Alabama Governor's Conference on Drug Awareness 2/29/88

I thank you for the warmth of your welcome. And thank you also for inviting me to speak at your Governor's Conference on Drug Awareness.

I would like to report to you today on the impressions I've gleaned in my travels around the country, in advance of the White House conference on drugs.

That conference has just convened in Washington, D.C., and we expect it to be an historic meeting.

We are at a critical juncture in the struggle to recapture our society from the illegal drugs which have ruined and even taken the lives of so many. Conferences like this one, and the upcoming White House conference, will help determine whether we will become a drug-free nation.

For those who dedicate themselves to this struggle against drug abuse, the reward is ample — an individual sense of achievement at having helped to purge drug abuse from our society.

If there was ever any doubt as to who our adversaries are in this struggle, the killing of Colombian Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos resolved it. He had dared to take on the drug traffickers in his country, and they killed him for it.

The killing came like a fire bell in the night; it warns us what the drug cartels will do to protect profits running to the hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

To chart the world-wide workings of these cartels, we have to assemble much data — so much data that we sometimes flinch from the never-ending task of assimilating it. But we persevere. Every iota of information is important; it could be the last piece in the puzzle.

Ordinarily, statistics tend be faceless and dull. But from time to time, you come on a batch of statistics that paints a picture.

The statistics compiled by the National Drug Abuse Warning Network — DAWN for short — do just that. And they do it vividly. They make you see the ravaged face of drug abuse.

DAWN, a network of 548 hospitals and 82 medical examiners in 26 metropolitan areas, reported recently that over the last five years, there have been 3,239 cocaine-related deaths. Not a surprising figure, given the escalating use of cocaine. It's really their figures on the sharply increasing number of "cocaine-related emergency-room episodes" that bring us face to face with the horrors of cocaine abuse.

Over the last five years, there have been no fewer than 50,961 such episodes. Each of them is a history of drug abuse in miniature. There's that first experiment with drugs, the progression to cocaine, the overdosing, climaxing in nightmarish emergency-room scenes as doctors struggle to keep a cocaine abuser alive. What a toneless term "episode" is, but, in this instance, what scenes it conveys.

A breakdown of that five-year figure reveals the surge in cocaine use, as more drug-users gravitate from relatively unaddictive marijuana to hard addictive drugs, principally, cocaine and cocaine derivatives like "speedballs" and "crack."

DAWN records that in 1983, there were almost 4,000 emergency-room episodes; in 1984, just more than 6,000; in 1985, almost 8,000; in 1986, more than 11,000; and finally last year, more than 21,000, a figure almost double that of the year before.

More than any other statistics I can recall, these convey the tragic consequences of drug abuse. They underscore one grim fact — as long as there are people with a drug habit, there will be drug traffickers abroad to feed it. I've read much about the drug trade, but none sums it up any better than this phrase: domestic demand, world supply.

As chairman of the President's National Drug Enforcement Policy Board, I know both sides, both demand and supply. I know, for instance, that the cocaine-abusers in those deathly hospital episodes support drug overlords in countries the abusers probably never heard of. And further, I know that when they buy drugs, they buy the ammunition for the drug cartels that murdered Hoyos in Colombia.

With considerable effort, we have crafted the weapons necessary for fighting these overlords.

We can, as we did effectively in Operation Blast Furnace in 1986, go to a prime source of cocaine, Bolivia, and, in a joint venture with the Bolivian government, destroy some 20 clandestine laboratories for processing coca leaves into pure cocaine.

With no laboratories to process their coca crops, the farmers thereabouts quit growing it. With no cocaine to carry, the traffickers' airfleet languished on the ground. Civil air traffic fell off by 90 percent.

We can confiscate traffickers, profits, and we have done so. If they've converted their profits into material assets, we can seize those, too. And we have confiscating golf courses, horse ranches, gold bars, paintings, and, among other things, a Rolls Royce.

We can impose stiff sentences on traffickers with long criminal records, and we've done so.

We have "shadow" planes, including helicopters, which can follow suspect flights to the smallest, remotest airstrips in Florida and along the Gulf coast, and seize drugs even as they're being unloaded.

Our reach is global, and our resources great. But with all that, we can't create that crusade I urge on you today, a crusade that seeks to do something about the demand side of the drug picture.

That's a matter of individual commitment — each person acting in concert with others, until, as the physicists say, the mass goes "critical," and the crusade begins.

And I am happy to report that I see more and more of that individual commitment, as I travel around the country.

Schools, churches, PTAs and civic associations of every description have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into this crusade.

Star athletes have come off the football fields, baseball diamonds, and the basketball courts to appear as role models for teenagers tempted to try drugs.

