national level and with federal policy change and state policy change.

The three major prongs of our mission are to stop impaired driving, support the victims of this violent crime, and to prevent underage drinking. A lot of people don't know that we're one of the largest victims assistance organizations in the country, and we actually serve thousands and thousands of victims. Some people like to be referred to as victims, some people like to be referred to as survivors. So, we serve thousands of victims/survivors every single year with our victim advocates, and we help them with resources. And this is all at no cost. People call into the MADD Helpline if they've been in a crash and don't know where to go, they need emotional support, they need support helping to understand how to navigate the court system. We have

some of the most incredible people working day and night to support people impacted by drunk and other impaired-driving crashes.

We also work in the underage drinking-prevention space. Underage drinking was one of MADD's first major legislative victories. Some people don't realize that Mothers Against Drunk Driving is largely responsible for the minimum 21 drinking-age law at the federal level. What was occurring was that there were teen drivers driving over state borders in states where the drinking age was lower than their state. Where it was 18, they could get drinks, and then drive home to their state where it was 21. Mothers Against Drunk Driving and others who supported us started referring to those borders as “blood borders.” There was such a high number of teen drivers that were getting involved in drunk-driving crashes, causing the crashes, and being killed in the crashes because of this phenomenon of different age limits for the drinking age in various states.

What the MADD moms did initially was come together and talk about this issue with federal legislators. We have pictures of some of the original MADD moms at the White House with President Reagan and Elizabeth Dole, who was transportation secretary when the age 21 law was signed by the president. Traditionally, you wouldn't think a Republican president would be signing something that takes authority away from the states, but there are quotes from him talking about the blood borders that are killing our teen drivers and kids and other innocent people on the roads. The age 21 law is one of the most successful public health policy initiatives that we've seen. Some states had it at 21 before the Vietnam War, and then lowered it, because the thought was, if our boys can fight in the war, they can come home and have a drink. So a lot of the states lowered it to 18, and then they started seeing teen deaths on the rise due to drunk driving. Then when MADD came along and got that national standard put in place, you see a significant drop in teen-driving deaths and other drunk-driving deaths.

That was really the first major national victory that MADD had on the national stage. Anytime that victims and survivors around any issue can band together, and you have data and research to support your argument, and you're putting the names and the faces together with the problem, whatever societal issue you're talking about, you're personalizing it. The key for MADD back in those days, and it still holds true now, is making sure that the voices of victims and survivors are heard.

I worked for lots of members of Congress on the House Transportation Committee. The key for us, then and now, is to have constituents come to the district, or here in D.C., and share their

stories. When we bring in victims and survivors who've never done that before, they're nervous. They say, "We don't really know what to say." We remind them, number one, that these legislators work for you. They're representing you and your voice in Congress. They're here to listen to you. And number two, the only thing that you need to do in these meetings is share your story. You don't need to dive into the weeds of the research and the data and the policy initiatives and what's going to be a proven countermeasure. We need you to bring that story and humanize it.

It's very hard for a member of Congress or anybody to sit across from a victim/survivor, whether it's a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, a spouse, whoever it is, to say, I lost this person, or I was injured and I've had 50 surgeries in the last 20 years—which is very common with our victims and survivors—or my loved one is never coming back. And it's 100% preventable. This doesn't need to happen. People are breaking the law and they're not being held accountable, and we need to change that in this country and we need your help to do it.

And then the policy team comes in and talks about exactly what that could look like. I think it really doesn't matter what the issue is, the formula is the same. You've got to make your story compelling. You've got to help people find their voice so that they're comfortable sharing their story, because it's scary and they're re-victimizing themselves. We're asking them to re-traumatize themselves by sharing their story. That's not really fun, to be honest, to ask people to do that again and again and again. They've got to relive the biggest trauma they will ever have. There's really no coming back from that for a lot of our folks. They move forward, they learn how to live with the pain, but it's not an event that then goes away.

