

forward to working with the Congress to make it a reality.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Oklahoma City Councilman Mark Schwartz, president, National League of Cities.

### Remarks in ABC's "Straight Talk on Drugs" Radio Town Meeting

March 12, 1997

[Peter Jennings, ABC News, opened the program and introduced the President.]

**The President.** Good morning, Peter.

**Mr. Jennings.** Thank you for being with us, sir. The President has already had a chance to talk to the kids here just a little bit. Tell the folks at home why you think it's important for them and you to be here together.

**The President.** I think it's important because we know that while overall drug use in America is still going down, drug use among people under 18 is, in fact, going up. And that's a very troubling thing because all of you represent our future. And I'm concerned about what happens to you as individuals, and I'm concerned about what happens to your communities and what happens to our country.

And ABC has been good enough not only to do this little townhall meeting for us but also to run a public service campaign with ads telling our young people and telling their parents and their friends and their mentors that, in effect, we have to talk about this, that silence about this problem is like accepting it. And I think that we all owe ABC a debt of gratitude for good citizenship here, and I appreciate what they're trying to do. We're here because the number one goal of our antidrug strategy is to persuade young people to stay away from drugs in the first place.

And I just want to thank especially our Olympian, Dominique Dawes, who is here with us today, who has agreed to be the spokesperson for our Girl Power campaign. And she's taped a lot of public service radio ads telling young girls to go for the gold, to

stay off drugs, to make the most of their own lives. And that's why we're here, and I'm glad we are. I'm glad you're here, too, Dominique.

[At this point, Olympic gymnast Dominique Dawes thanked the President and said that young people should stay busy and stay off drugs. Mr. Jennings then introduced Mickisha Bonner of Garnet-Patterson Middle School in Washington, DC, who described a drug market across the street from her school.]

**The President.** Well, Mickisha, are these drug sellers in the same place every day?

**Participant.** The same place every day.

**The President.** And how long have they been there?

**Participant.** Since I've been going to school there.

**The President.** And have the school officials asked the police to move them—

**Participant.** Yes.

**The President.** —get rid of them, to arrest them? Have they ever been arrested?

**Participant.** I don't really know. I just see them every day.

**The President.** I'll see what I can do about that.

**Mr. Jennings.** Talk to the President after the—he's very good, I've seen him do this before.

**The President.** I'll see what I can do about that. That's not right.

**Mr. Jennings.** But even though this is radio, I want to try a show of hands. How many of you have seen drugs being traded—

**The President.** Or sold.

**Mr. Jennings.** —or sold around your school? We've got maybe 30 kids with us here, for those of you at home, and we've had more than a dozen kids go up.

There are, by the way, so many drugs for kids to abuse, it's almost mind boggling at times. But again for you at home, to get some sense of what we're talking about here, here briefly is ABC's Jim Hickey to tell us what is available for kids to abuse.

[Following a report by Mr. Hickey on effects of various drugs, Mr. Jennings introduced Brandon Power, of Woburn, MA, who had nearly died of a muscle relaxant drug over-

dose in February. Brandon explained that an acquaintance had offered him prescription pills taken from a neighbor's mail.]

**The President.** Well, let me ask you this. Did you know they were muscle relaxants when you took them?

**Participant.** Nobody really knew exactly what they were, but not like anything big.

**The President.** Was there one person who had them all who then gave them to the rest of you?

**Participant.** Yes, there was one girl that had a bottle of them.

**Mr. Jennings.** Under some pressure, do you think, because the other kids were taking them?

**Participant.** I don't think it was really pressure, but in some cases—I can't speak for everyone, but there were other groups of kids that, like, I'm not totally friends with that may have felt pressure. But I didn't at all.

**The President.** Do you believe that in this case that if people had understood how dangerous they were, that they wouldn't have done it?

**Participant.** I don't really know, but I think that if they had found out about what would have happened and how they could have died and how close they came, they wouldn't have taken them.

**The President.** This is big problem for us. This is why it's so important that people talk about this and that we educate children at a very young age about what they can do, because it's not a bad thing to have legal drugs being shipped through the mail. It helps a lot of senior citizens, for example, who are not mobile, who have a hard time getting around. If they have a legal prescription and they can get it through the mail, that's a good thing. It makes their lives easier and better.

Inhalants—virtually everything people inhale is legal and performs some sort of function in our society. And I think what you're saying, it's kind of another important piece of evidence for me that we need to have more conversations just like this in every home in America, in every school in America. We need to talk about it, because those muscle relaxants are—if you think about it, I don't know if you've ever had a muscle

spasm, but I have. If you ever had a muscle spasm, it takes something pretty powerful to unlock that muscle. And so if you—even someone as big as I am, you can't take more than a couple of those pills within a period of time without having an adverse reaction.

