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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
IRVING BAR ASSOCIATION
LAW DAY DINNER

TEXAS STADIUM
IRVING, TEXAS

9:36 P.M. CST

Martin, Senator Tower, President John Lawrence, Ed Kincaid, members of the judiciary, members of the Irving Bar Association, guests:

It is a very great privilege and honor for me to have the opportunity of coming to Irving and participating in the Law Day ceremonies here in this part of the State of Texas.

I have had the privilege and honor a good many times to visit many parts of the State of Texas. Fortunately, I have had a good many acquaintances, and my closest friend and acquaintances are, or have been, the Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate from your State, one of whom is here this evening, John Tower.

I must say -- and I say this with emphasis and sincerity -- having spent 25 years in the Congress, you get to know good delegations and those that don't quite make it. John Tower represents the high quality of the Texas delegation, whether they are Democrat or Republican, and as I said, members of your delegation have been my very closest and best friends, whether on my side of the aisle or on the other.

I want to compliment your State in having such outstanding statesmen represent you in Washington, D.C., and John Tower is one of them.

Texas, they tell me, is number one in the country in many, many important ways -- number one in cattle production, number one in oil production, number one in cotton and often number one in football. (Laughter)

I am delighted to see tonight that you are certainly still second to none in hospitality, and for that I thank you very, very much.

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Now, in observance of Law Day here in Irving, I thought it would be tremendously appropriate if I directed my remarks to an increasingly serious problem all across America, and when I say "all across America", I mean its totality, and I hope and trust that you will not misunderstand what I say tonight by indirection or otherwise that I might be talking just about Texas.

This is a problem that affects all 50 States, and I think it is time that all of us, whether we are from Texas or Michigan or elsewhere, that we get a refocus on this serious matter that involves a good many fine people in our society.

As practitioners of the law, as leaders of your community, as loving parents, all of you must share my very deepening concern about a new wave of drug abuse that is affecting our Nation.

Only a few short years ago, many of you will recall the United States was faced with a virtual epidemic of drug abuse, large quantities of opium was coming out of poppy fields from countries such as Turkey, they were converted into heroin in port cities in France, and from there were smuggled into the United States.

This country mounted a massive, active campaign against illicit drug traffic, and with the cooperation of law enforcement officials, both here and abroad, we eventually broke the back of the so-called "French Connection".

There was good reason to be pleased because it seems we had not only turned the corner in drug abuse, but we had also begun to make significant strides in street crime problems.

Our success, however, did not last as long as most of us would have hoped. The heroin trade has now shifted to other countries, and today there is a renewed and alarming flow of drug trafficking into this country.

The time has come to step up our fight, sharpen the weapons in our arsenal and launch a new and far more aggressive attack against this insidious enemy. The cost of drug abuse to this Nation is staggering, and I had the benefit of the various agencies and departments in the Government give me a two-hour briefing earlier this week, and the information, the facts are unbelievable.

Every year more than 5,000 Americans die from direct drug-related causes. Every year more than 170,000 injuries can be directly traced to drugs. Every year the problem of drug abuse costs up to \$17 billion.

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Significantly, the greatest bulk of this \$17 billion is money lost through crime. Law enforcement officials estimate that up to one-half robberies, muggings, burglaries and other forms of property crimes are committed by addicts to support their expensive and debilitating habit.

These statistics, as ominous as they are, reflect only part of the traffic total. For every teenage child killed by a drug overdose, there are thousands and thousands of others who do not die but continue only the motions of living. They sit in classrooms without learning, they grow isolated from their families and from their friends. When they should be preparing for the future, they can hardly cope with the present.

And this disease is by no means limited to youth or to any other particular group in our society -- the suburban housewife, the worker on the assembly line, the white collar professional, nobody is immune.

As you know, 80 to 90 percent of the heroin coming into the United States today has come across the border from Mexico. The problem is not an easy one to cope with. There are as many as 20,000 small poppy fields hidden in the mountainous terrain of the Sierra Madre.

With the new equipment that we have, not only the aircraft, whether it is fixed wing or helicopter and with the traffic capability, you can see these relatively small, but very productive and very financially beneficial, poppy fields.

