

**The National Partnership to Prevent
Drug and Alcohol Abuse Dinner
10/10/85**

Our dinner this evening is a very special occasion for me. This Administration, as you know, is deeply committed to eliminating the ravages of drug and alcohol abuse from American society. President Reagan and our First Lady have taken a great personal interest in this problem.

As Attorney General, and as a citizen, I share their concern. If alcohol is a pox on our house, then drug abuse is the plague which threatens to consume our nation. It is this sober recognition that has led me to make drug law enforcement the number one priority of the Department of Justice. Tonight, in the face of these grave social problems, I share with all of you a tremendous feeling of hope and excitement about the National Partnership to Prevent Drug and Alcohol Abuse. We are, I truly believe on the threshold of a new era in preventing the abuse of these addictive substances.

Many of you — some of our foremost citizens — have been selflessly at work, for more than a year, with our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to launch this magnificent partnership. When I see so many talented people commit themselves to a common objective, my hopes can't help but rise.

Thoughtful persons, including me, believe that our young people are the key to solving America's drug dependency problems. As energetic and bright as they generally are, young people are also impressionable and often poorly informed. That is why a strategy based on education and prevention is particularly well suited. By honestly portraying the reality of dependency, we can remove some of the lustre placed on drugs and alcohol by popular culture. I have faith that with all the facts in mind, young Americans will begin to make choices they — and their country — can live with.

I had the pleasure to join your honorary chairman Nancy Reagan in an event earlier today. Let me assure you that you could not have made a better choice for chairman; for the Partnership in many respects will be building on her long-standing efforts in drug prevention.

There are other examples of successful cooperation between the public and private sectors to prevent drug and alcohol abuse to which the Partnership can look as well. One is the National High School Coaches Association which joined together with the National Football League, the NFL Players' Association, the International Association of Police and the Department of Justice to reach 5.5 million student athletes through a Sports Drug Awareness Program.

Tonight, in kicking off the National Partnership, we are not only vastly increasing the scale of cooperation between the public and private sectors in fighting the drug scourge, we are also shifting in a significant way the emphasis in our anti-drug strategy.

The National Partnership represents a major, new step in addressing the *demand* for drugs and alcohol among youth. This Administration—President Reagan, first among us—has recognized that restricting the *supply* of drugs alone cannot solve America's drug problem. We must also attack demand, even though the Department set new records for seizures of marijuana, cocaine and heroin last year, and expects to do the same this year.

There is some encouragement in the consumption picture. Overall use of marijuana was down in 19 percent in the under-25 age group. We expect this downward trend to continue through 1985. Nonetheless, one-third of all high school seniors continue to use marijuana on a monthly basis.

Heroin use showed a slight decline in 1984, stabilizing at about a half million addicts.

On the other hand, cocaine use jumped through the roof. All told we may now have more than 24 million cocaine users, and they are spread across the social spectrum. When one considers the destructive capacity of cocaine, it becomes clear that a national disaster is in the making.

New evidence supports previous findings that cocaine is both more addictive and more toxic than heroin. According to researchers Michael Bozarth and Roy Wise of Concordia University in Montreal, laboratory animals given free access to cocaine died at almost three times the rate of those given access to heroin.

Ironically, cocaine was once touted as a harmless, non-addictive “recreational” drug. However, research on laboratory animals has revealed it to produce a tenacious dependency, accompanied by erratic behavior and a sharp deterioration in health.

These laboratory findings have been corroborated by interviews with actual cocaine users:

- 71 percent reported that cocaine was more important to them than food;
- 50 percent said it was more important than sex;
- 72 percent said it was more important than family activities; and
- 64 percent said it was more important than the friends that it had displaced in their lives.

It takes little imagination to understand how socially disruptive such a powerful drug can be.

As bad as cocaine addiction is for adults, the prospect of young Americans starting out in life with a big-league dependency is even worse. Yet projections show that by the end of this year, *one out of five* high school students will have tried cocaine before graduating and *ten percent* of suburban high school students will be regular users.

Use in the category of “dangerous drugs” — methamphetamines, PCP, and a variety of “designer drugs” — also increased in 1984, and probably will do so again in 1985.

Illegal trafficking in prescription drugs, which accounts for 70 percent of all drug-related deaths, is also on the rise.

This Administration plans, of course, to continue its interdiction efforts. We anticipate that new tools recently supplied by Congress will give us additional leverage on the problem. The asset forfeiture provisions of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 are only one example.