[Brandon asked about improving mail security.]

**The President.** Well, I don't know what we could do about that because she probably took it out of the neighbor's mailbox. And so, once that happens, I don't know what we could have done. There may be something that can be done to label them more clearly.

Now, we do have—the Postal Service is on the alert for illegal drugs being shipped in the mail. That also sometimes happens. But when you've got a legal prescription drug, about all I can think of you could do is maybe have the post office try to deliver it to the door. Maybe that's one thing you could do, and maybe not leave it in the mailbox. And I'll talk to them about it and see if there's anything else we can do.

[Another participant suggested special deliveries for prescription drugs as a means to prevent thefts.]

**The President.** I think that's a good idea.

[At this point, the network took a commercial break. When the show resumed, a participant commented that Brandon should not have taken pills, even from a friend, if he didn't know what they were.]

**The President.** I was just wondering—I see someone has got a comment back there, but I was wondering—this raises a question about what obligations young people have to each other, because no matter how—let's assume that we can fix this mail problem and say, okay, you'll have certain dangerous drugs, or potentially dangerous, and they'll only be delivered direct to people. There will always be some opportunity. You can't get all the inhalants off the market because they're legal. What obligations do you all have to each other? If you have a friend you know is doing drugs, what do you do about that? What are your obligations to each other?

[A participant responded that as a recovering drug abuser, he would preach to friends about the negative aspects of drug use. Another participant said she would point out the health risks involved. Another commented that some kids use drugs to be cool and to get attention.]

**The President.** Do people believe it's dangerous? You had your hand up back there.

[A participant said that a friend's obligation would be greater when harm to other people, rather than only to the user, was a possibility. Another participant indicated that it was hard to avoid drug use when others thought you weren't cool.]

**The President.** What about these guys? Michael, what were you going to say?

[A participant noted that marijuana had become so accepted that the users had more arguments for drug use than he had arguments against them.]

**The President.** You said—this is very important because the biggest increase in drug use among children under 18 by far has been marijuana. You believe it's because they simply don't believe it's dangerous or they don't believe it will hurt them?

[The participant said that kids don't believe it is dangerous, especially in light of the California law allowing medicinal use, and that they think medicines won't harm them.]

**The President.** Well, Brandon can prove that's not true.

**Participant.** Exactly.

[A participant from Los Angeles discussed the drug problem there, saying that he was a former gang member and drug user, and that the counseling he received after being arrested had helped him to see a broader world beyond his immediate surroundings.]

**The President.** Had anybody tried to talk you out of using drugs in the first place, before you did? At home, at school?

[The participant said that his parents were drug abusers and he first accepted it but later viewed it as part of a bad environment. Participant Matthew Migliore then described his alcohol overdose at the age of 10, saying that

a variety of drugs were available and that he had seen antidrug public service announcements but just never believed them.]

**The President.** So how can we be more effective about this? Let me just give you one example, because you talked about this. We know a lot about marijuana, for example, we didn't know 20 or 30 years ago. We now know that it is roughly 3 times as toxic as it used to be, number one, and number two, that it does have bad health effects on your heart, your lungs, and your brain. And specifically, for young people—this is very important for young people—sustained use of it makes it more difficult for people to concentrate, to learn, and to retain. It has a—we know this now.

So how can we—you may be right, Matt, maybe we've overdone it. But what can we do to communicate it in a way that's effective?

[At this point, the network took a commercial break. Following the break, a participant discussed the importance of parents talking to their children about drugs. Another participant said that having positive role models would help children avoid using drugs.]

**The President.** And tell me—give me an example.

**Participant.** Well, I don't have any examples because I don't do drugs. But a lot of my friends do, and they do a lot of pot. And they have—that's the most—the worst thing they've done. But they don't have anyone to look up to.

**The President.** So like somebody in the Big Brother/Big Sister program.

**Participant.** Yes, or a mentor.

**The President.** Or a mentor of some other kind.

[A participant stated that teens who don't use drugs can be good role models for their peers]

**Mr. Jennings.** Mr. President, we were all talking with Chelsea before you got here. She recently turned 17. When did you start talking to her about drugs, and what did you talk to her about?

