

# Remarks at a Meeting of the White House Conference for a Drug Free America

**February 29, 1988**

The President. Thank you very much, Lois. And let me just say here how much Nancy and I admire the job Lois has been doing. On my desk in the Oval Office, I have a little sign that says: There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit. And I can't think of anyone who is a better example of that truth about quietly getting things done than Lois Herrington. Lois, I speak for everyone here in saying thanks for the great job that you do.

All of us are here today to talk about the campaign for a drug free America. Now, I've said this once or twice in public and many times at home, but I can't say it too often. There are few things that I'm more proud of than the work Nancy has done in the fight against drugs. And in a moment I'll talk about money and law enforcement and so forth. They're important, no doubt, but Nancy has addressed something more fundamental. She's touched the conscience and consciousness of the Nation. She's helped teach hundreds of thousands of our young people to just say no to drugs and alcohol. Nancy, I'm so proud. And I'll confess that I've been nursing a little guilt, too. I'm the only one in the family the Government's paying. [Laughter]

We're fighting the crusade for a drug free America on many fronts. In the past 7 years, we've, for the first time ever, set up a coordinated Federal, State, and local campaign against drug smugglers. Among other things we've enlisted the military in the battle, including Navy ships and AWAC planes. We've also set up 13 Federal, State, and local strike forces to investigate and prosecute major drug rings. We've substantially increased the number of Federal prosecutors and agents. And we've strengthened the laws so that, for example, we can now dispose of property that was bought with drug money. We don't have to give it back.

The results? Last year, Federal drug agents confiscated over half a billion dollars' worth of drug-related assets. They closed down 682 clandestine laboratories. And they seized 92,000 pounds of cocaine. These are all records. We've taken fleets of airplanes, boats, and trucks from smugglers and dealers. I visited Florida some time back and saw for the first time what \$20 million looks like. It was piled up on a table, confiscated from drug dealers. I've heard stories of our planes tracking drug planes and landing right behind them on the runways, agents jumping out and making the arrest.

To get around us, smugglers have had to find new ways of hiding their product. We've discovered drugs in hollowed out lumber and in bathrooms and luggage compartments in airplanes. One morning in Tennessee a man woke up and found a body in his driveway. It was wearing an unopened parachute and carried a large package of cocaine. An air smuggler had tried to elude pursuers by bailing out of his plane. Drug seizures are at an all-time high. Federal drug arrests have increased 66 percent. Arrests of major traffickers have tripled. And in the past 8 years, prison sentences for those convicted of drug law violations have increased by 44 percent, to an average of more than 6 years per sentence.

And that's how we're fighting on what you might call the supply side of the crusade against drugs. But as significant as stopping smugglers and pushers is, ending the demand for drugs is how, in the

end, we'll win. That's why the best news I've heard in a long time was the recently released annual survey of high school seniors. For 13 years we have asked thousands of graduating seniors what drugs they use, how often, and what they think about drug abuse. For the first time a substantially smaller proportion of the seniors -- one third smaller -- acknowledged current cocaine use than did the year before. Use of marijuana and amphetamines is also dropping. Better still, almost all students said it was wrong even to try a drug like cocaine.

With all the headlines about how we're losing the drug war, let's keep in mind the progress we've made. Many drug-related problems now are not because more people are turning to drugs -- in fact, the number of users has leveled off and may be falling -- but because so many got hooked when the message went out that illegal drugs were acceptable.

This conference couldn't have happened 8 years ago -- not enough people cared. Now almost everyone cares. Your communities are looking to you for leadership. So, let me ask you to take back home the message that illegal drugs are one thing no community in America can, should, or needs to tolerate -- in schools, in workplaces, in the streets, anywhere. America is already starting to take that message to heart. That's why I believe the tide of battle has turned, and we're beginning to win the crusade for a drug free America.

Now, rather than go any further, I'll stop here. President Eisenhower once said that the great thing about this job was no one could tell you to sit down. [Laughter] Well, almost no one. [Laughter] Nancy, you're on.

Mrs. Reagan. Thank you, Mr. President. I know who's boss in the family. [Laughter] I can't tell you how good it feels to be here at this conference with so many people united in a common purpose. Although the drug problem is still destructive, the Nation has come a long way in its battle against drugs, and your presence here today proves it.