MADD has had a lot of success over the last 40-plus years. The age 21 law was huge. The 0.08 national BAC [blood alcohol content] standard was huge, and I was fortunate enough to be around for that. There have been hundreds and hundreds of state laws that our victims and survivors have gotten put in place over several decades that have all contributed to a steep decline in the number of people killed and injured in drunk-driving deaths. That's wonderful. And the MADD model has been used by a lot of other movements. We're in *Jeopardy* questions all the time. We're in the *New York Times* crossword puzzle all the time. People refer to us as one of the most successful public health movements ever.

At the same time, we still have over 13,000 people killed every year in drunk-driving crashes alone, forget poly-use and other substances that aren't even tracked well with data, and which we don't have limits for, like we do with 0.08 BAC. It's very different from alcohol. And we still have about 400,000 people seriously injured in these crashes. We have seen a 33% increase in those deaths since 2019. COVID brought [a decline] in traffic safety that we never thought was

going to happen again. We had much less enforcement on the roads, fewer vehicle miles traveled, but more risky driving behavior. As a result: more addiction, more substance use, more hazardous driving behavior, more speeding, and more impaired driving. We still haven't recovered from that. There's a lot of issues happening around the social justice movement and law enforcement and the traffic stop. We are working desperately to differentiate DUI enforcement. Despite our tremendous success and the model that I think MADD helped create for a lot of other grassroots advocacy organizations, we're still fighting all these years later.

But we just had another really major legislative victory at the federal level three years ago. This November 15th will mark three years since the transportation infrastructure bill was signed into law, the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, the IIJA. In that massive law that funds our roads and bridges across the country, it also funds program safety initiatives at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is part of the Department of Transportation. Our victims and survivors lobbied online [for that] during COVID. We had them in hundreds and hundreds of virtual meetings over the course of years. Some might say it helped us that the auto industry wasn't able to golf or take members out to dinner during this time. But we had a lot of victims and survivors in what we called a war room, which would meet weekly.

Much like we did in person during 0.08, we did an online campaign of meeting with members of Congress, so that victims and survivors would share their stories and talk about how this problem is completely preventable through available in-vehicle technology that can be built behind the dash, like every other feature in your vehicle. If you're at 0.08 BAC or above, you cannot operate. There's no police coming, there's no information shared or stored, privacy is protected, it's purely preventative. You might be able to start your car for safety purposes—heating, air conditioning, to charge your phone, whatever—but you can't operate your vehicle if you're trying to drive at an illegal limit. We won. Nobody thought we would win, and everybody doubted us along the way. What the government affairs team at MADD would say is, they underestimated the voices of victims and survivors.

It's very hard to get a federal motor vehicle safety standard into law. Rear-view cameras that are now in cars—that standard took 10 years to get into place, and it was because there were victims and survivors who had backed up over their children and didn't see them. MADD had never engaged in a fight to get a new vehicle safety standard on cars until about 16 years ago, when we started talking with the auto industry about the feasibility of developing technology. It's a huge fight. It's a David Goliath fight that MADD is in now. The auto industry doesn't want to be regulated. No industry wants the federal government to tell them how to make their product.

And there's a lot of reasons and excuses that they give around why it's not possible. But we got the law done. There's been a lot of research and development going into technologies, and there's several different types of technologies that one day will be in cars that will prevent illegal drunk driving. And again, no cops will come, no privacy issues will come up. We wouldn't support a final standard that did that.

The law is in place and we have bipartisan support, and that's only because of victims and survivors. We would not have bipartisan support if it wasn't for victims and survivors showing up virtually to meet with their members of Congress and share their pain, to say, I know there's a cure to this problem. How can you help me make sure that the cure is implemented? Here's what happened to me, and I'm a voter in your district, and I need you to help me get this done.

