

**Excerpts from a Speech Delivered Before
the Abraxas Foundation in Pittsburgh, PA
1/15/87**

Contrary to what some recent reports have maintained, our drug problem isn't a new one. And neither is the war against it. It is interesting to recall, however, that until 1986, this country's drug problem seemed only to be noticed by those who came in personal contact with the tragedy. But with the cocaine-induced deaths of two prominent sports stars — Len Bias and Don Rogers — the problem of drugs was suddenly discovered by many in Congress and the news media. You only have to think back to the end of last summer: it was then that the news magazines gave page after page, week after week, to this issue, heralding it as the new problem facing our country.

Well, you and I know the truth — that the problem isn't new — and neither is the fight against it.

In 1981, President Reagan issued a directive to those of us in the Cabinet, and particularly to my predecessor as Attorney General, William French Smith, to launch a major offensive within the federal government against drugs. It was in that year — 1981 — that the Reagan Administration began the battle against drugs.

One can begin to comprehend how huge our undertaking has been by looking at the amount of money handled in drug transactions. It is not at all unusual for people to put up, in cash, bail of up to a half-million and even one-million dollars and then walk away and leave that bail. It's not at all unusual for people who are in the business of drug trafficking to buy aircraft and yachts and then to leave them abandoned, despite the fact that they cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, because they view that just as a cost of doing business.

Despite the enormity of the job, our Administration has battled steadfastly, and with solid results. There isn't time to recount all that has been accomplished. But I would like to mention to you some important figures released at year's end that unfortunately did not receive the media coverage they should have. For fiscal year 1986 the Drug Enforcement Administration, which is part of the Justice Department, reported dramatic increases in its arrests and seizures. DEA arrested almost 36 percent more big-time drug violators in 1986 than in 1985, and convictions of these people rose by 22 percent. Furthermore, DEA seized assets valued at almost 379 million dollars — almost 54 percent more than in 1985. That amount, by the way, was more than DEA's entire operating budgets for 1986. DEA also put out of operation a third more drug-producing laboratories in 1986 than it did in 1985.

The DEA figures testify eloquently that the federal law enforcement effort is becoming more and more effective. It is our conviction, however, that we cannot ultimately prevail in the war against drugs unless our society uses every available weapon. This means that we must work not only to reduce the supply of drugs through law enforcement means such as eradication, interdiction, investigation, and prosecution. We must also endeavor to reduce the demand for drugs through education, prevention, and rehabilitation.

These are the premises of the anti-drug program announced by the President last summer, a program the Congress in substantial measure supported by enacting the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986.

Unfortunately, we have lately been hearing a new chorus of negative criticism from those who are more interested in politics than progress. By distorting the budget figures and by either mistakenly or deliberately misrepresenting the facts, they are trying to give the impression that this Administration is cutting back on the battle against narcotics.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. President Reagan is committed to continuing an aggressive and expanding campaign against drug trafficking and drug abuse and to providing the funding and resources needed to support it.

That is why our 1988 budget proposes to increase actual program costs for federal drug law enforcement — the area I know best — by some 72 million dollars. And we are proposing increases in the most vital areas. With the budget submitted by the President last week, we will be able to hire more investigators and more prosecutors. And we will be able to build more prison cells for those ultimately convicted and sentenced.

Likewise, our campaign for education and prevention, as well as treatment, rehabilitation, and research, will continue to receive strong support. Those who claim budget cutbacks either don't understand or are by design confusing the figures.

By ignoring the facts that some of the 1987 funds were for one-time capital expenditures, that other monies were appropriated in that year and to be spent over a two-year period, and that certain grants were intended by the Administration to be for start-up costs of local programs, critics have tried to show a diminution of the national effort. The truth is that the proper federal role in combatting drugs has received continually increasing support over the past six years, outstripping comparable commitments by most state and local governments. This effort will be maintained in the future.

We are not only expanding traditional resources, but we are mobilizing new resources and doing a better job of organizing and utilizing all elements of the federal government involved in the anti-drug campaign.

Projects such as Operation Blast Furnace, conducted last summer and fall in Bolivia, and Operation Alliance along our southwest border, which we began phasing in last summer, are slowing the influx of illegal drugs into the United States. Further, we have developed numerous cooperative efforts with representatives of the international community. These are bearing considerable fruit.

At the purely state and local levels, however, there are many matters that those governments and their communities should handle — and indeed can better handle. Particularly is this true in regard to drug prevention and treatment.

I should also mention one important way that the federal government has been helping the states and local governments finance anti-drug programs without cost to the taxpayers. The Reagan Administration has been actively enhancing the anti-drug efforts of state and local communities by actively using the Asset Forfeiture Program provided for in the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984. In this program, when a drug arrest is made by federal agents with the cooperation of state and local governments, the assets that the drug merchant accrued from his illegal activities are forfeited to the federal government, which in turn shares these funds with those state and local agencies involved in the investigation.

At the start of this program, in fiscal year 1985, the Justice Department approved the transfer of more than \$2.5 million to state and local agencies. In fiscal year '86, this sharing in-

creased to \$24.4 million, a substantial increase by any standard. In the first quarter of fiscal year 1987, which ended December 31, some \$10.4 million in additional sharing has already been authorized.

This program is having an impact here in Pennsylvania. Just last week, Attorney General Leroy Zimmerman was in Washington to receive a check from the federal government for over \$1 million. This was Pennsylvania's share of forfeited assets from a drug trafficking ring that had imported more than seven and one-half tons of cocaine, the largest amount ever in the history of American law enforcement. With the help of the Pennsylvania law enforcement community, this particular bust resulted in the conviction of seven persons on drug trafficking charges. It is my understanding from Attorney General Zimmerman that money from that success and others is earmarked for both drug enforcement and drug prevention here in the Commonwealth.

Thank you.