At least we realize there is a drug problem today. In Saturday's Washington Post, there was one page in which every article was a local drug story. And there was another local drug story on the front page. We must face the fact that drugs are tearing our communities apart.

Although I've been deeply concerned about this problem since my days in Sacramento, over the past nearly 8 years, I've focused mainly on education, on prevention, and on the need to change attitudes. Although we're making progress, still many ignorant ideas persist. And one of the worst is the casual user's justification that drug use is a victimless crime, that drugs don't hurt anyone except the person who's using them. Yet there are consequences to drug use beyond an individual's personal and selfish high. And that's what I'd like to talk to you about this morning.

A few weeks ago the drug cartel murdered Colombia's Attorney General, Carlos Mauro Hoyos, who was active in trying to halt cocaine traffic to the United States. Half a dozen men in 3 jeeps ran his car into a curb, sprayed it with machine gun fire, and killed his two bodyguards. Mr. Hoyos was later found, blindfolded and handcuffed, his skull shattered with bullets. And, ladies and gentlemen, the people who casually use cocaine are responsible, because their money bought those bullets. They provided the high stakes that murdered those men plus hundreds of others in Colombia, including supreme court justices, 21 judges handling drug cases, and scores of policemen and soldiers.

The notion that the mellow marijuana user doesn't hurt anyone is just as phony. As a result of an intensive effort by the Drug Enforcement Administration in Guadalajara, Mexico, and particularly Special Agent Enrique Camarena, over 10,000 acres of marijuana that were ready for harvest and eventual sale in the United States were destroyed. And this caused a major financial loss for a notorious trafficking group. On February 7, 1985, less than 3 months after the destruction of the 10,000-acre plantation, Special Agent Camarena was kidnaped by the traffickers. He was tortured and beaten to death. And this country's casual marijuana users cannot escape responsibility for their fellow American's death, because they, in effect, bought the tools for his torture.

As you know, many others have had their lives taken to protect our society from the corruption of drugs. Two DEA agents in California were killed just this month. Last week, while guarding the home of a witness in a drug crime, a rookie policeman in New York was assassinated in a patrol car. The traffickers and dealers will murder anyone who stands in their way. Recently an innocent young girl in Los Angeles was shot to death in the crossfire between two rival drug gangs. And who will tell the grief-stricken families that drug use is a victimless crime?

The casual user may think when he takes a line of cocaine or smokes a joint in the privacy of his nice condo, listening to his expensive stereo, that he's somehow not bothering anyone. But there is a trail of death and destruction that leads directly to his door. The casual user cannot morally escape responsibility for the action of drug traffickers and dealings. I'm saying that if you're a casual drug user you're an accomplice to murder. The casual user also cannot morally escape association with those who use drugs and then endanger the public safety. The message from casual use is that drugs are acceptable, that they can be handled, that somehow it's simply a matter of dosage. Casual use sets the tone for tolerance and that tolerance has killed.

Anne and Arthur Johnson are from Potomac, Maryland. They're with us today, and I'll introduce you to them later. On January 4, 1987, the Johnson's daughter, 20-year-old Christy, was taking the train to New York to visit her sister before heading back to classes at Stanford University. The Sunday afternoon Amtrak train was crowded with students returning to school and families returning home from Christmas and the New Year's holidays. Unknown to the passengers, a Conrail locomotive passed several warning signals and crossed into the path of the Amtrak train. The crash killed 16 innocent people and injured 175 others. Christy never made it to her sister's; she was killed in the crash.

The investigation determined that the engineer and brakeman on the Conrail train were smoking marijuana prior to the crash -- 16 people killed because of an engineer's personal indulgence in a joint of marijuana. Now, don't tell the Johnsons that casual drug use is a victimless crime. And don't try to tell the Johnsons that drugs hurt no one but the user. Several of the families of the victims who were killed in the wreck testified before the Senate last week in favor of mandatory drug testing for railroad personnel. The engineer and the brakeman also called for such testing, saying that alcohol and drug use was widespread within the industry. Senator Danforth told the families: "You won't win this quickly; you have to fan the flame of rage." And that's exactly what we must do -- we must fan the flame of rage.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to make it impossible for casual users to escape responsibility for any innocent death due to drugs. I want to make them fully face the brutality of drug use. I don't mind admitting that I have reservations about telling the following two stories, because they're real stories of anguish and inhuman brutality. Yet Betty Jean Spencer and Vince and Roberta Roper can't ignore

the brutality of drugs. They live with it every day. They're with us today, and if they can't forget, neither should we.