Recently, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America took full-page ads in newspapers around the country to warn teenagers against cocaine. The page was dominated, top to bottom, by a close-up of a girl's face. The picture startles. The girl is making as if to snort cocaine; but it isn't cocaine she's snorting; it's the barrel of a gun, and her finger's on the trigger. Underneath in big type is a single word, COCAINE.

Similar public-service ads are appearing President and Mrs. Reagan's "Say No to Drugs" campaign is an appeal in the same vein. The picture it evokes is of a teenager tempted for the first time. There's nobody around to say no for him; there's just himself. Say "no" says it all. Its terseness and simplicity make it the kind of phrase a teenager would repeat to himself, time to time. "Say no to drugs." It would tend to stick.

The old canine snooper in the raincoat, McGruff, who is familiar to a whole generation of grammar-school kids for his "Take a Bite Out of Crime," is pushing "No" to drugs, too. And like the others, he's on to the fact that we have to get to the children early. It's interesting to note that John Brosiak, of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign, which sponsors our furry friend, says first use of drugs often comes at a very young age. As early, we find, as the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. If we can get to the children before the drug-sellers do, if we can coach them to say "no" that first time, and make it stick, we're one up on the drug sellers. The moment of that first encounter could be the most critical moment in a child's life. All that chorus of "No's" you hear from the Reagans, the ads, the role models from the sports world are directed to making sure of one thing — that the child doesn't learn to regret that moment, but to be proud of it.

The roster of athletes, active and retired, who've turned out to cut teen-age drug abuse reads like a "Who's Who" in sports. Dave Winfield of the Yankees and Julius Irving, the "Dr, J" of Philadelphia , 76ers fame. Football players? They haven't just enlisted as individuals; they have enlisted as a league, the NFL. Wide receivers? We have many of them — Harold Carmichael and Mike Quick of the Eagles, for example. The National Football League Players Association tells me the number of players who have joined runs into the hundreds. These athletes take top high-school students, athletes, and cheerleaders on "retreats"; there, these star performers tell them what it means to a lonely or a disaffected teenager to have a student leader drop an arm around them and show that someone cares. It could turn someone primed for an OK to drugs to saying no.

And I'm happy to report that among the youngest and most vulnerable of our population, such efforts are beginning to pay off. In 1987, we experienced the first substantial decrease in the use of cocaine by high-school students. In a recent survey by the Department of Health and Human Services, those reporting daily usage declined 25 percent since 1986; those reporting usage in the preceding 30 days, 31 percent; those reporting usage in the preceding year, 19 percent; and those reporting usage over their lifetime, 10 percent. But with all this outpouring of community concern, there are still some in society who hang back from enlisting in the struggle against drug abuse.

Why, we don't know.

It may go back to when the drug scene first materialized, in the early 1960s. In our innocence, we didn't realize what a destroyer of lives and neighborhoods drug abuse was to become. For some, the right to "do your own thing" seemed to have been enshrined as an-

other amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It's hard to imagine now, but drug abuse was somehow thought to be a victimless crime. It may be that some vestige of that thinking still survives, to confuse people, and keep them from signing on against drug abuse.

The leniency with which drug-dealers were treated until quite recently may go back to the '60s, too. That was just about the time concern for the accused began to turn into a maudlin sympathy for the convicted. Some of that may still linger to deter people from putting drug-peddlers where they belong.

Then again, some have simply cultivated a detachment from the problem; maybe they've read so much about the drug scene and gang battles over turf that they're resigned to a drug-ridden society.

But we cannot afford that sort of resignation. Because the only way we can assemble an army to battle drug abuse within our free society is through voluntary enlistment, through people coming forward willingly to do their share, and taking on themselves the sort of discipline to be found in a real army.

Now, the United States Army's solution to the drug problem is an extensive urine-testing program, with stiff punishments for those who test positive, including dismissal from the service.

This program keeps the Army relatively drug-free — out of 1.2 million samples taken last year, only 2.05 percent tested positive.

But our free society is not organized like an army, and so we cannot, and would never want to, resort to that sort of program for the population at large.

When a youngster is tempted to drug abuse for the first time, there's no top sergeant to shout, "No," and make it stick.

And that points up the essential difference between the discipline the Army imposes on its troops, and the discipline a free society voluntarily imposes on itself — self-discipline.

It's the theme that runs through the Reagans, "Say No to Drugs," the ads, and all the Justice Department's role-model programs, to which sports figures have contributed so generously.

Each effort, here in your own community, or abroad in the nation, has to be keyed to the individual, his sense of personal worth, and his ability to steel himself against the illusory appeal of drugs through self-discipline.

So that when a teenager asks himself who's to protect him in his first encounter with drugs, he can say confidently, that person is myself.

Thank you very much.