NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

NCADD Salutes Senator Frank R. Lautenberg

NCADD would like to join the thousands of Americans affected by the death of Senator Frank R. Lautenberg.

We are especially heartened by the contribution and impact Senator Lautenberg had on public health policy during his 29 years in the US Senate.

In the 1980s, Lautenberg led his first of two extraordinary fights in the U.S. Senate. As a freshmen senator in 1984, he pushed through legislation establishing the national drinking age at 21. Five years later, he led another successful fight -- this time, a ban on smoking on all commercial flights.

We'd like to take a moment to look back at some of his big policies over the years:

- Banned smoking on airplanes. In the late 1980s, Lautenberg helped pass through a series of bills that prohibited smoking on airplanes — first on short flights, then later on all flights. Those bills were the first bans on smoking in public spaces, a practice that eventually became widespread.
- Raised the national minimum drinking age to 21. One of Lautenberg's first big pieces of legislation, authored as freshman in 1984, was the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, which required states to set the minimum drinking age at 21 — or they would lose some of their federal highway money. That bill made the United States one of only three countries in the world with a drinking age over the age of 18; the others are Iceland and Japan.
- Lowered the definition of drunk driving. In 1998, Lautenberg authored a bill that required all states to lower the legal threshold for drunken driving from .10 blood-alcohol content to .08. It passed two years later and affected 35 states in all. Researchers have found that lowering the threshold reduced the number of fatal crashes in the United States: One 2007 study, looking at traffic fatalities after the law was passed, estimated that the lower standard saves about 360 lives per year.

Senator Lautenberg was an innovator and primary architect of legislation that changed the way we conduct our daily lives. We fully expect his legacy will live on forever.