First, let me tell you about Betty Jean Spencer. Mrs. Spencer was at home in her rural farmhouse in Indiana with her four sons. They were 14, 16, 18, and 22 years old. Four men barged into the house, men out on bail on drug trafficking. The men didn't know her. They didn't know her sons. Mrs. Spencer says they were obviously high on something. They were laughing about the other people they were going to kill when they finished there. They ordered Mrs. Spencer and her four sons to line up face down on the floor, and then the men began shooting them at point-blank range with a shotgun. Mrs. Spencer miraculously survived two shotgun blasts to the back of her head, but her sons were murdered. And the men are in prison.

That's a brutal, brutal story. And it makes me angry. And no one -- absolutely no one -- should be allowed to say that drug use is a victimless crime. No one should be able to get away with the argument that drugs are a harmless, private indulgence.

Finally let me tell you about the nightmare that Vince and Roberta Roper must endure. Their daughter, Stephanie, a 22-year-old student, was returning to school in Maryland when her car broke down. Two men offered assistance. They drove her a short distance in their car, pulled a gun on her, and each raped her. They drove to another location and raped her again. They then decided to kill her. I don't want to repeat what they did to her, but we can't ignore the brutality of drugs. One of the men whipped Stephanie on the head with a chain, and as she tried to run away, he shot her. He then poured gasoline on her and set fire to her. Both men were users of PCP, LSD, amphetamines, barbiturates -- virtually any drug they could obtain.

Now, who would dare stand before the Ropers and tell them that drug use is a victimless crime? What apologist for casual drug use will look the Ropers in the eye and say it's all a matter of moderation? Who could be so brazen? Yet the attitude prevails.

Applause isn't appropriate, but a hug or a squeeze of the hand when you leave might mean a lot. But I'd like to introduce you to Betty Jean Spencer, and Anne and Arthur Johnson -- [applause] -- Vince and Roberta Roper. Thank you. [Applause] Let's each of us help here: Promise them that we won't let anyone forget the brutality of drugs.

You know, in the field of drug and alcohol abuse there's something called the enabling concept: If I don't do something about your behavior, then I enable it to happen. Society's attitude has enabled the casual drug user to avoid facing his role in the murder and brutality behind drugs. We can no longer let the casual user continue without paying the moral penalty.

We must be absolutely unyielding and inflexible in our opposition to drug use. There's no middle ground. We must be as adamant about the casual user as we are about the addict. And whereas the addict deserves our help, the casual user deserves our condemnations, because he could easily stop, and yet he chooses not to do so. He must be made to feel the burden of brutality and corruption for which he's ultimately responsible. We must get the message out: We will not stand for illicit drug use of any kind -- period.

And there's another message I'd like to get out to all of you here today, and that's a message of gratitude for your involvement in the fight against drugs. You're the people who will eventually turn

the tide. You're the ones who will make the difference. Many of you have been with me from the very beginning in one capacity or another. And I want you to know that when my husband and I return to California I'm not giving up my interest and concern about this. You can't get rid of me. In fact, I'll be actively involved in the Nancy Reagan Center in Los Angeles to be run by Phoenix House. The center will include a residential high school for young people in treatment, a training unit, and a research unit. I hope that the center will become a place where we can develop new methods, test new approaches, and discover new answers.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh once wrote: "One can never pay in gratitude, one can only pay 'in kind' somewhere else in life." And I'm hoping that this center will be one way I may repay all of you for the support and love and encouragement you've given me over the past 8 years. Thank you for your support, and thank you for what you're doing for our nation.

*Note: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Regency Ballroom at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. In his opening remarks, the President referred to Lois H. Herrington, chairman and executive director of the Conference.*