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Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE ARNOLD I. BURNS
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

PLENARY CONVENTION SESSION
NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

NEW ORLEANS CONVENTION CENTER
HALL A
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2:30 P.M.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. It is always a pleasure to be able to speak to those involved in the education of our young people. As a father and grandfather I know that guiding the lives of young people can be one of the most rewarding jobs, but also one of the most difficult. As I reflect on how difficult, I think of the story of the mother who tore into her son's bedroom one morning and shook her son awake.

Yes, I am sure that it is sometimes hard to get up in the morning and grapple with tough issues such as budgets, curricula, and discipline. We all know, however, that as difficult as it may occasionally be, the long-term health of our nation depends on the crucial decisions that all of you are involved in making.

And some of the most important decisions that you will be making in the coming months will undoubtedly concern one of the greatest problems facing our society today -- the problem of drugs.

Now I know that for most of you, drugs is not a new topic. I am sure that you have all discussed the harms associated with drugs amongst yourselves any number of times. What makes drugs such an evil phenomenon, however, is that, like viruses, there is a constant mutation going on. The drug problem that existed in 1978 is not the drug problem that exists in 1988. In fact, it takes just a few years for the drug picture to change dramatically. That is why I think that, although drug abuse is a familiar issue, new facts make it very worthy of discussion here today.

Take cocaine, to cite just one example. Over the past four to five years, production has skyrocketed. As production has increased, the price of cocaine has plummeted. Just two years ago a kilogram of cocaine would cost \$100,000. Last year the price dropped to \$20,000 for a kilogram. And do you know what a kilogram of cocaine costs today? Just \$7,000. I mean, for less than the cost of a subcompact car you can go out and become a big-time cocaine dealer. To show you just how ridiculous things have gotten, one can now buy crack -- the potent cocaine-based product that is plaguing many of our poorer urban areas -- for just \$5 a pellet. This is less than the cost of a ticket to a movie.

The price drop of cocaine is not the only difference from years past. The purity of cocaine has gone way up. And as the purity has gone up, so has the danger to the health of the user. It is increased purity that has led to the growing number of deaths attributable to the drug. From 1983 to 1986, cocaine-related hospital emergencies nearly tripled, and the number of cocaine-related deaths more than doubled. To take a specific example, cocaine has become the number one killer among narcotics in the city of San Francisco. In just this last year, cocaine-related deaths more than doubled in San Francisco. According to experts, the new bumper crops of cocaine are so strong that they can literally break down the walls of the human heart.

Let us make no mistake about it, drugs are dangerous; drugs are debilitating; drugs are disabling; drugs are devastating; drugs are death.

The huge increase we are seeing in the supply of drugs translates into widespread availability and use. Surveys show that nearly 6 million Americans are current users of cocaine and more than 18 million are current users of marijuana. In this country's workplace, one out of six workers uses marijuana and one out of twenty uses cocaine at least once a month.

In view of these statistics, Nancy Reagan recently said, "The casual user may think that when he takes a line of cocaine or smokes a joint in the privacy of his nice condo, listening to his expensive stereo, that he's somehow not bothering anyone. But there's a trail of death and destruction that leads directly to his door. The casual user cannot morally escape responsibility for the actions of drug traffickers and dealers. I'm saying that if you're a casual user, you're an accomplice to murder."

And she is absolutely right. Drugs fuel all kinds of crime, from murder on down. The casual user must take responsibility for the fact that, according to surveys of law enforcement agencies, drug use or distribution is involved in 20% of murders and rapes, 25% of auto thefts, 40% of robberies and assaults, and 50% of burglaries. The casual and recreational drug user feeds this predatory system.

Drug use is not, and never has been, a victimless crime. Drugs endanger our security and the very infrastructure of our society.

In the face of all these new developments, what is our society's response? As many of you know, one response of this Administration has been a strenuous effort to cut the supply of drugs entering into this country.

This Administration has followed a number of strategies to deal with the "supply-side" of the drug problem. First, we have initiated large-scale international drug suppression programs. In Operation Blast Furnace, for instance, we succeeded in virtually stopping the flow of coca leaves coming in from Bolivia during 1986. Cooperating with the Bolivian government, we achieved this success through the destruction of 20 cocaine laboratories.

We have engaged in aggressive eradication programs. In 1984 we destroyed nearly 13 million domestically grown marijuana plants. Just two years later we destroyed almost 130 million domestic plants -- a ten-fold increase.

We have greatly stepped up our interdiction efforts. In our Operation Alliance we have molded a large and efficient team of Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to stop the inflow of drugs coming across our border with Mexico. In just one year, from fiscal year 1986 to fiscal year 1987, this

Operation doubled the amount of marijuana seized, and tripled the amount of cocaine seized.

