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**SENATOR ELIZABETH DOLE AND PUBLIC CITIZEN PRESIDENT  
JOAN CLAYBROOK HONORED BY AUTO SAFETY ADVOCATES  
FOR THEIR HISTORIC LIFESAVING AIR BAG LEADERSHIP**

***Mother and son saved by air bag present Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety's  
first Lifetime Achievement Award for air bag advocacy***

***Air bags credited with saving over 25,000 lives in first 20 years***

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 6, 2007) -- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a national coalition of the leading consumer, health, safety groups, and insurance organizations, today presented the first "Lifetime Achievement Award" to U.S. Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) and Public Citizen president Joan Claybrook in recognition of their "significant contributions to advancing air bag technology."

Twenty years ago, few makes and models of cars were equipped with this lifesaving technology. Today, frontal airbags are standard equipment on all passenger vehicles, and U.S. government figures credit airbags with saving more than 25,000 lives over the past two decades. In addition, side head air bags are saving additional lives and will shortly become standard equipment on most passenger vehicles.

Joan Claybrook was the administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), during the Carter Administration (1977-81), and oversaw the issuance of the first rule requiring automatic occupant protection, including air bags. Air bag technology was new and not widely understood by the public even though it had the potential to dramatically reduce the number of deaths and the severity of injuries in frontal crashes, a major cause of traumatic injury in traffic crashes. After Claybrook left NHTSA in 1981, the air bag rule was changed and the matter eventually went before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1983, the nation's highest court rejected the changes and required DOT to rewrite and reissue the safety rule.

Senator Dole served as U.S. Transportation Secretary from 1983 to 1987 during which time an alternative called Rule 208 was proposed that required air bags or automatic safety belts in new vehicles, with an extra credit for use of air bags and with the condition that if states representing two-thirds of the population passed seat belt laws within five years that met strict criteria, the rule would be suspended. The rule is credited with encouraging states to adopt seat belt laws and the auto industry to consider installing air bags as standard equipment on some makes and models. This voluntary action began with one manufacturer – Chrysler – in the late 1980s, and was quickly followed by others.

The awards were presented to Dole and Claybrook by Terri Vaccher, a mother of four from Fullerton, California, who was accompanied by her 10-year-old son, Dominic. In 1997, Vaccher was eight months pregnant with Dominic when her vehicle collided with a large jack-knifed truck. Her car was struck again by another vehicle, further propelling her vehicle under the truck. Although Vaccher's legs were badly injured, the air bag on the driver's side is credited with saving her life and that of her baby, who was born prematurely several hours after she was safely pulled from the wreckage.

"I think of that day every day because what could have been two tragedies instead resulted in two lives saved. Dominic and I stand here today because of the leadership and decisions of these two extraordinary women," Vaccher said. "The airbag made the difference between our living and dying, and my family and I are grateful for this opportunity to publicly thank Senator Dole and Joan Claybrook for their lifesaving leadership." Vaccher and her husband have had two more children since the 1997 crash, and she ran a marathon two years ago.

"When we enacted Rule 208, our goal was simple: to save as many lives as possible as quickly as possible," said Senator Dole upon receiving the Lifetime Achievement award. "This action totally changed the climate for automotive safety in America, and the statistics prove that the rule worked just as designed. As a result, there are many real-life stories similar to that of Terri and Dominic, where tragedies have been averted and family members and friends have been spared the loss of a loved one in an automobile accident. Thanks to the efforts of many dedicated individuals and organizations, we succeeded in making these historic improvements in automotive safety."

Because of the lifesaving benefits of air bags, in 1991 Congress enacted legislation with bipartisan support requiring automakers to install frontal air bags in all vehicles as standard equipment. Advances and new applications of air bag technology have resulted in their use for side impact protection that further increases the number of lives saved and traumatic injuries prevented.

"Air bag technology in motor vehicles is one of the most important public health advances in our nation's history," said Joan Claybrook. "We may never know how many Terri and Dominic Vacchers there are out across our country, and also in nations across the globe who have followed our lead. People have been spared life-ending or life-altering traumatic injuries as a result of some tough decisions made years ago when industry opposition was fierce. On behalf of the many talented people inside and outside the auto industry, in the DOT, and the insurance industry, who have persisted with us over the years, I am honored to accept this lifetime achievement award."

Judith Stone, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety ([www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org)), cited the leadership of Senator Dole and Joan Claybrook for accelerating the public acceptance and availability of air bags as standard equipment. "Their passion and perseverance have saved thousands of lives and prevented millions of disabling injuries," Stone said. "Highway crashes are the number one cause of death of Americans ages 3 to 33, resulting in a total of 42,000 deaths and 3 million injuries each year. Today, millions of people and their families are far safer on our roadways because of the actions of these two bold and fearless women leaders."

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