**The President.** Well, I think probably when she was probably 7 years old, 6 or 7, something like that, very young. And then she had—she went through the D.A.R.E.

program at her school—which is one thing I think Philip mentioned—the D.A.R.E. officer. She loved her D.A.R.E. officer. He had a profound effect on the young people.

But we began when she was very, very young, talking to her, basically saying that this is wrong. This can cause you great damage. It can wreck your life. It can steal things from you. It costs money. It costs you your ability to think. It costs your self-control. It costs you your freedom in the end. So we talked to her about it quite a lot when she was very young.

**Mr. Jennings.** A lot of people at home know we have a baby boomer President, and a lot of people in the baby boomer generation are nervous, apprehensive; some even think it's hypocritical to talk to their kids because of their own experience. What did you tell her about yours?

**The President.** Well, I basically told her what I've told everybody in America, which is when I was 22 years old in England and I thought there were no consequences, I tried marijuana a couple of times. But if I had known then what I know now about it, I would not have done it. And I think that—I feel the same way Dan does. I think that if you have done something that you're not especially proud of, but that you know more about it, you have almost a bigger obligation to try to prevent other people from getting in trouble.

I think this business about how the baby boomers all feel too guilt-ridden to talk to their kids is the biggest load of hokey I ever heard. They have a bigger responsibility to talk to their children. Most of us did not—most of us—first of all, most of us were much older when the experimentation started. And secondly, we did not know what we know now. We have no excuse. We have a greater responsibility, not a smaller one. So it hasn't bothered me to tell her that she shouldn't make the same mistakes I did.

I think all parents, by the way, hope their children won't make the same mistakes they did in many areas of life, not just this. And so that's part of what being a parent is all about.

*[A participant described his experience with inhalants, explaining how easily they could be obtained and the adverse effects of using*

*them. Mr. Jennings asked why he had started, and the participant responded that his troubled homelife contributed to his drug use. He then explained that he sought help at Manor Mountain Treatment Center in Baltimore, but after his release, he started using crack and returned to the center.]*

**The President.** Do you think that you can have an impact on other people because of what you've been through?

**Participant.** Yes.

**The President.** Can you talk to other people and get through to them in a way that someone else couldn't because of what you've been through?

*[The participant replied that he hoped to help at least one person learn from his experiences with drugs. Another participant described his continuing battle with crack addiction. The next participant said he thought drugs were destroying the country and asked the President if the U.S. could institute effective sanctions against drug producing countries.]*

**The President.** Well, let me tell you a little about that. Let me just talk for a couple minutes.

First of all, I agree with that. We require countries where drugs are grown to cooperate with us in trying to destroy them and arrest the people who are selling them, if they want to keep getting any kind of aid or any help with trade from us. And I think that's a good thing.

But let me tell you what they say. I'll tell you what they say back. They say, "Okay, we have a poor little country here, and I'm a little farmer. And I can grow cocoa to make cocaine, or I can grow bananas and pineapples and I'll go broke if I do that and I'll make money if I do the other thing." The police officers in these poor countries where the drugs are shipped through—last year we know there was something like \$500 million spent in Mexico alone to make payments to police officers that like tripled or quadrupled their annual salary. And so these countries that try to help us that are poor, where the drugs are grown, they say, "If the Americans didn't buy—the American people have 5 percent of the world's population and buy 50 percent of the world's drugs. And if they didn't want the drugs and weren't willing to

pay these outrageous prices for them, we wouldn't have a market, and we'd have to go do something else for a living."

In other words, I think you're right. We have to be tougher on them. And last year we had record numbers of destruction of drugs in foreign countries and arrests and all that. But as long as there is as much money as there is, and as long as Americans are just dying to have it, it's going to be impossible to completely eradicate. And we need to do more.

But all of us have to take responsibility, too. If we didn't have a drug problem in this country, they would go broke, and they would go do something else. Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't do more in other countries, but we have to take a lot of responsibility here, too.

**Mr. Jennings.** A show of hands—radio, again—a show of hands from the kids only, is he convincing? Well, you didn't do too badly. Okay, so we'll continue in a just moment.

**The President.** It's better than I did in the election. That's great. [Laughter]

[At this point, the network took a commercial break. Following the break, Mr. Jennings asked what role the media played in educating children about the dangers of drugs. A participant said that the media does influence kids and suggested that the President support an increase in antidrug public service announcements.]

**The President.** More of the antidrug commercials?

**Participant.** Antidrug commercials.

**Mr. Jennings.** But now somebody said earlier—

**The President.** What about what Matt said—

**Mr. Jennings.** —there were too many of them.

**The President.** —that if you overdo it, people won't believe it? What's the answer to that—Matt?

**Participant.** A lot of kids are—they don't believe it—you know, it's just not the right message.

**The President.** So what is the right message?

Go ahead.

