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ADDRESS

BY

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Before the  
FEDERAL WIVES FORUM

regarding  
"DEPENDENCE ON DRUGS--ITS IMPLICATIONS IN OUR LIVES"

Benjamin Franklin Room  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C.

It is a pleasure for me to have this opportunity of participating in this important conference. I understand you had an exceptionally fine program this morning, and I am certain you received a great deal of valuable and accurate information concerning the problem of drug addiction.

I cannot overestimate to you the threat that narcotics and dangerous drugs pose to the mental and physical health of the nation -- especially to our young people who are, in frighteningly increasing numbers, turning to marijuana, hard narcotics, and other dangerous drugs as a way of life. The President summarized the situation in his message to Congress last year, when he said:

"Within the last decade, the abuse of drugs has grown from essentially a local police problem into a serious national threat, to millions of Americans.

"A national awareness of the gravity of the situation is needed.

"A new urgency and concentrated national policy is needed at the federal level to begin to cope with this growing menace to the general welfare of the United States."

I am sure that the experts who spoke to you this morning referred to the tragic statistics indicating the seriousness of the problem of drug abuse. While the problem

is not new, it continues to grow in complexity and dimension. We are confronted with a situation of crisis proportions. I hasten to point out that I make these statements not as an alarmist, but as a realist.

I wish I could report to you today that the increased and combined efforts within the last year of federal and state governmental agencies and many private volunteer groups have brought about a significant improvement in the situation -- but, unfortunately, this is not the case. The problem has not decreased -- it has continued to increase at an alarming rate -- and once again, we must report that the principal increase in drug abuse is among the youth of our nation.

I do not wish to burden you with a lengthy recitation of the reports reaching my office daily from across the nation. But I should like to point to the situation in New York City. There, in 1969 alone, 968 deaths were reported from overdoses of heroin. We are told that at the present time, an average of three persons a day are dying in that city from the same cause. As a matter of fact, the rate of heroin-related deaths in New York City is now approaching that of the homicide rate. We further estimate

that there are probably 100,000 heroin addicts in the United States, and that these unfortunate victims consume about 2-1/2 metric tons of heroin annually.

As far as marijuana and other dangerous drugs are concerned, the demand is on the increase, and availability, although not always at a level consistent with demand, continues to grow. We first noticed this increase among the college age group and the disadvantaged youngsters in the large urban centers. Today, we find these substances readily available in high schools, junior high schools and even in some instances in grade schools. The problem is no longer confined to the large cities; the affluent suburban areas are also deeply involved.

Perhaps the fact that more and more young people are taking drugs is not so much a sign of rebellion as of conformity in a pill-oriented society. There are in fact many more people using, and misusing, the psychotropic drugs -- the sedatives, tranquilizers and stimulants -- than such drugs as marijuana or LSD or even the "hard" addictive drugs like heroin and cocaine. In one year -- 1965 -- about 58 million new prescriptions and more than 100 million refills were written for psychotropic pills, capsules, and tablets in

the United States. One adult in four uses one or more types, and nearly half the adult population has used one or more of them at some time. The television commercials constantly hammer home the theme that many of life's difficulties can be solved by swallowing a pill. There are more than 6,000,000 known alcoholics across the nation. In spite of warnings of the cancer risk, the average American smokes 3,680 cigarettes a year -- the highest consumption rate in the world.

It is obvious that drug addiction is a cancer that affects every segment of our society. It has become a disease which could literally destroy this and future generations if we fail to bring it under control.

There are no simple answers to this dilemma. Narcotic and drug abuse is a complex medical, legal, social, economic, educational, and moral problem. All agree, however, that facts are essential to any understanding of or response to the problem. I hope today's presentation has provided you with some additional insights into the nature of the problem and what the federal government is doing to solve it.

I should like to review with you the programs initiated by the Administration within recent months to control and reduce drug abuse. Drug abuse is a complex

problem for which there is no one solution. Any effective attack on the problem must therefore be multilateral in that all our resources are utilized in one combined effort. One of the most significant things we have done is to emphasize the need for unified, cooperative, and concerted action on the part of all concerned federal agencies and departments.

We are also dealing with a national problem from which no segment of our society is immune. The federal government must therefore take the lead in developing solutions, but programs must be developed with the close cooperation and assistance of state authorities.

Our federal attack is directed at the two aspects of the problem -- supply and demand. Any effort to reduce the supply of drugs must be directed at the source of these substances. Thus, our law enforcement efforts are directed primarily at the major drug trafficker, whose illicit activities are national or international in scope. We are hitting him wherever he does business: in the big cities, our nation's borders, and overseas. This requires the combined efforts of the State Department with its diplomatic expertise, the Treasury Department through its Customs Bureau,

and the Justice Department through the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. We have recently initiated effective programs to control the illegal importation of drugs into our country from foreign sources. For the first time, we have entered into significant cooperation with concerned foreign governments to more effectively control international trafficking in narcotics, marijuana, and dangerous drugs. Illicit traffic is big business, and its proponents are well organized, resourceful, and ruthless. But our most recent efforts are hurting their profits and reducing drug availability.

While actions such as initiation of greater cooperation with foreign governments to stop the production of contraband drugs at their sources, and acceleration of efforts to intercept illegal narcotics shipments from abroad can be expected to help in the fight against drug abuse, a widespread educational campaign is needed to combat the ignorance and misinformation leading an ever-growing number of American youth into the tragic consequences of drug addiction. I am talking now about reducing the demand for drugs within our society.

Because of widespread ignorance and misinformation,

and its clear relationship to the growing magnitude of drug abuse, the President has called for "a balanced and objective program to bring the facts on drugs to each American -- especially our young people."

The prevention of drug abuse or the conversion of the drug abuser into an abstinent person is the ideal solution to the problem. This requires a modification of attitudes and beliefs which can be accomplished best by skillfully presenting factual information and by correcting false ideas about drugs.

The presentation of unbiased information is sufficiently impressive that it will deter most potential or actual users. Furthermore, attempts to sermonize or to scare with inaccurate statements are likely to fail or even to encourage adolescent drug abuse. Young people will rebel against patently false information. In the drug area the generation gap often consists of ignorance about drugs on the part of the elders and illusions about drugs on the part of the youngsters. We are now trying to close the gap from both directions.

While some resources have been expended by both governmental and private agencies in programs designed to

meet the challenge of drug abuse, the statistics I have previously cited indicate that such programs have failed to significantly alter the rapid increase in the use of drugs. Evaluation of these programs suggests that the principal impediment to success lies in the fact that they have failed to communicate the seriousness of the problem to the public and to foster the development of positive attitudes on the part of the nation's young people.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare is now developing major new educational programs with the help of other agencies and with new funds made available by the White House last month. The National Institute of Mental Health has over 150 grants in operation, which will, hopefully, produce hard facts to be communicated to the uninformed or misinformed public.

The emphasis on prevention by way of increased public awareness as contained within these new educational programs, coupled with more rigorous surveillance of sources and heightened prosecution of those who traffic in drugs, should permit an early reversal of the accelerating trend towards drug abuse.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we cannot

succeed with this war on drug abuse until we enlist the active assistance of every citizen. Young people themselves can and must play a key role in this war. It is a time for synthesis between the generations, a time to harness the dynamism and energy of youth and the experience of their elders for the tasks that lie ahead. Parents, counselors, administrators, teachers, nurses, social workers, religious leaders, law enforcement officers, civil and community leaders, and any others who have occasion to work with the young must arm themselves with the facts on drugs. These facts must be communicated to the youth, and they in turn must communicate them to each other. We can now offer young people the moon -- it may be that they can help us preserve the old earth.