And I pledge to you tonight that we will spare no effort to crush the meance of drug abuse.

Clearly, as we look at the picture today, our first defense must be directed at our own borders to clamp down on the illegal flow of drugs from foreign sources. And as I mentioned a moment ago, 80 to 90 percent of the current flow of heroin comes across the Mexican border, having been moved from what had previously been the case with Turkey and several other countries.

The drugs that come from these fields might be smuggled here in any way, any one of almost a million vehicles a week that cross border check points, or aboard any one of 4,000 aircraft that illegally penetrated the border last year or even in the backpack of someone who illegally walks across the 2,000-mile border that we share with Mexico.

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Fortunately -- and I think we are fortunate -- the Government of Mexico, under the leadership of President Echeverria has been increasingly concerned with this problem and has cracked down very hard on both the growers and the traffickers.

With help provided by our Government -- this help includes helicopters and other advanced equipment and committing substantial resources of our own -- the Government of Mexico is undertaking the biggest and most effective crop eradication program in its history. Thousands upon thousands of fields have already been wiped out.

While many of these fields can and will be replanted, the Government also plans for the first time to maintain a year round eradication program. This is the only way that you can really stop the growth of this into our country.

The efforts made on their side of the border have been very substantial and they have been aided by what we have done on our own side through the combined efforts of Federal, State and local authorities. In particular, I would like to compliment the law enforcement officials of Texas.

The people in the Federal Government tell me that they get maximum help and assistance from your State, as well as local officials. So, speaking for the Federal Government, may I thank you and indicate our great appreciation.

Your people have done a fine job in helping to control the flow of illegal drugs and they not only deserve your thanks, but they deserve the appreciation of many, many thousands of Americans throughout the other States of the Union because if you look at the flow charts, they bring these drugs across the border and they fan out in almost organized routes that end up in Chicago or New York or any one of the other places.

So, what is done at the border, or what is done behind the border in Mexico is significant from the point of view of the people in the other States of the Union. I believe, and I believe very strongly, that the leaders of Mexico feel that together we seized a great opportunity and we, working together in conjunction with one another, can stem the tide of new drug invasion within a year.

That is a hard goal, that is a tough accomplishment, but with their cooperation and our joint efforts, and with the help and assistance of local and State officials in Texas and elsewhere, we can effectually achieve a substantial reduction in the supply at the source, as well as crossing the border.

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But frankly, our efforts must not stop there. We must also accelerate our law enforcement efforts here throughout our own country.

Frankly, despite all the rhetoric of recent years, I do not believe that we have yet succeeded in making it tough enough for drug traffickers.

As far as I am concerned, and I think this is shared by virtually everybody in the Congress, the House, as well as the Senate, the people who traffic in hard drugs are nothing less than merchants of death and should be put behind bars for a long, long, long time.

Yet the Justice Department studies show that more than a quarter of those convicted of narcotics trafficking do not spend a single day in jail. The extraordinary laxity that sometimes exists was illustrated just last month in a case when law enforcement officers arrested 31 people, most of whom were major violators responsible for very large shipments of heroin into the United States, 19 of those arrested were immediately freed on a \$500 personal recognizant bond, even though their offenses were punishable by 15 years in jail.

All but two of the 19 had long, long arrest records, and one was on parole for narcotics offense -- unforgiveable, completely indefensible.

I believe that we have to close legal loopholes that permit traffickers to escape the Federal penitentiary. Those who live off the misery of others must pay the price, and the higher the price, the better, as I see it.

To his great credit, the new head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Peter Bensinger, who independently is off to a very fine start, quickly intervened in the case that I mentioned. Warrants were reissued for the 19, and bail was raised to \$10,000 for each of the others.

I can't tell you the end result because it hasn't been concluded, and we shouldn't talk about individual cases by name. But something has to be done to prevent the kind of an illustration that I indicated.

Last year, the Administration sent to the Congress legislation that would require mandatory prison sentences for persons convicted of high-level trafficking in heroin and similar narcotics. Sentences would not be less than three years for such traffickers and would range up to a total of 30 years.