Now we're in the implementation phase, and there needs to be a regulation written at the Department of Transportation. We're still fighting and we're going to be fighting for the next several years to get this done. I was told during that campaign on Capitol Hill that this is a bullshit bill that will never happen. I mean, even our supporters, people who believed in the work, they were like, this is never going to happen. Why are you wasting your time? The reason why we knew it was going to happen, those of us who were working on this day and night, is because of our victims and survivors and their passion, and the way that we organized with all of them, and the way that we targeted very specific members of Congress who could create change on various committees in the House and Senate.

It's old-fashioned grassroots advocacy work. And we still have a ways to go. I tell our victims and survivors we're at the 50 yard line. We got the law done, but just because the law is done doesn't mean that NHTSA's going to do their job. There are dozens of mandates sitting on the shelf at the Department of Transportation that may never happen. And the only reason this is going to happen and the others might sit on the shelf is because MADD's never going to give up, and because our victims and survivors are going to demand action.

The three-year anniversary of the IIJA is on November 15. The reason why we're focused on November 15th right now is because, in the law, that is the first Congressional deadline for a final standard to come out of NHTSA at the Department of Transportation. NHTSA is the agency that does all the recalls. They do a recall on airbags that are having problems or whatever. It's this small agency within the Department of Transportation. But NHTSA's first deadline to issue a final standard on the law is this November. If they don't do it, they have to send a report to Congress that asks for a one-year extension on issuing the final rule, for up to three years. So

the next three years are really critical for MADD and everybody who supports the end of drunk driving.

The government affairs team and other folks at MADD are in the process of planning an event, hopefully on the National Mall, where we're going to show people why this is important and why we have to mark this deadline, the first Congressional deadline to issue a final rule which would require that every new vehicle sold in the United States comes equipped with anti-drunk driving technology in it. We're talking about things like 10,000 red roses on the National Mall to symbolize what the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has said, which is that when this standard is fully implemented, over 10,000 lives a year will be saved. That's really significant.

I think part of what we battle at MADD is a perception that this problem has been totally solved, because MADD exists, and we've brought the numbers down significantly, especially in our first couple of decades of existence, and then we hit this plateau. Because we were employing every effective tool: high-visibility enforcement strategies of strong laws that MADD victims and survivors got passed. The laws are on the books, so why are these deaths still happening? People drive drunk because they can. How do we prevent these deaths moving forward? How do we eliminate them? It's in vehicle technology. That's what we're really focused on at the federal level for the next several years.

The key for anybody who is looking at MADD's model and looking at all the different ways in which MADD victims and survivors have made an impact is, you have to be organized. When I see organizations faltering or campaigns faltering, even our own, [it's because] there wasn't a cohesiveness and a simplicity to the goal, and getting everybody organized around that goal, and then figuring out how to get it done. What we see in some of the campaigns that aren't as effective as they could be is that there's not a cohesive voice and there's not a cohesive message or strategy around it.

What was so great about the 21 law or about 0.08 is that it was really straightforward. At 0.08 BAC and above, people are X times more likely to cause a fatal crash. We had the data. The alcohol industry would say, "Oh, my gosh. You're not going to be able to have one drink with dinner and drive home." That was garbage. It wasn't one drink, and we had the data to show it. It depends on your weight, and it depends on what you ate and how much time. You go up to Capitol Hill armed with the research, and you do a fact-versus-fiction document. You say, here's what our detractors are saying, and here's the truth, and here's the research that backs it up. And by the way, we want you to listen to this person in your district whose kid is never coming back. I've been in offices where members of Congress are crying hearing about the devastation that

drunk driving has caused in their districts. And they've read the headlines, they understand it. Not all of them, but enough of them. I think when you're really organized around that simple message and you've got thousands of victims/survivors all marching in the same direction, you're unstoppable.

Rollo Romig: Your work with victims and survivors telling their stories is the most visible and best-known part of what you do. What are some strategies that have been really important to what you do that people wouldn't necessarily know about?

