

Tobin's son sorry for 'unforgivable mistakes'

Son of former premier killed friend last year in drunk-driving stunt

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OTTAWA—The son of former Newfoundland premier Brian Tobin said he hopes the tragic consequences of the drunk-driving stunt that killed his close friend will make others think twice about getting behind the wheel while intoxicated.

"If there is any good to come from this very dark cloud, I hope that it will be this message to others," a tearful Jack Tobin, 25, told a packed courtroom Friday as he apologized to the family of the friend he killed while drunkenly spinning his tires in an icy parking lot last year.

"The consequences of drinking and driving are deadly, they are real, they are enduring — a nightmare from which you never wake up."

Tobin pleaded guilty in May to impaired driving causing the death of 24-year-old Alex Zolpis, a close friend with whom he attended high school and then Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Zolpis died when he was pinned under a pickup truck that Tobin was driving packed with five other friends, all heavily drunk after a night out, in a rooftop parking lot in the early morning hours of Christmas Eve.

"I want to tell you how truly sorry and utterly ashamed I am for the unforgivable mistakes that I have made," Tobin told Zolpis' parents, younger sister and longtime girlfriend.

"I truly wish that I had been the only victim of my actions that night, and not Alex," Tobin said as his mother, Jodean, held hands with his father and cried.

Crown attorney Mark Moors also expressed his hope Friday that Tobin would set an example for other young people thinking about driv-

JACK TOBIN'S APOLOGY

"Your honour, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to Alex's loved ones.

"Dr. Morgan, Dr. Zolpis, Meaghan and Emma, [Alex Zolpis' mother, Dr. Susan Morgan; his father, Dr. Ed Zolpis; his sister, Meaghan Zolpis; and his girlfriend, Emma Roberts.]

"I know how difficult these past eight months have been. I know that no amount of words will ever fill the void in your hearts, or in any way replace the loss that you have suffered. I want to tell you how truly sorry and utterly ashamed I am for the unforgivable mistakes that I have made.

"It is impossible for me to put into words the absolute grief, sadness and regret that I feel knowing the role I played in Alex's death. I truly wish that I had been the only victim of my actions that night, and not Alex.

"I take full responsibility for what happened — for the hurt, the pain and the anguish that I have caused you, your families, my family and friends.

ing after having too much to drink. He argued that a longer prison sentence — five years in jail plus a 10-year ban on driving — would underscore that message.

"It was not a foolish, stupid stunt," said Moors, noting this was not an isolated incident. "It has to be denounced. It has to be censured (and) make those Canadians in a similar situation say to their parents, 'Look, I'm drunk, come get me.' They'll say to their friends 'Let's get a cab.' They will say to themselves, 'I am too impaired to drive.'"

But defence lawyer Norman Boxall argued that it was the message of just how much was lost — not a stiffer sentence — that would serve as the greatest deterrent.

"I know how senseless this has been and how preventable Alex's death was. There are simply no excuses.

"Life will never be the same without Alex. He was a true friend. His presence in my life was profoundly valued and treasured. I think of him every day. I think of all the good memories we shared and the adventures we had, I think of the qualities in him I admired — his loyalty, his wisdom, his sense of humour. I think of everything that's now been lost and everything he will never experience.

"Alex was loved by everyone who knew him, but most of all he was loved by you. I know how deeply he is missed. In time I pray that you will begin to heal and find peace once again in your lives.

"If there is any good to come from this very dark cloud, I hope that it will be this message to others: the consequences of drinking and driving are deadly, they are real, they are enduring — a nightmare from which you never wake up."

"This group of young persons were in a car, drinking, listening to music, in a parking lot," said Boxall, noting that Tobin never intended to drive home that night. "Does anyone here think a sentence that was longer would have changed their minds?"

"The most important way to deliver that message is by the loss, and the magnitude of the loss, and not some magic number," said Boxall, who is asking for a sentence of 18 to 30 months incarceration plus a five-year prohibition on driving.

The judge expects to deliver her sentence on Aug. 31 and has hinted that in addition to jail time it could include an order for Tobin to speak to schools about the deadly consequences of his mistake.