

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE  
 AT 6:00 P.M. (EST); 5:00 P.M.  
 (CST)

APRIL 9, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary  
 (San Antonio, Texas)

-----  
THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
 TO BE DELIVERED AT A LAW DAY DINNER  
 TEXAS STADIUM, IRVING, TEXAS

In observance of your law day celebration in Irving, I thought it would be appropriate if I directed my remarks this evening to an increasingly serious problem all across America. As practitioners of the law, as leaders of your community and as loving parents, all of you must share my deepening concern about a new wave of drug abuse that is afflicting our nation.

Only a few short years ago, as you will recall, the United States was faced with a virtual epidemic of drug abuse. Large quantities of opium were coming out of poppy fields in countries such as Turkey, were converted into heroin in port cities in France, and from there were smuggled into the U. S. A. This country mounted an 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 "French Connection." There was good reason to be pleased, then, because it seemed we had not only turned the corner on drug abuse, but we had also begun to make significant inroads into street crime.

Our success, however, did not last as long as most of us hoped it would. The base of the heroin trade has now shifted to other countries, and today there is a renewed and alarming flow of drug traffic into this country. The time has now come to step up our fight, sharpening the weapons in our arsenal and launching a new and more aggressive attack against this insidious enemy.

The cost of drug abuse to this nation is now staggering: Every year, more than 170,000 injuries can be traced to drugs. Every year, the problems of drug abuse cost us up to 17 billion dollars. And significantly, the greatest bulk of this 17 billion dollars is money lost through crime. Law enforcement officials estimate that up to one-half of all robberies, muggings, burglaries, and other forms of property crimes are committed by addicts to support their expensive and debilitating habits.

These statistics--as ominous as they are--reflect only part of the tragic toll. For every teenager killed by a drug overdose, there are thousands of others who do not die but continue only the motions of living. They sit in classrooms without learning. They grow isolated from family and 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 particular group in our society. The suburban housewife, the worker on the assembly line, the white collar professional--nobody is immune. I pledge to you tonight that I will spare no effort to crush the menace of drug abuse. Clearly, our first defense must be directed at our own borders--to clamp down on the illegal flow of drugs from foreign sources.

As you know, eighty to ninety 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 away in the mountainous terrain of the Sierra Madre.

(MCRE)

The drugs that come from these fields might be smuggled here in any one of almost a million vehicles a week that cross through border checkpoints, 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.

Fortunately, the Government of Mexico under the leadership of President Echeverria, has been increasingly concerned with this problem and has cracked down hard on both the growers and the traffickers.

With help provided by our Government -- help that includes helicopters and other advanced equipment, and committing substantial resources of its own -- the Government of Mexico is undertaking the biggest and most effective crop eradication program in its history.

Thousands of fields have already been wiped out. And while many of these fields will be replanted, the Government there also plans for the first time to maintain a year-round eradication program.

The effort made on their side of the border has been substantially aided by what we have done on our own side through the combined efforts of Federal, State and local authorities. In particular, I want to compliment the law enforcement officers of Texas. They have done a fine job in helping to control the flow of illegal drugs, and they deserve the thanks of all Americans.

I believe, and the leaders of Mexico believe, that if together we seize this opportunity -- as we are doing -- we can stem the tide of the new drug invasion within a year. That is our goal.

But our efforts must not stop there. We must also accelerate our law enforcement efforts here in 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, the people who traffic in hard drugs are nothing less than merchants of death and should be put behind bars -- for a 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 large shipments of heroin into the United States. Nineteen of those arrested were immediately freed on a \$500 personal recognizance bond, even though their offenses were punishable by 15 years in prison. All but two of the 19 had long arrest records, and one was on parole for a narcotics offense. To his great credit, the new head of our Drug Enforcement Administration, Pete Bensinger -- who incidentally, is off to a fine start -- quickly intervened. Warrants were re-issued for four of the 19, and bail was raised to \$10,000 for each of the others.

I believe we must 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.

(MORE)

Last year I 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 be not less than three years for such traffickers and would range up to 30 years.

Unfortunately, this legislation has become caught up in the great debate over Senate Bill Number One -- which would overhaul our Federal Penal Code. Because we cannot afford continued delay, I am separating out this mandatory sentencing proposal. In a special drug message that I will soon send to the Congress, I will resubmit this proposal and call for urgent action.

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

In recent years, we have made significant progress in the United States in 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 what we spent in 1969. We can now treat more than a quarter of a million drug addicts at one time. In addition, recent studies show that the number of addicts who go back to drugs after they have been treated has dramatically declined.

Encouraging progress has also been made in working with local leaders on programs of drug education and counseling. I know that the people of Dallas must take special pride in the highly innovative program that has been set up with Federal seed money and is now run by the Dallas Independent School District under Doctor Nolan Estes. This program, built on the philosophy that the drug problem is actually a people problem, has turned countless numbers away from drug abuse and has helped to rehabilitate many others. And what impresses me most about this effort is that its leaders are not only concerned adults but young people themselves -- young people who have a mission in life: To save their classmates and families from a horrible fate.

Looking over the wide range of drug efforts, it can be seen that the Federal Government must play an essential role in dealing with law enforcement problems that are national in scope and in mobilizing the enormous potential resources of states and localities.

We are pursuing an active program now, and building upon a white paper we issued a few months ago. I plan to accelerate that program in the future. We shall 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.

But let me add this final note: In everything we do -- whether in combatting drugs, in solving the problems of our economy, or in regaining energy independence for America -- we cannot rely solely upon Washington.

This country is great not because of what Government has done for people, but what people have done for themselves.

MORE

All of the resources that we in Government devote to the drug problem 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 families.

The mysteries of growing up, of finding meaning in life are perhaps more baffling today than they were in simpler times. As adults, we cannot provide all of the answers -- but we can provide a loving and caring home, we can provide good counsel, we can build good communities in which to live, and we can show through our own example that life in these United States is still very meaningful and satisfying.

Americans have always stood strong and tall against all enemies. Drug abuse is an enemy we can, we must, and we will overcome.

# # #