Stephanie Manning: There's so many. I've been doing this for so long that I sometimes maybe don't realize that to people who've never done this work, this is like a foreign language, in terms of really getting down into the nuts and bolts of the day-to-day. I think that people are often fearful of not understanding policy work if they've never done it before, fearful of the unknown. None of this needs to be scary, Congress and the administration are there to serve us.

It's just understanding how it works, and connecting with people who can explain to you how it works: committees of jurisdiction, understanding who the key players are, who the decision makers are, what's the difference between committee staff members versus personal office staff members, and how you can bridge gaps between both. What the politics between different members on committees are, and how you can get to them in various ways. What certain members will respond to but others won't. Lobbying, really, is all about how you influence people. At the end of the day, these are all individuals that are part of a much larger system of how laws are created, whether it's state or federal.

I'll speak to the federal piece. One of the biggest challenges that MADD faces is that we are always up against a massive industry, whether it's the alcohol industry or the auto industry or others. When you're a grassroots organization who can't compete with the funding of any part of corporate America, it's really tricky, and you've got to stay ten steps ahead in order to compete. You need to have the voices of victims and survivors, which are always going to be top of the list. That's the most important part. Nobody cares that my team and I are coming to the Hill. To a committee staffer who's writing the bill, I can say, "Every time I'm in this room, I'm representing millions of victims and survivors who are standing behind me, including victims and survivors who are in your district." That's how I start a lot of the meetings, because then they do listen. That'll get them to perk up, but it's really understanding how all of these pieces work together.

I'll give you an example. As we're fighting for this federal motor vehicle safety standard, we're targeting a U.S. senator, for example, and we're having a victim/survivor meet with that senator,

and it's a senator who typically doesn't support a lot of federal regulation, and we know that there's an auto company in that state who employs 20,000 people, and we know that the former chief of staff for that senator works for that company now, as their lobbyist. That's the kind of stuff that we knew in great detail as we worked with all these offices. The strategy piece is really understanding what we need to do. Is it possible to bring that member of Congress to our side, despite the way that this is stacked against us? The answer is yes. You can actually work through a lot of grassroots, muscling, and collaborative work with our victims and survivors in those areas of the country, and working with local law enforcement and fire and EMS and hospitals.

It's also about collaboration. Who else cares about your issue in that area? And who else can help you influence that particular U.S. senator who sits on that particular committee, even though that U.S. senator is listening to this person and this person and may collect campaign contributions from this company who employs a lot of people in that state? We had to look at committees of jurisdiction over our issues in the House and Senate and be extremely strategic.

That's the other [reason] that the auto industry and even some of our supporters never thought we could do it. That's why they doubted us. "The opposition is too big, Stephanie. You're not going to get it done. I know that you think this is possible, but there's no way MADD can compete with this industry, regardless of how many meetings you do with victims and survivors or how many different ways you come at it." A big lesson that MADD has taught me over the decades is that you don't give up and you don't take no for an answer.

That's another lesson that I would love for other grassroots movements to understand: if you're not succeeding, why is that? Take a hard look at where your gaps are. If you're not able to move decision-makers, policymakers, there are reasons for that. You've got to dig deeper and go that extra mile to peel the layers back and look at who the employers are in that state. Look where the campaign dollars are coming from. Look at former staffers who are now lobbying on behalf of the industry that might be working against you, or any interest that might be working against you. Or maybe that member of Congress had a DUI, or maybe they were a defense attorney.

The other thing is the power of the media, figuring out how you marry your communication strategy to all of this, so that you have an op-ed appearing in a paper of a US senator that you're trying to get on board, under the name of a victim/survivor sharing their story and saying, we need this done. We have the power to solve drunk driving. We need this legislation to become law, and we're counting on Senator So-And-So to support it.

