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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
PETER BENSINGER
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

THE OVAL OFFICE

2:33 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: I am very sorry, Pete, I couldn't come over to the ceremonies, but I was there in spirit, if not personally. I might add, as June and Dick know, we felt we have to move ahead even more rapidly and more effectively than we have in the past in trying to do something affirmatively about this problem of drugs.

This situation has gotten far more acute in many of our major metropolitan areas, the difficulties at the Mexican border and other sources. They are of great concern to me, and I think you have a big job, but I know you can do it.

MR. BENSINGER: Mr. President, I appreciate your confidence and the mandate that you have set forth to realistic levels of achievement I think would be tempered in part by the ability we can cooperate with foreign Governments and the effectiveness we can develop in relationships, both at the State, local and Federal levels.

But, I was very encouraged with the people I have met since I have been in Washington from drug enforcement and with the support I feel the American people have to stop this traffic, this illegal traffic of narcotics.

THE PRESIDENT: We do have a serious problem, as you indicated, at the Mexican border. We have other Latin American countries where the problem is to some extent just as acute. I have talked to the President of Mexico, and the President of Columbia, in trying to get their cooperation, and they have fully agreed to do the maximum.

So, if we can stop the flow and then handle the problem of the domestic drug traffickers, which is a tough one, I think we can gradually eliminate many of the problems we have.

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MR. BENSINGER: Mr. President, we will bend our efforts to make sure that foreign eradication of crops proceeds with priority and that we focus on key international importers of narcotics, too, and sharpen up those.

I think that will eliminate some of the major importers and financiers. I think that is where the Federal role should be focused.

END (AT 2:36 P.M. EST)