

PRIDE Conference
3/19/87

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to be in Atlanta. It is the home of one of my predecessors, Griffin Bell. As a matter of fact, the topic assigned to me, "Taking Care of the Law," happens to be the title of Griffin Bell's book about his experiences as Attorney General. I want to assure him that it is coincidence, and that I am not trespassing on his territory.

I'm just taking it on faith that you all are out there because, with those lights in my eyes, I can't really see you. I hope that when I return to my seat, I don't find an empty auditorium.

In any event, it's good to be at this conference. By your presence, you demonstrate your interest in the topic at hand — an interest shared by my close friend, Carlton Turner, who will be with you in the course of this conference. He is the architect of this Administration's drug-abuse prevention program.

Carlton has done an outstanding job. He's a doctor, a Ph.D; he's been a professor. And he has a unique talent for working with people from all walks of life — police officers, school teachers, parents — and helping them get down to brass tacks in setting up drug-prevention programs. He has been an inspired leader in the fight against drug abuse.

And, of course, like you, I'm proud to be joining our First Lady, Nancy Reagan, here. She has been tireless in alerting the citizens of our nation, especially our young people, to the seriousness of the drug problem,

Her participation today, I think, indicates not only her dedication to drug prevention but her regard for the work your organization has done. Her presence here is a great compliment to you all.

I would also like to call attention to the other First Ladies who have come here for PRIDE's tenth anniversary conference. We thank them for their interest. They grace our deliberations. By their presence, they attest to the fact that drug abuse and drug trafficking are problems affecting not just one nation but virtually every nation in the world.

In just a few months, Jack Lawn and I will be going to Vienna for the International Conference being held under the sponsorship of the United Nations. There, we will joint representatives from virtually every country in the world to see how we can do a better job in combatting drug abuse. As Jack Lawn mentioned earlier, there have been times people have pointed a finger at the United States and have said, "If it wasn't for your problem here, we wouldn't have the problem abroad."

But now other countries are realizing that each country has its own drug problems. Whether it's a cultivating nation, a trafficking nation, or a transshipment nation, they all have to fight illicit drug use. Not only around the world but among their own citizens.

I hope this will be the first of many ten-year anniversaries for PRIDE. As Jack Lawn said, even if we were completely successful in driving the drug-traffickers out of our respective societies, we would still need organizations such as yours to keep drugs from resurging and to prevent the problem from happening again.

But as things are, we know that in spite of all our efforts and achievements — some of which Jack talked about this morning — we are still a long way from abolishing the drug traffic.

The contribution you're making is absolutely essential to attaining a drug-free America. It's important, I think, to remind ourselves that PRIDE was founded by concerned parents, and that the most important weapon we have in combatting drug abuse is the truth.

Jack Lawn, from the Drug Enforcement Administration, talked about the importance of accurate, factual information in dealing with young people. They are not to be fooled. Horror stories that are not founded on true data are probably counter-productive. They leave young people puzzled, confused, and apt to think they can use drugs with impunity.

In insisting that its leaders and the speakers addressing this conference stick to hard facts, PRIDE stands out as a world leader in the struggle against drug abuse.

Emphasizing truth, PRIDE counteracts the disinformation spread by organizations such as the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws and other groups which have tried to play upon the natural curiosity and the natural interest of young people, and have tried, in many ways, to subvert what parents and school teachers and religious leaders have to say about drugs.

Your approach has paved the way to positive programs of self-esteem, programs making young people understand that they can exert peer pressure on others. This has made a difference throughout our country.

Accentuating truth, you have, literally, set national standards for drug education and community drug-prevention programs.

That is important. And a look back at the way the drug problem has developed in this country the past three decades will tell you why.

My personal involvement with drug law enforcement began in 1958, 30 years ago.

In those days, the problems of drug abuse were limited to a relatively small segment of society. Most of the "hypes," as they were called in those days, were using heroin. There was another group that was using marijuana. But marijuana use was a relatively infrequent phenomenon, even among those people who came in contact with the law.

In the middle of the 1960s, as most of you know, the drug problem in the United States took on a very different and frightening new aspect.

First of all, it invaded the mainstream of society, and, secondly, it became a divisive force setting the younger generation against their elders. It divided the generations. Drugs became a symbol of rebellion. The young people's natural and healthy desire to strike out on their own was exploited by drug-abusing peers as well as by those who were dealing in drugs. In effect, instead of striking out in a constructive way, they were literally causing them to strike out so far as society was concerned.

Well, your work in PRIDE has helped to heal that split between the generations. Indeed, you're the much-needed symbol of solidarity between generations.

The moral power of the good example should never be underestimated. People, particularly young people, learn much more by what we do rather than what we say.

Going back to the first year of this Administration, President Reagan said in his Father's Day proclamation in 1981, "Through love and instruction, discipline, guidance and example, we learn from our mothers and fathers the values that will shape our lives and our public citizenship."