And you've got to explain to the public why this isn't scary, why this is okay. You relate it to the seat belt fight. That has a lot in common with the fight that we're in now. I grew up in Upstate New York, and I remember in 1984, I was in fourth grade when New York State was the first state to pass a primary seat belt law. I remember my parents saying, "We all have to buckle up. It's the law." I remember friends saying, "Oh, gosh. I don't want to do that." Now you can't even imagine having your kids in the car without a seat belt on. Seat belt usage in this country went from 13% to over 90% now. It took decades and funding and political reasons for that to happen.

Now we have Click It or Ticket—that's in hip-hop songs. It's part of the fabric. That's what we're trying to do now with this vehicle safety technology. It's the next seatbelt. In order to do that, we can't just sit back now that it's law and be like, "Yeah, it'll happen." It requires constant strategic thinking. How are we going to stay ahead of the auto industry, which doesn't want to see this happen for a lot of reasons? It's not easy by any stretch. You've got to keep it simple, you've got to make it relatable, you've got to have people who make it meaningful and put the face on the issue, and you've got to understand what's going to move policymakers to yes.

Rollo Romig: The industries that sometimes act as your opponents—the auto industry, the alcohol industry—does MADD work to convince them that some of these changes would actually be in their best interest?

Stephanie Manning: Absolutely. And I should say that the distilled spirits industry is a huge supporter of the HALT Act, which is the vehicle safety technology provision that we got in the IIJA. I can't say enough good about the work that the distilled spirits industry did, specifically Responsibility.org. They're a nonprofit arm of the distilled spirits industry that does a lot of positive messaging to youth, and they have programs designed to combat underage drinking and stop drunk driving, just like us.

If you can bring any industry into the fold to work with you, you get to leverage their resources and their voice. For members of Congress who might require more than hearing from a victim/survivor, it is extremely helpful to hear from another industry that wants to see the problem solved and also donates to campaigns and also employs people in the district and can pick up a phone and call a member of Congress in a way that we can't, particularly certain members of Congress in certain states or parts of the country where they have some of these employers.

And it can be controversial. Not all victims and survivors want us to work with the alcohol industry, which is totally understandable. We've had to have those discussions with some of our

victims and survivors who have done this work for decades and who have seen the opposition to 0.08, who have seen the opposition to age 21, who have seen the opposition around state legislation designed to tackle these problems. We had to really convince people in the last five to six years internally: no, this is real. The distilled spirits industry is really coming to the table and they mean it. And they're lending us their lobbyists to help with members that we don't have access to the way that they do, particularly Republicans who are harder to move when it comes to federal regulation.

I can't say enough good about partnerships, even unlikely partnerships. There are certain segments of the alcohol industry that want nothing to do with this. So it also could be that you strike out with one area, but you keep going because there might be another part of that same industry that thinks, yeah, we want to be a part of that change, we think that people really should be able to figure out a ride home and still enjoy our product. Same thing with the auto industry. There are certain, what I call, angels in the industry who like to give us information and like to cheer us on from the sidelines. They might not be able to engage in the way that we would like, but there are certain companies who want to see this happen.

The official beginning of the rulemaking process around this in-vehicle technology was announced in December by the Department of Transportation with what's known as an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors, just happened to be at a public discussion at an economic forum, where a reporter was asking her questions about all kinds of things that were pertinent to the auto industry. It was the day after the ANPRM was announced by the Department of Transportation, and we were there at DOT for that announcement. Mary Barra was asked, what do you think of this announcement? Mary Barra said something to the effect of, we have that technology. We've been working with federal regulators on it, and it's going to be good for everyone.

That was a really big deal. It was the first time that a Detroit, US-based company had said anything positive about this. It was, to us, just as big of a deal as the beginning of the rulemaking process that was announced just a day or two prior. I don't think that D.C. staff from General Motors were happy. I know they weren't. That's another interesting thing to think about: even when you're up against opposition from one area of a company, you may be able to figure it out from another angle.