But a good dose of Yankee realism is also called for. We must try a new tack. The stakes are just too high for this great country to leave the problem of drug *demand* unaddressed.

Let's be honest. The drug trade may be the most wretched business on earth but it is not a business built on the coercion of consumers. Drug dealers may maim and murder narcotics agents to keep their markets open; they may even double-cross and murder each other in greed; but no one forces Americans to buy drugs at gun point.

The plain truth is that drug dealers would be nowhere without the consumers who buy their sordid wares. It is the aggregation of countless *choices* by individual Americans to buy and use drugs that made the drug trade a \$90 billion industry last year.

That so many Americans made those choices does not, of course, make them good choices. Quite the contrary. Drug abuse is a choice with disastrous implications, not only for those individual Americans who partake, but for our country as a whole. As I have said before, no nation can long sustain the casualties we are suffering in terms of lives, health, productivity, wealth, crime and morality, without heightening our vulnerability to aggression from without.

Now, we could easily sink down in disheartenment at the high levels of drug abuse in our society. But it is realism, not defeatism, we need.

The resilience and the common sense of Americans are well known. These enduring qualities, properly nurtured through education and prevention will enable this country, I believe, to break free from slavish habits which do not befit the sons and daughters of a nation born in liberty.

But let me emphasize that a plan of mere passive prevention — one that merely leaves it up to young Americans to get the message — would be a cruel hoax. We have long since passed the point where we can simply sit by and wait for our children and fellow adults to come to their senses.

Instead, we must move aggressively into the marketplace of ideas. We must pursue an education and prevention strategy that is energetic and engaged. Our challenge is to sound a message of reason through the babel of voices competing in our culture for the attention of young Americans.

I have high hopes for the National Partnership. As far as I can see, all signs are go. We have the talent, the resources and the spirit of cooperation necessary to launch an aggressive, effective campaign.

Those groups essential to success are present: parents and other citizens groups, the business community, professionals in law enforcement and drug and alcohol prevention and rehabilitation, and the media.

I learned long ago that in law enforcement citizen involvement is indispensable to fighting crime; I have no doubt that the same is true for a venture of this sort. Building local public-private partnerships under the national umbrella organization will be vital to the success of this program. Working together as a confederation of concerned organizations, we can draw strength from each other. (I have been trying to tell people in Washington that for years.)

We have also been blessed with the support of the business community. Recognizing that the future of this country depends on America's youth, it is providing many of the financial resources needed for the success of the Partnership. Tonight, I want to call on all those corporations which are not represented to join us in a venture whose success or failure has great import for the health of our nation and our economy.

At the Department of Justice we are fully committed to the success of the Partnership. Jack Lawn, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Lois Herrington, Assistant Attorney General for the excellent leadership, have signed on, as has the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, under the guidance of Director Al Regnery and Deputy Director Jim Wooten.

Finally, but certainly not least, I would like to salute the media — the networks, particularly NBC, the broadcasters, the press — and the advertising groups for the leadership shown in addressing this problem. That we are here this evening is in large part due to your efforts.

It has been said many times that in the media you have a powerful instrument at your disposal — one that may be used for good or for ill. I am gratified to see you join the Partnership as a force for enlightenment. The success of our education and prevention campaign will depend heavily on effective communication with young America through its chosen information sources — television and radio. It will be good to have the masters of these media on our side.

The outcome of America's war on drugs ultimately lies with Americans themselves. No amount of law enforcement resources mobilized against the drug supply will ever truly eliminate the scourge of drugs from our society as long as our citizens, particularly our young people, choose to use drugs. As President Reagan has said, "No matter how effective we are against the pushers and the smugglers, it still comes down to our young people making the right choice — the choice that keeps them free from drugs."

We cannot avoid responsibility for how our young people make this choice. The responsibility for the tolerance of drug use in our society lies squarely on the shoulders of all Americans. There is a role for every institution in society to play in this National Partnership to Prevent Drug and Alcohol Abuse. Each brings something different to the effort.

But there is one thing which all of you bring by your example. That is moral leadership.

I challenge you tonight to continue as you have begun: to put your talents, your resources, your dollars, and yourselves into this magnificent Partnership. To paraphrase an old saying: The ounces of drug and alcohol abuse prevention you give through the Partnership will save our country many pounds of painful cure.

Thank you.