And nowhere is that more important than in the dread field of dangerous drugs. As a matter of fact, I suspect that kids sometimes learn more from their parents than we realize.

There is the story of the kid with the stomach ache. His mother knowing all about how he had his little ailments, some of them imagined from time to time, told him his stomach hurt because it was empty and that he would feel a lot better after he had had something to eat.

Well, that turned out to be true, and his stomach ache was forgotten about, or so his mother thought. The next Sunday afternoon, the minister from their church came to visit the family and in the course of the conversation, he was asked how he was, and said: "Well, as a matter of fact, I have a headache."

At that point, the little kid piped up, "Don't worry, that's just because it's empty, and you'll feel better when it's filled up."

We who work in law enforcement know what you teachers and parents are up against. And we suspect that sometimes you feel you're out there all alone, and that too many politicians are saying we're losing the battle against drugs.

Well, I don't think we want to be overly optimistic, but I think we have seen positive signs that the hard work you're doing is beginning to pay off.

We are starting to make progress in the battle against drugs, and you shouldn't forget that. Nor should you forget that all levels of government are in your corner.

This conference has many values, one of them being the "togetherness" it fosters. We have experts, officials, and concerned citizens from government, education, and the private sector. Together, we can evolve what I like to call a total, all-encompassing strategy against drug abuse.

I think we are agreed on one thing: drug abuse is the greatest social problem we face today. Where you have crime, poor health, infant mortality, industrial accidents, and urban deterioration, you're likely to find drug abuse, either as a direct cause or as a contributing factor.

To deal with drug abuse, the Reagan Administration has adopted a two-prong strategy: We put the demand side, if you will, on the same footing as the supply side.

The single agency empowered by President Reagan to cope with supply and demand is the National Drug Policy Board. It is a Cabinet-level entity; and it is charged with originating, implementing, and reviewing drug-fighting policy. And to do so, it draws on all the resources of government. Virtually every Cabinet member doubles as a member of the board.

You have already heard from Bill Bennett on what the Education Department is doing in generating ideas for combatting drugs in the schools.

Sam Pierce, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, has initiated a program for purging drugs from public housing.

The secretaries of Interior and Agriculture serve on the board because of the public lands they administer: they stand guard against the traffickers who would seed our national parks and forests with marijuana.

There is a direct correlation — and it is a clear one, established by careful research — between drug abuse and crime.

Now, to be sure, as Jack Lawn has pointed out, not every person who uses drugs is going to involve himself in other criminal activity. But the threat is there, as suggested by the findings of the Pretrial Services Agencies of the District of Columbia.

In March of 1984, the agencies began administering drug tests to suspects taken into custody by police. The results indicated a high statistical likelihood that the suspect used drugs a short time before he was arrested.

As I say, this data does not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between drugs and the commission of a crime, but they certainly suggest a relationship beyond coincidence between the two.

The statistics are interesting: In March of 1984, 15 percent of all arrestees were cocaine-users. By 1986, just two years later, the figure had climbed to 37 percent. Cocaine was taking hold among criminal suspects as the drug of choice.

Every federal, state, and local law-enforcement agency has applied itself to purging society of illegal drug use.

Law-enforcement officers are going out into the community to alert parent-teacher associations, businesses, and community groups to the dimensions of the drug problem, and how to cope with it.

Our U.S. Attorneys in the country's 93 judicial districts are organizing mini-anti-drug conferences patterned after the conference we're attending here.

Acting under the school-yard law, we are arresting pushers selling within 1,000 feet of a school, and imposing the stiff sentences and fines the school-yard law authorizes and, in many instances, mandates.

Also, we have fostered local-state-federal cooperation in recapturing urban neighborhoods from drug-dealing gangs which have intimidated residents and cowed them into silence.

Just a few weeks ago, I went to Philadelphia to visit a neighborhood that had been wrested from the control of the drug-pushers. Fifty-six suspects had been seized; and for the first time in months, the residents were free to walk their streets without fear of being driven indoors.

I think it is important to note that in every way we can, we are going after the traffickers. Our reach is long. Just recently, we conducted a sweep of New York airports where airline employees were actually conspiring to bring in drugs from South America. We arrested suspects, and seized shipments.

We have the know-how to plan such sweeps, and the resources to make sure we succeed.

I think we are seeing a popular revulsion against drugs. The level of outrage is rising. In the long run, public sentiment promises to be the most important resource we have in realizing our dream of a drug-free society.

History shows that periods of remission or decrease in drug use have generally followed periods of heightened sensitivity to the threat of drugs.

I believe that we are entering just such a period of growing abhorrence of drugs and what they are doing to our young.

Which brings me to those of you who are parents. I would urge you to see your role in the fight against drugs as the most important role you have to play in rearing your children.

Schools and government have a unique and important contribution to make to drug education, but there is no substitute for parental guidance.

In the last analysis, parents have the ultimate responsibility to protect their children.

I congratulate you for your part in this PRIDE organization, on your past accomplishments, and I wish you good luck and continued success.

Thank you.