That has happened also with auto suppliers. We have found that several tier-one auto suppliers, $50 billion companies who make all the parts that go in your car, are doing research and development now on anti-drunk-driving tech and other safety technologies that they hope to be

able to sell to their customers: GM, Ford, Stellantis, Honda, Toyota. As the auto industry and the OEMs—the original equipment manufacturers—were fighting us, we were doing outreach to suppliers, and they were doing outreach to us, saying, we can do this. We can absolutely do this. Years ago we started having these conversations, and now we go to the Consumer Electronics Show every year in Vegas, and we see that they're demonstrating it. After 15 years of people telling us that this is ridiculous and it's never going to happen, we're seeing it being demonstrated.

Other parts of the auto industry are still saying, this is crazy, this is never going to happen. I'll be honest, it's exhausting for all of us at MADD. It's mostly exhausting for victims and survivors to sit here and wait. We got the law done. Why isn't this happening? It is really complicated, and it's about markets. We are literally changing the markets around vehicle safety technology. And I will say that behind the scenes, the industry has been really helpful. On Capitol Hill and with the administration, they don't want this to happen. So you use what you have to your advantage.

We pulled together a technical working group. We don't have the expertise. Victims and survivors and my team that's working on this, we are not engineers. We're technology-neutral. We don't know which option is going to work best or be cheapest or be best for consumers for consumer acceptance. We pulled together the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, consumer reports, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, former associate administrators at NHTSA, and attorneys to write this. We pulled together over a dozen experts in the field to ask if they'd be willing to have meetings with us and talk through how to remove obstacles.

Take advantage of all the goodwill of people who might be working tangentially to you but who have the same interest in solving a problem, even if you're not sure that they're going to want to be supportive or helpful. I find that if you present the problem and the solution to people who are really well-respected in this area, they want to be a part of the solution. They want to be able to say, “Wow, I've been working at this in this space for decades, and this is going to be one of the most significant things I ever work on in my career.” That's the truth.

When I started, I co-chaired with a wonderful gentleman from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health who used to work at NHTSA. He was an associate administrator at the agency, assigned to write this regulation. I called him and said, I want to do this to take advantage of other people's knowledge that we don't have, and the next phase of this is something we have no knowledge of. It was amazing to me—every single person that he and I called and explained this to said yes. Understanding that you've got to look outside yourself and look to your partners and look to other groups, even if you're not sure they're going to have the same interest in it.

How do you bring them in? We're still doing that. I mean, we have a lot more of that that we could be doing, quite frankly. It's not easy, but it's leaving no stone unturned that fits into that strategy. How does this help us move the ball forward?

Rollo Romig: You were intimately involved in achieving the national 0.08% BAC law. Are there particular insights or strategies that helped with that that you'd like to share?

Stephanie Manning: I'll tell you what was really key about that fight. Similar to what we have now with Senator Luján, who's a victim/survivor, Frank Wolf was our champion, a Republican who is no longer in Congress. He was a leader on the House Appropriations Committee, and he was himself impacted by a drunk driver. I can't express enough how helpful it is, even though it's unfortunate, to have decision makers and policy makers who have direct experience with the issue.

Unfortunately, whether you're talking about sexual violence, traffic violence, or whatever issue it is, there are people in positions of power who have directly been affected, even people that you may think wouldn't support you. And there were others, Senator Shelby, Senator Murray, Senator Lautenberg, Senator DeWine, Republicans and Democrats, some of whom are still here, some of whom are no longer serving. It takes grit and leaving no stone unturned. Who has been impacted and how can you leverage that? Folks like Frank Wolf or the senators who I mentioned ran up against pretty intense opposition around the 0.08 issue.