[Several participants explained how television programming sent mixed messages on drug use and gave examples from daytime programming and situation comedies where drug use was treated lightly. Other participants indicated that their friends were not influenced by public service announcements. Mr. Jennings then invited the President to speak for the remaining 2 minutes of the program.]

**The President.** Well, I'm going to give you back the 2 minutes. I'm going to give you 2 minutes to tell me anything specific you think I could do to help more kids stay off drugs.

**Mr. Jennings.** Okay. You're going to have to make it very quick.

**The President.** Very quick, though. Real quick. One line, everybody.

**Participant.** What you need to do is make more mentorship programs, more after-school programs where a kid could keep himself busy right after school.

**Participant.** There should be more treatment centers and more education.

**Participant.** People who are in jail should have more learning while they're in jail and not just getting out and learning more while they're in the system.

**Participant.** You should have more police officers out on the street, make sure nobody is selling drugs.

**Participant.** I think you need more of a firsthand look from people who have experience with this problem to— That's it.

**Participant.** I think you should cut back on the cartooning commercials and make there be more live-action commercials that get to the point about drugs.

**The President.** Give evidence.

**Participant.** More education programs for kids and younger kids about the harmful effects.

**Participant.** Well, I think that the cartoons they really don't believe because it's just—if they do it then they think it's cool anyway.

**Participant.** I also think that you should open up more after-school programs where kids have sports to do after school, keep them active.

**Participant.** I think the parents need to get really, really involved with their kids, not

matter how many times their kids try to make them stay away from them.

**Mr. Jennings.** Boy, don't you wish you could get such fast, cogent advice from your Cabinet members? [*Laughter*]

**The President.** It's great, and I think—first of all, I agree with the after-school arguments, the mentoring arguments, the treatment—all the things you have said. But I think it's a good thing that we ended with Ally, because we know that children that have parents who work with them and deal with this issue are much less likely to be in trouble.

NOTE: The town meeting began at 11:06 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

### **Statement on Senate Confirmation of Federico Peña as Secretary of Energy**

*March 12, 1997*

I want to applaud the Senate today for its strong vote of support for Federico Peña to serve as our Nation's new Energy Secretary. As Transportation Secretary, Federico Peña built consensus among communities, business, and government and streamlined operations to reap benefits for all taxpayers.

With this record, I am confident that Secretary Peña has the skill, experience, and dedication to lead the Energy Department to meet its central challenges—to broaden America's energy resources, to promote a safer, more secure world, and to help to create a brighter economic future for all Americans.

### **Remarks on Departure for Raleigh, North Carolina, and an Exchange With Reporters**

*March 13, 1997*

#### **Attack on Israeli Schoolchildren**

**The President.** Today along the normally peaceful border between Israel and Jordan, we have seen an inexcusable and tragic act of violence against schoolchildren. I condemn this act in the strongest possible terms. I offer to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Israeli people, and the families and friends of

the innocent children who died or were wounded my profound condolences and those of the American people.

As I travel to North Carolina today to speak to people about our own schoolchildren, the senseless denial of a future for these young Israeli children will bear heavily on my mind. There is no justification or excuse for these acts. Now the leaders in the region must work hard to calm the situation, to do everything in their power to create an atmosphere in which violence is rejected rather than embraced.

I call on the leaders and the people of the region to reject violence, to redouble their efforts toward peace and reconciliation. I was encouraged by the statement which King Hussein issued not long ago—just a few moments ago—and I am very hopeful that the leaders and the people will respond in an appropriate manner.

Thank you.

#### **Jerusalem Settlements**

**Q.** Mr. President, do you believe the Israelis have to halt the settlements in East Jerusalem at this point? Do you think that might help calm the situation there?

**The President.** Let me first say that there is no evidence at this moment that this terrible incident is related to the tensions in the area over the issues. For all we know, this may have been just a deranged person. And I think it is important, given King Hussein and Jordan's long record of reaching for peace and reconciliation, that no one jump to any undue conclusions.

We don't have the facts. None of us have any facts other than we know this incident occurred. But we have no reason to believe that this was politically motivated by any larger group or anything. We just don't know that.

But you know what I believe. I believe that this is a time when we need to be building confidence and working together and there needs to be a certain mutuality of action in the Middle East to get this peace process well underway. That is what I had hoped would happen after the Hebron agreement, and that is still what I believe has to happen if we're going to succeed.