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Unfortunately this legislation has been caught up in the great debate over Senate Bill 1, which is a very controversial piece of legislation and, unfortunately, unless we break it out, unless we separate it from other very controversial reorganization and rewriting of our Federal Criminal Code, I am afraid we can't get affirmative action.

But because we cannot afford delay, I am recommending the separation of these recommended provisions to handle these problems from S. 1 which is a comprehensive rewrite of our Federal Criminal Code.

I will recommend in a special drug message that will soon be sent to the Congress, the separation and to urge the Congress to act as quickly as possible in order to join with us in the Executive Branch with the local and State people who are trying to do something very affirmatively in this one-year period.

Now, beyond halting the illegal flow of drugs from abroad and stiffening our domestic law enforcement, still another prong of attack on drug abuse must lie in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

In recent years we have made very significant progress in the United States creating a very large and successful treatment network. Today some \$460 million in Federal funds is spent annually on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, ten times more than we spent just seven years ago.

We can now treat more than a quarter of a million drug addicts at one time in the United States. In addition, recent studies show that the number of addicts who go back to drugs after they have been treated has dramatically declined, which indicates that the treatment is better and certainly, if we can get them early enough, it's infinitely better.

Encouraging progress has also been made in working with local leaders on programs of drug education, particularly counseling. I know that the people of Dallas must take a very special pride in the highly innovative program that has been set up with Federal seed money, and is to run by the Dallas Independent School District under Dr. Nolan Estes. This program, as I understand it, built on the philosophy that the drug problem is actually a human problem, has turned countless numbers of individuals away from drug abuse and has helped to rehabilitate many, many others.

And what impresses me most about this effort is that it's leaders are not only concerned adults, but young people themselves, young people who have a real mission in life to save their classmates, their families from a very horrible fate.

Now, looking over the wide range of drug efforts, it can be seen that the Federal Government must play a very essential role in dealing with law enforcement problems that are national in scope and mobilizing the enormous potential resources of State and local localities.

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We are pursuing an active program now and building upon a white paper which was issued just a few months ago. We plan to accelerate that program in the future. We will step up our interdiction efforts. We shall step up our law enforcement efforts. We shall step up our efforts at prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, and we shall stick with it as long as we must to get the results that are essential and vital to the history and the health of this country.

Now, let me add this final note -- before getting into the final note that it was going to be the final note (Laughter) -- I couldn't help but gather from the conversation at the dinner table tonight that some in this audience were very pleased with the firm actions under the leadership of John Tower and several others in the Senate in defeating, or in effect killing for this session of the Congress at least, the no-fault insurance legislation.

The Administration helped a little bit. We didn't like it either, congratulations, John.

The final note, if I might. Everything we do, whether in combatting drugs, in solving the problems of our economy or in regaining energy independence for America, you know as well as I that we cannot rely solely upon Washington, D.C. This country is great, not because of what Government has done for people, but what people have done for themselves.

There is one very fundamental truth that I would like to repeat because it means a great deal to all of you as citizens, but it means something to you particularly as lawyers. We should never forget this fundamental truth, that a Government big enough to give us everything we want is a Government big enough to take from us everything we have.

Now, as we take a final look at the total effort, cooperation with the Mexican Government and the prevention of the growing or planting of the poppies, to the interdiction at the border, to more law enforcement, tougher action in the courts, prevention, rehabilitation, when we mobilize all of those resources -- Federal, State and local -- we in Government have made the most massive effort that we possibly can.

But, all of that effort will be of little use unless the American people themselves rally and fight this scourge of drug abuse within their own communities and within their own family. The mysteries of growing up, of finding meaning in life, are perhaps more baffling today than they were in much simpler times.

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As adults, we cannot provide all of the answers, but we can provide a loving and a caring home. We can provide good counsel, we can provide good communities in which we can live and the children we bear can also live. We can show, through our own example, that life in the United States is still very meaningful and very satisfying and very worthwhile.

Americans have always stood tall and strong against all enemies. Drug abuse is an enemy we can, we must and we will overcome, but it has to be a personal and a national dedication.

If we do, we can be successful. I am convinced we want to, and we will and we must.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 10:00 P.M. CST)