The age 21 and 0.08 [campaigns] were designed in similar ways. They were decades apart but handled very much in the same way. If a state did not enact age 21 or 0.08, the state would lose a percentage of their highway funding from the infrastructure law. So we were hitting states where it hurt. They either had to adopt 0.08 or, earlier, age 21, or lose significant funding to build roads and bridges in their states or districts. That was really painful. The impact of that was [they had to] pass the law, and every state did. No state lost money for either age 21 or 0.08. It worked. That’s very rare, a very serious policy initiative that is very hard to achieve, because members of Congress don't want to have to go back to their state and say [they’ve lost funding]. That doesn't go over well.

One of the strategies that we employed was to go to members of Congress who already have 0.08 and get them to help entice other members of Congress who they may have relationships or connections with, to convince them why there's no other way. I will also say that there were trades that happened. I won't get into details, but there were trades with members of Congress on the Appropriations Committee who may have incentivized some members. It's just the way it

works, right? Nobody likes to pull back the curtain and see how the sausage gets made, but I was there and I remember it very well, and there's probably only a handful of us still who remember what happened during those negotiations and the trades that were made. But you've got to have champions. And bipartisanship was just as important for 0.08 as it is today with in-vehicle technology. Today it's even more important that you target both sides of the aisle, and you've got to make sure that whatever roadblocks are in your way, figure out how to remove them.

I remember during 0.08, Frank Wolf calling all of us together in his committee hearing room. We would have weekly meetings with him. What a member of Congress. He would pull us together, not just MADD but other groups that were supporting us and say, "What are the problems this week? What are we up against this week? How are we going to get around them?" To have that kind of champion, who is a true believer in your cause, who can help you navigate all of the garbage that goes on behind the scenes, is really key. We had that with 21, we had it with 0.08, and we have it now with the in-vehicle technology.

0.08 was something that a lot of people didn't think we would get done. The other key around 0.08 that we took advantage of was the false messaging that the alcohol industry did around it, similar to some of the messaging we're facing now that's false around the in-vehicle technology. "The government's going to shut your car down." No, no, no. "The government's controlling [your car] if they don't like the way you drive." I mean, it's the most ridiculous thing. It's all false. False narrative. During 0.08, we would have press conferences with victims and survivors and members of Congress to move the policy forward. And there were members of the alcohol industry who would literally wait around the corner. I saw it with my own eyes. They would grab members of Congress or reporters or both to say, "That's not true, and you're not going to be able to have one drink with dinner." It was scare tactics. We stayed on top of that. We made sure that we came back at every single argument that they made against us and used it against them and flipped it on its head.

No stone unturned. You've got to figure out how to remove every single stumbling block in a way that people believe. Why are they going to believe MADD more than they're going to believe the alcohol industry? Why are they going to believe MADD more than they're going to believe the auto industry? It can't just be about the stories. You've got to make sure that your facts are correct, that the research backs you up, that you have proof of what you're saying, and that you eliminate any doubt. You go in and you say, "We can solve this problem. We know the auto industry or the alcohol industry is saying this. Here's the truth. Here's our proof. We need your

help to make sure this gets done." You couple that with members of Congress who truly care and who are going to help you remove obstacles.

That's what got 0.08 done. I mean, there were a lot of trades done in appropriations in addition to the intense lobbying. We had thousands of victims/survivors on the Hill, thousands, wearing red and walking around, banging on doors and doing meetings, and being respectful and saying, If you drink, there's no reason for you to drive. At a minimum, 0.08 is a very dangerous level, and it needs to be the law of the land. We can't have blood borders again. We have them. If you're driving at 0.08 in a state that's 0.10, you're fine. If you're in the next state over, you might go to jail, just like age 21. This should be a national standard. There shouldn't be a different standard in each state.

Combating that narrative that it's my right to do this. No one has the right to drive drunk on public roads. No one has the right to sexually assault anyone. No one has that right. When you hear arguments about freedom—that's a huge one in this country. I'm an American, and I believe in freedom, but when you hear about that rhetoric being used to justify bad behavior or to not do anything from a policy perspective, that's just chickenshit. There's no reason behind it. It's grueling work. But if your supporters believe you and they want to rally behind you around that one solution for that pain point, you just keep going.