In addition, we have increased our intelligence gathering capabilities, and have made more prosecutions than ever before. Federal courts heard 115% more drug cases in 1986 than in 1985. Today we have a Federal prison population of 44,000, with drug offenders accounting for 37% of the total. This is in stark contrast to 1978 when there were only 24,000 Federal prisoners, 25% of whom were drug offenders.

Congress has enacted and the President has signed tough drug laws like the Anti-Drug Act of 1986, and promulgated the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, both of which effectively increase sentences for drug offenders.

And finally, we have vigorously enforced the asset forfeiture provisions of the 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act. This is the law that gives the Federal government the power to seize the tools and assets used by drug dealers and traffickers in their vile trade and to forfeit all their profits and property bought with drug money. At this time the Justice Department is managing more than \$560 million worth of seized cash and property. This hits the dealers and traffickers where it really hurts -- in the pocketbook. It used to be that these criminals could go to prison for a few years and have their ill-gotten wealth waiting for them when they got out. Now, because

of stiffer sentencing and the asset forfeiture law, these thugs will be old paupers by the time they leave prison.

All told, the Federal government this year will spend nearly \$4 billion in our effort against drugs. This is more than three times as much as was appropriated in the last Carter Administration budget. The money we are spending on insecticide, interdiction, intelligence, investigation, inculcation, incarceration, and investment-seizing are at record levels. But let there be no mistake -- it still has not been enough.

As I mentioned earlier, cocaine and other drugs are still pouring into this country. At a recent anti-drug conference at the White House, Customs Service Commissioner William von Raab said that it would take at least \$24 billion per year to stop altogether the inflow of drugs.

If you think that in this era of deficits that we are going to be able to increase our annual spending on supply side anti-drug efforts six-fold, then you too must believe in the tooth fairy. It is just not going to happen.

And money alone is not enough. All across the country, Federal, state, and local law enforcement have been counselling us that as long as there is a demand, the supply will get through. The public, I believe, also instinctively knows that spending money is not going to be enough.

The public's skepticism about the government throwing money at problems brings to mind the story of the little boy who wanted

to buy himself a set of toys which cost \$100. The little tyke wrote a letter to God praying for him to send \$100 so he could make his coveted purchase. The letter was opened by the postmaster, who was moved by the contents, so he decided to send it to President Reagan. Somehow it reached the President and when he read it he, too, was moved by the little boy's plea. The President turned to one of his aides and said, "Send this boy \$5." When the lad received it, he wrote another letter to God, which again was read by the postmaster and in turn sent to and read by the President. The letter said, "God, thank you very much for sending me the money. Unfortunately, it was routed through Washington, D.C., and the damn bureaucrats took out their 95%!"

That is why, as important as cutting the supply of drugs is, what may be even more important is cutting the demand for drugs. The logic is very simple: if there is no demand, there will be no supply.

And that is where all of you come in. As local school officials you have perhaps the best opportunity, outside of parents, to influence our young people away from drugs. And so I would urge you to implement demand reduction programs in your districts. These programs can be very effective. In addition to our supply side efforts, this Administration has also initiated an array of demand reduction programs which have had considerable success.

For example, all 94 U.S. Attorney districts have created drug demand reduction activities ranging from speaking engagements before school assemblies, to establishing district-wide coalitions to coordinate private sector and governmental drug education and prevention efforts. In Utah, for instance, the U.S. Attorney sponsored a drug education program at every high school in the state.

The Border Patrol has successfully used their drug-sniffing dogs in classroom presentations to gain the quick attention of youngsters. It is interesting to note, in fact, that organized crime put out probably their first non-human hit contracts on two of these dogs. These two dogs, Barco and Rocky, are reportedly the best agents in the South Texas division of the Border Patrol.

The Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which many of us think of as purely law enforcement agencies, have developed a number of effective demand side programs. The most notable of these is the DEA/FBI Sports Drug Awareness Program. This program provides training and support to high school coaches around the country in setting up drug abuse prevention activities. It has been able to enlist the cooperation of such role model athletes as New York Yankee outfielder Dave Winfield, basketball great Julius Irving, and heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson.

Many other agencies are also vitally involved in reducing the demand for illegal drugs. The Department of Education has

distributed almost two million copies of its "Schools Without Drugs" publication, and has awarded a number of grants for the development and dissemination of audiovisual materials focusing on prevention. The Bureau of Justice Assistance has been circulating an anti-drug video aimed at elementary school children. The video stars our ever-popular McGruff the Crime Dog. And, of course, First Lady Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign has been extremely effective in getting out the message to our young people that drugs can destroy their lives.

