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Van Roy's Views: On the Road Again

MADISON – For many families, summer means cook-outs, taking the kids to the pool, and time in the great outdoors. It also means more time on the road. In fact, summer months are the most dangerous when it comes to the number of traffic accidents. That is why June, which just happens to be National Drive Safe Month, is the perfect time to remember how important it is to drive defensively and think about a few good tips to keep you and your family safe this summer.

As a member of the Transportation Committee and the Highway Safety Committee, I hear a lot of testimony about the devastating effects traffic accidents have on peoples' lives. In the blink of an eye, a person's life can be turned upside down, and all too often, these accidents are preventable.

Each year there are millions of motor vehicle crashes in the United States, which result in tens of thousands of deaths and countless disabling injuries. These crashes cost Americans hundreds of billions of dollars and represent the eighth leading cause of death in the United States. Last year in Wisconsin, nearly 800 people died in the just over 700 traffic accidents that occurred in the state.

With those kind of statistics, it's easy to see why knowing how to be a safe, defensive driver is in your best interest. I want each of you to have a safe and wonderful summer. Here are some tips from traffic safety organizations that will help make sure you do:

- Buckle up. Wisconsin's safety belt use is only 73 percent, much lower than the national average of 80 percent. More Wisconsinites would survive crashes if they used their safety belts, so click it when you get in the car!
- Don't tailgate. Many people forget that cars should maintain at least one car length between them and the car in front of them for every 10 mph; so 50 mph means five car lengths back. Another way to make sure you are keeping a good distance is to make sure at least two seconds elapses between the time the back of the car in front of you passes a certain point on the road (like a road sign) and your car crosses that same point.
- Slow down, especially when you're in construction zones. Going a reasonable speed protects you, your family, and others on the road.
- Don't use cell phones while driving. Pull over, have a fellow passenger make the call, or wait until you have arrived at your destination before having your conversation.

- Avoid other distractions, like eating or searching through the glove compartment. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that 25 percent of all crashes involve some kind of driver distraction.
- Pay attention to your driving behavior. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation cites poor driving behavior, such as failing to yield or weaving, as a cause of 85 percent of the state's accidents.
- Drive defensively and pay attention to the behavior of other drivers. Even if you are driving safely, others may not be, and your best defense against them is to be aware of what they are doing on the road.

Keeping these few simple tips in mind while you are driving this summer could save your life. With these suggestions, some courtesy and a lot of common sense, together we can make sure Wisconsin roads stay safer this summer as we are out enjoying our great state.