Rollo Romig: You were talking about bipartisanship. We are in extremely polarized times. How do you safeguard against the polarization of your cause?

Stephanie Manning: Drunk driving is not a partisan issue. It should never be a partisan issue. That doesn't always work, but it's the truth. And like we see in politics, sometimes if you say something enough, it just is. For our victims and survivors and our team that goes in to meet with Republicans and Democrats alike, on all parts of that spectrum, there are people that we're not going to win over. We know that and we still try, but we know we're not going to win them over and we're always going to disagree. But there are more moderates in this country than the far ends of the spectrum. And there are more members of Congress who fall in that moderate category than I think people realize.

Again, you have to make it relevant to them. People are movable. It's not easy. But we just had a situation in the Appropriations Committee where we had a member of the Freedom Caucus who was going to offer an amendment to not allow any DOT appropriations funding to be spent on implementing this law. We fought it last year too. We had to convince a certain number of

Republican members, because we had all the Dems on committee. We had to convince a certain number of Republicans on the committee to be with us to avoid that vote.

We didn't just choose moderates. There were different reasons why we chose certain people, whether we had a victim/survivor in their district, or whether we noted that they had been more moderate on some other issues or gettable on other issues that we might not have thought they would've been, so maybe they would be on ours too. I think that 80% of life is showing up. I use that quote a lot, because that's the truth when it comes to grassroots advocacy. Maybe even 90% or 100% is showing up. And you don't know unless you go in and ask.

Drunk driving is different from some other issues. And some people may think, “That's easy, everybody's against drunk driving.” Yeah, but not everybody is for government intervention at the federal level around it, whether it's 0.08 or 21 or in vehicle tech. But we kept going with the narrative, regardless of which issue we're talking about: that this is a bipartisan issue, that we don't want this to be politicized, that we won't play into that narrative. And we went to as many Republicans as Democrats, maybe even more Republicans than Democrats, because we knew we had support on the Dem side.

I think a key thing here is, don't ignore the people who you think may not support you. We were able to get the chairman of the subcommittee in this latest round of appropriations. We never thought that would happen. That was a huge victory. The rhetoric is out of control. The party-line voting is crazy. If we listened even to our own people, even some of our biggest supporters who never thought this would happen, it never would've gotten done. We got 19 Republicans to vote with us. That's all we needed. In the appropriations, there was a house floor vote just on our provision, and we won.

And then we came back again and we had to fight again. We might have to do this every year. It's exhausting, and it's not fair for our victims and survivors to have to keep entering the fray in this fight. They should be done, and we should just be focused on implementation. But what we tell them is, “We're really sorry we're asking you to do this again. We really don't want to have to bother you with this, but we may have to do this every year until that tech is on cars. We may have to, and we're going to do it. And we're going to show the auto industry and the Department of Transportation and Congress, we're not going away. We're demanding that the solution get implemented.”

It really doesn't matter to me if someone is a Democrat or a Republican. The bipartisanship piece is really important to me because it's the only way it's going to get done. I think too often

people in movements like this ignore one side of the aisle. “We don't want to go meet with that committee staffer because they're not going to support us anyway." Absolutely not. Go do the meeting. Be professional, no matter what they say. Collect your data, collect your intelligence. Talk with committee staff on both sides of the aisle about which members on the committee might be most open to listening. You just keep going and you don't leave any stone unturned.

Rollo Romig: Thanks so much, this has been an incredible conversation.

Rollo Romig: (he/him) is a freelance journalist who writes most often for The New York Times and The New Yorker. He is the author of the book I Am on the Hit List: A Journalist's Murder and the Rise of Autocracy in India. He teaches writing at The New School in New York City. He was born and raised in Detroit.

***This conversation has been edited and condensed.*