



# Department of Justice

---

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE  
UNTIL 10:00 A.M., E.D.T.  
FRIDAY, MAY 23, 1986

29 MAY 1986

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

STUDENTS OF LANGLEY HIGH SCHOOL

MCLEAN, VIRGINIA

MAY 23, 1986

NOTE: Because Mr. Meese often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from this text. However, he stands behind this text as printed.

## OPENING

Good morning. I'm very happy to be here today, especially since I know several of you as friends of my daughter.

As Attorney General, I am here in the role of the nation's chief law enforcement officer and prosecutor. But I am also here because I live in McLean and I care about you.

We in the law enforcement community -- police, sheriffs, FBI, and others, including our U.S. attorneys -- are members of our communities. We raise families and participate in the life of our communities. And so, not surprisingly, like most Americans, we care about our communities and their people -- all of them, young and old. And so it is that I care about you -- and about the decisions you are making about your lives.

Believe it or not, I remember my days in high school. And I remember facing important decisions, like what courses to take, and, a little later, where to go to college.

You are now making those same decisions. But you have another choice to make as well. It's a big one, a choice some of you must make every single day. The choice is whether or not to use drugs.

There's no escaping it, drug abuse is found in schools all across our country. It affects not only urban schools and urban students, but suburban schools like Langley and people just like you.

We feel that you have a right to know the truth. The truth about the medical dangers associated with illegal narcotics. And the truth about what could happen to you should you be unlucky enough to meet me or one of my U.S. Attorneys in court because you got on the wrong side of the law. We want you to know what you'd be getting into.

This program today is designed to do three things. First, we want you to know what damage can be done to you and your body by drug abuse. Second, we want you to hear, first hand, from a professional athlete, how he has been able to say "no" to drugs. And, also, how he's had to watch his friends abuse their bodies with drugs. And, finally, we want you to hear the facts about the law.

So let's begin. First, you'll see a videotape of five men. They are all older than you are. But they started using drugs when they were your age or younger. We asked them to look back on their lives. They did and they have a message for you. It's a strong message with some strong language, so let me caution you now. But it's definitely a message that deserves your attention.

Okay, as George Michael would say, let's go to the videotape.

CONCLUSION

Well, I think we are well on our way to accomplishing our mission here today. You've seen on videotape the stories of five drug losers, you've heard the medical facts from Dr. Gold, and you've heard Jay Schroeder tell the truth about how drugs and a good career don't mix. That's the first part of the program we promised you.

As Attorney General, I'm here to deliver the second part of the program. Today I want to tell you about a new law passed by Congress. It affects each of you right here in Langley High School. We call it the "schoolyard" law.

This law increases the punishment anyone receive if they sell drugs within 1,000 feet of a school building. That's the length of three football fields.

Buying or selling drugs is a bad idea anytime, anyplace. But with this new law, it is now an especially bad idea to buy or sell in the vicinity of a school building.

The Justice Department, which I head, is charged with enforcing that law through its U.S. attorneys. And we are enforcing the law. Some students who were arrested recently for selling drugs at McKinley and Anacostia High Schools in the District had to learn that the hard way.

Students selling drugs to students is a phenomenon that we are determined to stop. And we will not stop with schools in the city, because drugs don't stop with the city schools. We will enforce this law vigorously -- in the suburbs and here at Langley High School.

So, what's the fuss? you might say. Why did Congress pass this law?

Well, first our federal drug laws reflect the views of a majority of Americans. Those views are simply that illegal drugs have no place in our society, that their possession, use and sale are to be condemned.

The "schoolyard" law is a relatively new step. It recognizes that our schools deserve our special attention, that they, in particular, should be drug-free institutions. Why? Because schools are where the minds, the bodies and the character of Americans are in large part forged for a lifetime. This process is vital not only for the individual students involved but for the nation as a whole. The type of students our schools help produce will, in large measure, determine what we become as a nation.

Education Secretary Bill Bennett, is absolutely right when he says that using drugs is incompatible with learning. In his words, it's "brain suicide." He is determined to get drugs out of schools -- "Right now, no ifs, ands or buts," he says. Secretary Bennett counsels that students who do drugs at school should be "kicked out." I agree. We can't let the bad apples spoil the barrel.

I'm not shy about saying it -- I'm here as the heavy today, and I'm not talking about my weight. I take enforcing the law seriously -- very seriously. And so do the agents and the prosecutors who work for the Department of Justice.

Most students get only one shot at an education. Some drop-outs manage to recover later, pass their high-school equivalencies, and take it from there. But that's far from being the rule.

Now, that's a shame, but the greater shame is the victimization of honest, law-abiding students by the bad attitude gang, who peddle drugs or otherwise break the law or incite disorder and disrespect in the classroom and elsewhere.

I think I can safely speak for most Americans when I say we just won't tolerate it any more. The days when the bad apples could tyrannize a school are coming to a close. Together, honest students, parents, teachers and law enforcement officials are taking a stand. The education of young America is just too important to allow free rein to a few law-breakers.

We in the Department of Justice will do everything we can to see that law and order are observed in our nation's schools. Today, I challenge you -- students and teachers -- to do your part. Say no to drugs, yourselves. And say no to others who would turn your high school into a drug palace. The quality and character of your high school is in your hands. It's your decision.

I also want to speak to you today not only as a law enforcement officer but also as a parent and a member of your community. I want you to have the opportunity to create a good life for yourselves. Or as the Army would put it, "To be all that you can be." One key to a good life is a good education. Another is staying out of trouble.

Drugs are an obstacle, an impediment, a stumbling block to your future. Before you smoke a joint, before you snort a line, stop and think about all that you are putting at risk -- your health, your friends, your family, your education, your future employment -- your future, period. An arrest record is a ball and chain you will have to drag through the rest of your life; a drug habit is a monkey on your back; an overdose may be the long good-bye. Those things speak pretty much for themselves. But what you may not know is that prior drug use, and no more, can become a shadow that will follow you into the placement office, the hiring halls and the unemployment line. In many instances, prior drug-use acts as an absolute bar to employment.

Don't create an insurmountable barrier to your career goals. I challenge you -- look beyond immediate pleasure and look beyond the pressure of your peer group. Look over the horizon and think about what you are going to be in the days ahead. No one wants to end up as a loser exhibited on a videotape. We certainly don't want to see you throw a future career out the window because of a misstep early in life. The best way to avoid that possibility is simply to say "no" to drug use.

Henry David Thoreau, the sage of Walden Pond, about whom you are sure to learn in your English classes, said that "Dreams are the touchstone of our character." My advice is to hang on to your dreams. Don't sell them cheap. Joints and lines are much too low a price for any of them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak frankly with you about drugs and the law. I hope you will take our message to heart.

Thank you.