I believe that these and other activities have had an impact. The National Institute on Drug Abuse just released a survey showing that in 1987, there was a drop in the regular or experimental use of cocaine among high school seniors. This was the first time a drop had ever been recorded since this survey was initiated in 1975. This survey also showed marijuana use among high schoolers to be at its lowest level in years.

The most satisfying revelation of the survey, however, was the incredible change in attitudes displayed by these 17 and 18-year-olds. Just two years ago, in 1986, only about a third of high school seniors felt that using cocaine once or twice was dangerous. Last year, in contrast, nearly half said that it would be harmful to use cocaine just one or twice, and an overwhelming 88% of seniors believed that regular use of cocaine would be harmful to a person.

Again, I ask all of you to join in this effort. We need your help, and the help of your employees: teachers, counselors, and principals. While we in the Federal government can provide anti-drug pamphlets, films, and speakers, without the day-to-day influence that is wielded by your employees, any drop in demand will be ephemeral.

And as we all know, how young people are influenced by others has a significant bearing on whether they will try drugs or not. A Colorado State University study of Midwestern eleventh and twelfth graders found that the habits of friends had at least five times more impact on teenage drug use than any other lifestyle factor.

Any bad influence must be counteracted with positive ones. Teachers and other school employees must undertake the job of influencing our children onto the drug-free path. It is a proven fact, for example, that if someone such as a teenager is using cocaine, he is much more likely to quit if he has a support system of parents, friends, teachers, and others he can turn to in his moment of need. The same holds true in stopping a young person from trying drugs in the first place. Have your teachers explain the importance of being drug-free and make sure they keep hammering this message home to the kids.

It is vital that we reach our young people early. Studies show that the average age of a child's first social use of marijuana is just 13.5 years. Also, according to the Department

of Health and Human Services, the process of drug dependency is much more rapid with children as opposed to adults. However, say the experts, if we keep youngsters drug-free until they are 21 years of age, we would reduce the number of chronic drug addicts by 50%. In other words, if we save them when they are young, chances are good we will have saved them for the rest of their lives.

One thing that I think is essential to tell students is that our free enterprise system will not tolerate drug use. Studies show that drug users in the workforce are three to four times as likely to be involved in on-the-job accidents as non-users. They are absent from work two and a half times as often, incur three times the average sickness cost, and are five times more likely to file a workers compensation claim.

It is little wonder then that half the Fortune 500 companies have begun testing their employees for drug use. Testing has been so successful in increasing productivity and cutting on-the-job accidents and absenteeism that it is very likely that almost all companies in the near future will be drug testing their employees. To show you how times change, even the counterculture magazine "Rolling Stone", which used to offer marijuana cigarette holders as subscription premiums, now tests its employees for drug use.

Therefore, if students are going to get a foot in the door of our economic system, they are going to have to be drug-free.

This is an especially important message to youngsters in some of our poorer urban areas who are being exploited by drug dealers to peddle crack and dope on the streets. Sure, the quick cash these kids make is a great lure to financially disadvantaged youngsters. But we must make these kids understand that their long term financial future lies in entering the legitimate economy with a good stable job. This again is where teachers and other school employees can make a huge difference. Those of us in Washington can give some material help, but it is up to you to talk to these youngsters and get them to see clearly their true health, safety, and financial stakes.

All of us have a great opportunity. If we keep sending the right message to our young people they will respond. They have already shown that in the National Institute of Drug Abuse survey I mentioned earlier. If we can keep up the positive pressure we may be at a turning point in reducing the demand for drugs.

It is the contention of some drug experts that the reason drug prices have fallen so low recently is not just that the supply has increased, but that demand has indeed fallen. Thus you have the classic case of too much product and a dwindling number of customers. In fact, the price for coca leaves may have dropped so much that it is now below the break even point for producers in Peru and other countries. Coca farmers may be driven out of business, not by police, but by Adam Smith's old rules of supply and demand. And if that isn't a prospect that

should spur us on to even greater demand side activity I don't know what will.

Our children are sophisticated. They will listen to our message if we speak the truth and make that message relevant to their lives. So I urge all of you to go out there and get our kids to "just say no."

William Schofield, vice president of the Pennsylvania School Board Association, may have said it best when he remarked,

"We must initiate, we must energize, we must take the knowledge, sensitivity and solutions to our communities, stand firm and prevail.... Our individual communities must have the opportunity to care for their children in positive ways, despite social denial. And we have the obligation in conscience and we have the obligation in common sense to grab that mantle of leadership and go with it."

This is what we must do, and I am confident that all of you will be up to the task.

Thank you very much.